“Just Finish Already”: How the Grey Area of Sexual Consent Highlights Inequalities Inherent in Heterosexual Pleasure

Shannon Russell-Miller

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School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines young adults' expectations and experiences of consent and pleasure which result in a grey area. Based on focus groups and one-on-one interviews with 18 to 25-year-old women and men, I explore various experiences of consensual sex ranging from clearly consensual and pleasurable, consensual yet mediocre experiences, and those which reflect a grey area of consent. Whereas best and simply mediocre sex are characterized by clear feelings of consent, the grey area involves sex that is felt as less than fully consensual but not quite as sexual assault. I apply theories of expectation states, compulsory heterosexuality, and sexual script theories to the findings of this research to argue that adherence to traditional gender norms of heterosexual behaviour lead to greater social importance given to men's needs for sexual pleasure. These inequalities and expectations surrounding sexual behaviour lead to feeling constrained in one's ability to negotiate and interpret feelings of desire and consent, resulting in a grey area.

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Acknowledgements and dedications

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In January 2018, the website Babe.net (Way, 2018) published an article detailing the story of a woman's date with Aziz Ansari, a popular comedian and self-proclaimed feminist. The woman, named Grace, discussed that she felt pressured into sex regardless of her feeling as though she was visibly uncomfortable (Framke, 2018). Ansari released a statement saying that he felt the activity "by all indications was completely consensual" (Stewart, 2018). Grace, however, came to understand the experience as sexual assault (Framke, 2018). Reactions to the story varied between those who related to the experience, those who felt Grace was being irresponsible, and those who were unsure how they felt. Ansari's feminist ties and comments condemning sexual assault (Famke, 2018), along with his book *Modern Romance* where he co-wrote with sociologist Eric Klinenberg to explore modern day dating, led many to have conflicted feelings about what to make of the story.

Part of the confusion stemmed from this landing in the midst of a larger moment of public outcry over sexual misconduct and assault including the #MeToo and "Times Up" movements. The #MeToo movement, started as an idea by Tarana Burke back in 2006, was popularized in 2017 following sexual assault allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted her friend's suggestion that women who have been sexually assaulted write #MeToo (Harris, 2018). This led many women to share the hashtag #MeToo on social media platforms to show that they have also encountered sexual harassment or assault. Rather rapidly, a number of powerful men in Hollywood and politics were taken down due to allegations of sexual misconduct and assault. The movement contributed to the development of the "Times Up" Legal Defense Fund to help women with legal support for their sexual harassment cases (Fortado, 2018).

A distinction between Grace's story of what happened with Ansari was that it did not necessarily match the experiences of other #MeToo accusations in their perceived severity of rape, assault, and harassment. Op-ed writer Bari Weiss (2018), for the New York Times, wrote that Grace was attempting to "…criminalize awkward, gross, entitled sex" (np). Media coverage and opinions of others thus consisted of mixed ideas as to the "wrongness" of what Grace experienced. Grace's story of "entitled" and "gross" sex resounded as all too familiar to some women, demonstrating that there is a pocket of experiences which toe an uncomfortable line between fully consensual sex and feelings of sexual assault that often go unacknowledged.

Research on subtle coercive and verbal pressure which leads to unwanted sex has been explored, identifying a space that exists between consensual and not-so-consensual, termed a "grey area" (Walker, 1997). This "grey area" of consensual sex is described as being in a spectrum of sexual violence, when one has agreed (or not objected) to having sex but ends up feeling regret, guilt, and may experience emotions similar to sexual assault (Akre, Chabloz, Belanger, Michaud, & Suris, 2013; Bussel, 2008; Cameron, 2006; Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Jervis, 2008; Powell, 2010; Ruckh, 2014; Walker, 1997). There have been recent blog posts on websites such as totalsororitymove.com and reddit.com that discuss this area between consensual sex and sexual assault. Ruckh (2014) argues that most women will experience confusing sexual encounters, where they may not want to have sex, but agree to do so anyway. Women mostly describe the experience as feeling dirty, guilty, and confused afterwards (Ruckh, 2014; Williams, 2019); many also feel regret (Akre et al., 2013). The grey area thus sits at a potentially fine line between what is perceived as rape and sexual assault.

Consent and sexual assault

A large part of the problem is how men are often afforded excuses for their behaviour, especially if they claim that "she didn't say no". Further, men are often not called out or labeled as they are. For example, rapist Brock Turner, a young white man, was portrayed in the media as an American swimming star rather than a rapist. This dismissal of wrongdoing is also an example of white privilege, especially when comparing the headlines to how Black men are portrayed in the media for similar offences (i.e., as violent predators) (O'Neil, 2016), even though white men are more likely to be sex offenders than Black men (Maynard, 2017). Black men are often portrayed as more sexually violent than white men or other men of colour (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2003). In Canada, Black men and women continue to face increased assumptions of criminality related to sexual behaviours, with Black individuals placed in jail more often for crimes that, if perpetrated by a white person, would have gone unpunished (Maynard, 2017).

Class, citizenship, race, and gender can all impact perceptions of what defines sexual assault in Canada. Experiences of women of colour in relation to any sexual violence can be quite different from white women, especially when it intersects with citizenship and class. Welsh, Carr, MacQuarrie, and Huntley (2006) found that Black women and Filipina women experience sexual harassment differently. Specifically, the ways that race and citizenship intersect with sexual harassment results in understandings or definitions of sexual harassment that do not align with the legal definition of sexual harassment. Indigenous women in Canada also are at increased risk of experiencing sexual violence. Kuokkanen (2015) argued that part of the marginalization of Indigenous women's experiences of sexual violence is that they are often "torn between the oppression they share with their men and the violence they experience at the

hands of those same men" (273). Gender, race, and class intersect to create varying experiences of sexual violence and are each confined through their intersection with patriarchy.

Traditional gender norms are supported through patriarchal culture and violence, structuring our social and political systems in a way that places men as dominant and women as subordinate. Overarchingly, patriarchy is defined as:

> a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks, 2004:18)

hooks describes patriarchal violence as the "belief that it is acceptable for a more powerful individual to control others through various forms of coercive force" (2015: 61). Patriarchy instils and reinforces messages of masculinity which suppress the emotions of men, threatening both their own health and the wellbeing of women (hooks, 2004). Specifically related to gender violence, the term heteropatriarchy is defined as "a system of subordination that burdens not only women and sexual minorities but also the straight-identified men that it purports to privilege" (Harris, 2011: 17). Heteropatriarchy supports dichotomous structures of sex and gender, the notion that men and women are opposites in characteristics, behaviour, and in equality (Harris, 2011). Patriarchy falls into the basis of the general arguments and theories applied within this research – that expectations imposed on individuals through patriarchal culture create tensions for the meaning and actions related to consent.

Erin Williams (2019), in her graphic novel *Commute*, explores the notion of consent. Specifically, she sheds light on feelings of guilt and confusion related to sexual assault, and how the concept of consent is used in association with rape and sexual assault in a way that is detrimental to women. Applying the notion that there was "a lack of consent" to experiences of rape and assault provides control for men, allowing them to use statements such as "you led me

on" or "you didn't say no". Using the concept of consent in situations of rape and sexual assault places onus and guilt on women. Williams (2019) describes that these questions of consent lead women to feel shame instead of trauma, which maintains their oppression. By turning sexual abuse or rape into a question of whether there was consent at all invites questions of who holds the power, none of which women hold. As will be explored in this research, and what Williams (2019) makes clear, is that what we have taught women to want and desire maintains patriarchal power. Within patriarchy, the line between what we know is okay and what is not becomes blurred, especially when both men and many women make excuses for actions that we know are not okay.

While not specifically examining sexual assault, this dissertation makes a major contribution to how young adults think about consent, and those experiences of sex which can fit into a grey area. In this dissertation I ask: What makes sex consensual? How do gender roles, expectations, and experiences of pleasure contribute to clearly consensual versus not quite consensual sexual encounters? I argue that unequal expectations related to heteropatriarchal gendered sexual behaviour and a hierarchy of men's pleasure over women's pleasure contribute to the grey area of sexual consent for both men and women. Though heterosexual sex is not inherently oppressive (nor is queer sex inherently liberating), my participants who identified as queer[1] and bisexual drew on their experiences of heterosexual sexual activity when discussing their negative experiences. The grey area of sex is conceptualized by comparing and framing sexual experiences participants felt were clearly consensual to those which were more problematic. Through the exploration of the grey area – which consists of uncomfortable,

[1] Some participants wrote that they were not quite heterosexual, therefore I chose to label them under the umbrella term of queer (Barker, 2016)

unpleasurable, and unwanted experiences – I provide distinctions between clear and unclear consent, and between best sex and sex that is just mediocre, sloppy, or awkward. From a sociological perspective, I analyze how understandings and negotiations of consent are shaped by gender within particular social, structural, and cultural contexts (Cowlings & Reynolds, 2004). Specifically, I will broadly apply an interpretivist paradigm and theories of expectation states, compulsory heterosexuality, and sexual scripts to deconstruct the ways through which gender norms lead to internalized pressure to engage in sex which lacks mutual desire, resulting in confusing and unpleasant sexual encounters.

Using definitions and research on consensual sex from Cowling and Reynolds (2004), Lim and Roloff (1999), Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999), Beres, Herold, and Maitland (2004), and Powell (2010), I propose a working definition of sexual consent as: the mutual desire and voluntary agreement, communicated through active and constant verbal or non-verbal affirmation, to engage in sexual activities. This definition of consent frames sex as something that is active, communicative, and wanted (Filipovic, 2008; Friedman, 2008; Kulwicki, 2008). Muehlenhard, Humphreys, Jozkowski, and Peterson (2016) argue that consent can be conceptualized as both a discrete event and as a continuous process. Consent can thus be a direct yes or no to a question of "will you have sex with me", or can be more interpretive such as by inviting someone over to "watch Netflix and chill" (Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

Related to the definition of consent, Spector, Carey, and Steinberg (1996) define desire as interest in a sexual activity. The authors refine the definition to include "dyadic desire" which refers to "interest in or wish to engage in sexual activity with another person" (Spector et al.,

1996: 186). While they use the term dyadic, I would suggest the term mutual[2] better identifies a shared agreement, and is more inclusive to multiple partners while still differentiating from solitary desire (the interest in sexual behaviour with only yourself; Spector et al., 1996). Simon and Gagnon (1986) provide a slightly different definition, where sexual desire is "not really desire for something or somebody, though it is often experienced that way, but rather *what we expect* to experience from something or somebody" (Simon & Gagnon, 1986: 100, emphasis added). This definition of desire fits into the expectation states theory I have applied, and thus I combine the two perspectives to define desire as mutual interest from two (or more) people to engage in a sexual activity based on the expected outcomes of that activity. Desire is part of the component of consent, framing why individuals engage in sexual activity, based on interest and what they expect to happen. Mutual desire is often why people have sex, and results in feelings of clear consent. Through this dissertation, I argue that in the cases where mutual desire is lacking and is instead replaced with obligation and necessity driven by gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality, the grey area is produced.

Before moving further, I wish to acknowledge my bias in favour of desirable and pleasurable experiences. While I explore the definition of sex below, I believe that sex should be driven by desire and be a pleasurable and fun experience. Pleasure activist adrienne maree brown calls "pleasure activism" the "work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (2019: 9). My hope is that this research is one step further towards eliminating limitations of oppression for both women and men in their pursuit and right of sexual intimacy and safety. Further, as a

[2] Similarly, MacKinnon (2003: 267) uses the term "simultaneity of desire" to argue that in sexual assault and rape cases, consent should require the threshold of being a mutual and positive choice. Instead, consent in the U.S. law is often decided based on a lack of no, but, as MacKinnon argues, can also include saying no.

sociologist I identify as a social constructionist, acknowledging that reality and knowledge are defined through and maintained by social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 2005). While I do explore non-sociological ideas such as attachment theory as they relate to consent, I believe that the problems of sexual consent are based on a system of inequality driven by culturally constructed gender norms within a heteropatriarchal framework and not due to biological sex differences.

Further, I wish to acknowledge that despite efforts to be representative in my sample design—the representation of racial/ethnic groups in my sample parallels their representation in the Canadian population (22.3% visible minorities in Canada; Stats Canada, 2017)—the purpose of qualitative research such as this is not to be generalizable or to employ a representative sampling design. Rather, the goal is to gather rich description of the experiences and interpretations of participants sexual experiences regarding consent (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010; O'Donoghue, 2006; Tracy, 2013). That said, given the higher proportion of white and heterosexual participants in the sample, the conclusions I draw may over-reflect the experiences of white, heterosexual young people in Canada. Like with any research, my conclusions should not be viewed as definitive truths that reflect the experiences of all people, so much as a starting point for understanding an as yet under-theorized social issue.

Shifts in the perceptions of sexual behaviours

Sex is a private yet relational experience, and as we have seen above, these private experiences are being discussed in a more public manner. How do we have someone such as Aziz Ansari, who is considered a feminist and aware of gender inequalities, in a position where his sexual partner feels their experience was not quite consensual? After carrying out this research, I came to see that the grey area is a result of the social construction and maintenance of

unequal gender norms, specifically around the expectations of sexual behaviour, leading to confusing and contradictory experiences of consent.

Understanding the ways that norms around sex have changed over time helps contextualize some of the moments in the construction of meaning around sexual behaviour. The following examination of historical changes are only a surface view, and do not aim to account for the complexities of historical shifts. Going back as far as Ancient Greece, sex was normalized through establish roles of those who were “passive” and those who were “active” (Foucault, 1985, 1986; Weeks, 2010). Boys, slaves, and women were seen as passive receivers of sex, while men were active givers of sex. In Ancient Rome, norms of sexual relations were centered only between those who were married, where men’s self-mastery over sexual drives and behaviour was valued. Following this, in the Golden Age of Rome (98-180 A.D), regulations on sexual behaviour focused on “healthy” sexual practices and the proper ways to have sex (i.e., time of day, age, etc.; Foucault, 1986). Within these time periods, there was no focus on female sexual behaviour, besides a norm of women taking passive sexual roles.

When Christianity was sufficiently widespread by the 4th century, particularly within Rome, sexual behaviour came to be more heavily monitored by religion and was framed as hazardous (Foucault, 1985). Any sex that was not for procreation was considered sinful, and there was increasing control on the regulation of sexual behaviour, especially for women. In Imperial Rome (5th century), women who were guilty of adultery were exiled and banned from getting married again (Eig, 2014); by the 16th and 17th centuries, promiscuous women were burned at the stake. Into the 18th century of Victorian England, women were informed that they were not supposed to enjoy sex; however, men were encouraged to visit prostitutes instead of

“defiling” their wives (Eig, 2014). Religion, therefore, played a large role in establishing women’s sexual desire and pleasure as both dangerous and fragile.

During the 18th century, the time of the Enlightenment, the regulation of sex stemmed less from religion and instead from medical and scientific concern (Kleinplatz, 2018). Into the 19th century, heterosexuality, which had previously been understood as the sinful act of engaging in penile-vaginal intercourse (PVI) for pleasure and not reproduction, was normalized (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Specifically, male sexuality was seen, and is still perceived, as a reference point for sexuality and sexual desire (Kleinplatz, 2018). Racial comparisons were also being made with regards to sexual activity, with Black women and men constructed as being primitive, uncivilized, and possessing “wild sexuality”. This constructed differentiation between Black and white sexuality was used to justify the view of Black people as inferior during the time of slavery (Collins, 2004; Springer, 2008).

Moving into scientific and psychoanalytical concern about sex was Freud. Known for his many public works involving sexuality, Reich (1973: 29) notes that Freud “had paved a road to a clinical understanding of sexuality”. Freud (1962) discussed sexuality not just as something that happens when someone has started to mature, but something that exists across the lifespan, including throughout childhood. Freud (1962) states that regardless of whether libido occurs in both men and women, libido is inherently masculine in nature. Freud (1962) argues that the sexual repression of women, specifically the change of focus from their clitoris to their vagina during puberty, along with setting aside the masculine aspects of their childhood sexuality, is what leads women to be more prone to neurosis and hysteria.

Working alongside Freud was Wilhelm Reich. Reich was termed “the prophet of the orgasm” (Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs, 1986; Eig, 2017), and believed that orgasms were an

important part of everyone's health. As a psychoanalyst, he treated individuals with perceived sexual disorders. Reich (1973; 1974) related much of people's mental disorders with that of unsatisfactory sexual gratification, specifically that the moral regulation of sex and sexual repression inherent in society create pathologies. In his work *The Function of the Orgasm*, Reich (1973) argued that sexual misery, frustrations, and fears did not exist in society prior to patriarchy. With patriarchy, aspects of sexuality became constrained and natural pleasure was replaced by duty, supressing sexuality in favour of obedience. Reich (1974) argued that society was sexually deprived, and that supressing what is natural leads to many perceived problems around sexuality. As a solution to this problem, he advocates that a social movement which changes sex negation to sex affirmation would imply generally that sexuality and society, nature and culture, would no longer be contradictory.

Researchers following Reich sought to do just that, by highlighting and exploring the contradictions inherent in assumptions of culture versus actual behaviour and experiences. Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard (1953) produced a body of work which challenged norms around women's sexuality and would help further the development of research on sex (Kleinplatz, 2018; Sagarin, 1978). Masters and Johnson (1966) highlight Kinsey's work as contributing to "sociologic investigation", while Sagarin (1978) argued that Kinsey and colleagues furthered the development of sociological research of sex by examining differentiations in patterns of sexual behaviour by gender, social class, education, and religion. Kinsey et al. (1953) found that prior to marriage, sexual intercourse only accounted for one sixth (17%) of women's orgasms. The researchers argued that many of the cultural and public assumptions around sex and sexual attitudes are not consistent with the actual sexual behaviour men and women were engaging in. For example, while there were assumptions about regret for

women following pre-marital sex, 69% of their sample did not regret having had pre-marital sex (Kinsey et al., 1953).

Following the works of Kinsey and colleagues are the well-known researchers of sex, whose focus was specifically on physiological and psychological responses to sex, Virginia E. Johnson and William H. Masters. The researchers are known most famously for their work Human *Sexual Response* (1966), which detailed phases of the sexual response cycles as excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. Masters and Johnson (1966) noted the impact culture and psychosocial factors have on women's ability to achieve orgasm compared to men's orgasmic achievement. More specifically, they argue that "fears of performance in the female have been directed toward orgasmic attainment, while in the male the fears of performance have related toward the attainment and maintenance of penile erection, and orgasmic facility always has been presumed" (Masters & Johnson, 1966: 218). Different cultural importance and relevance is given towards women's ability to achieve orgasm. Masters, Johnson, and Levin (1975), in their book *The Pleasure Bond* note double standards and sexual expectations, specifically the assumptive roles of men and women, and how "generations of adult men and women have found it virtually impossible to live with or live up to the sexual roles to which they were culturally conditioned as adolescents: roles which suggest that men are satyrs who ravish innocent, but grateful, females" (3). The authors emphasize how the internalized assumptive gender roles of sex, such as men's continuous desire for sex, can lead to negative consequences in a marriage when neither partner lives up to those expectations.

Masters et al. (1975) argue that many of the cultural norms around sexual behaviour were developed prior to gaining knowledge about the physiologies of men and women's sexual responses and capacities. They note that while men in the 1950s shifted to doing something *for*

their partners rather than *to* their partners, that the role of men was still that of a sexual provider whose responsibility it was for achieving sex and orgasm. In a transcribed dialogue at a symposium, Masters and Johnson discuss the double standards associated with women as both regulators of sex and sources of pleasure. Johnson makes a comment that women often grow up seeing their role as women as "*being* pursued, *being* desired, *being* enjoyed" (Masters, Johnson, & Levin, 1975: 69). Overall, the works of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson shifted the thought towards women's sexual desire, behaviour, and pleasure.

Generally, the work on sex and orgasm from Reich, Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson was seen as an avenue through which the sexual revolution of the 1960s began (Ehrenreich et al., 1986; Eig, 2014; Powell, 2007; Watkins, 1998). The sexual revolution was a social movement marked by its success in changing the way that sex is thought about. Specifically, it marked a change from sex as medical concern to a social concern (Ehrenreich et al., 1986). The revolution marked the separation of the right to sexual pleasure from marriage (Risman & Schwartz, 2002), fostering the notion that women should be able to do what they want with their bodies and sexualities (Queen, 2001). Ehrenreich et al. (1986) argue that the sexual revolution is more of a women's sexual revolution due to the changes in perception mostly being in favour of women's sexual behaviour. Ehrenreich et al. (1986: 5) note that the sexual revolution is not just that women had more sex, but that "they began to transform the notion of heterosexual sex itself: from the irreducible 'act' of intercourse to a more open-ended and varied kind of encounter". They also argue that the meaning of sex became less about women's passive roles and instead was an interaction which would be on more equal footing.

The increased attention given to women's pleasure, both in the pursuit of sex and orgasm, was further driven by the introduction of the birth control pill. Development of the birth control

pill began when contraception advocate and early founder of Planned Parenthood Margaret Sanger, along with Katharine McCormick who funded much of the research, partnered with doctors Gregory Pincus and John Rock (Eig, 2014). The pill was brought to market by 1957, and by 1962 1.2 million women had used it (Eig, 2014). While the early version of the pill was linked to problems such as cancer and suicide, among other health problems (Eig, 2014), the pill is credited with increasing women's sexual empowerment and building pleasure into sexual expectations by reducing women's fears of pregnancy (Ehrenreich et al., 1986).

Feminist sexologists and sex educators like Betty Dodson and Shere Hite focused on how women can better enjoy sex, advocating for women's pleasure outside of penile-vaginal intercourse (PVI). Betty Dodson, a pro-sex feminist and a pioneer of women's sexual liberation, advocates for the importance of masturbation as a tool for sexual empowerment. Dodson (2004) emphasizes that masturbation allows people to gain "sexual self-knowledge". Her research took place in the 70s and 80s, where Dodson taught (and continues to teach) thousands of women to masturbate using electronic vibrators (often marketed as body massagers) through her various techniques and group workshops (see Dodson, 1974). Dodson (2004) has argued that a social fear contributing to the taboo around women's masturbation, is that once a woman learns to masturbate that she will stop having sex with men. As Dodson puts it, if women are sexually knowledgeable then men "will no longer be able to fuck her for a couple minutes, blow a load, then roll over and go to sleep" (Dodson, 2004: 158). Taboos around women's masturbation thus support and maintain heterosexual norms.

Critiquing the work of Masters and Johnson (1966; 1975), and Kinsey et al. (1953) as normalizing and emphasizing PVI[3], Hite conducted her own study on women's pleasure and orgasm. In 1972, Hite sent out letters to 100,000 women asking them how they masturbate, whether they fake orgasm, and how they felt about the sexual revolution. Hite (1979) emphasized that prior to her research, there was little description of how orgasm was really experienced by women. After analyzing the letters that she received from participants, one of Hite's main findings was that women do not automatically experience orgasms during intercourse. She argues that the expectation that women do orgasm directly from PVI provides unrealistic expectations for both men and women. Hite (1979) stated that many of the perceptions and definitions surrounding sex were cultural rather than biological. Ehrenreich et al. (1986) argued that Hite's report put pressure on men who did not care enough to place focus on their female partner's orgasm, and also worked as a call to action for women to request orgasmic sex. Further, Hite (1979) described that the sexual revolution contributed to an expectation for women to engage in sex more often simply because they could. However, this meant that it became more challenging for women to be able to say no to sex (see also Rubin, 2009). This highlights a conundrum that young women still face today: given that women's desire for sex and pleasure is more normalized, there is an increased expectation that women will be willing to have sex.

While the sexual revolution led to a liberation of sexuality and pleasure, particularly for women, this liberation was stalled when sex began to be viewed as dangerous, with a return to earlier moralizing rhetoric. Although the pro-sex feminists and sexologists throughout the 1960s

[3] I would argue that Kinsey et al. (1953), as well as Masters, Johnson, and Levin (1975) did not perpetuate these cultural norms around women's pleasure, but rather sought to challenge stereotypes and assumptions of women's sexuality, pleasure, and desire (especially in *The Pleasure Bond*). However, emphasis on relations between men and women, as well as the emphasis on PVI does perpetuate heteronormativity.

brought greater attention to women's desires and ended a long history of seeing only men as uniquely sexual beings (Ehrenreich et al., 1986), feminists in the 1980s and 1990s began to critique the view that sex is always empowering for women. There was a shift in debate to the risks of sex, and the danger of rape that women needed to be protected from. A rift formed between feminists, some of whom believed that women could claim sexual pleasure and agency, while others believed that embracing radical sexualities such as acceptance of pornography, sex work, and sadism/masochism, constituted a submission to patriarchal ideals and promoted violence against women (Basiliere, 2009; Fahs, 2014). Fahs (2014) labels the feminist sex wars as a rift between those who ascribed to *freedom from* repressive expectations of women and the power that men had over women, and those who advocated for *freedom to* have sexual rights and expressions.

Feminist theorists such as Andrea Dworkin (1987) and Catherine MacKinnon (1987; 1989ab) have been part of the feminist *freedom from* movement, and have often been critiqued as sex negative (Ehrenreich et al., 1986; Hakim, 2010; Mottier, 2008). Dworkin and MacKinnon highlight patriarchal narratives on the constraints of sex, challenge the patriarchal system and aim to empower women. Dworkin (1987) argues that women's sexual desires are just a product of internalized misogyny; that sex has become about dominance, and there is no equality possible in sex unless it is transformed outside of this concept. She argues that women can either say yes or no to intercourse, in which case intercourse has come to be synonymous with having sex. Dworkin relates saying yes to sex as "affirming the implicit right of men to get laid regardless of the consequences to women" (1987: xxxiii). Anything but a yes challenges men's dominance. Dworkin (1987: xxxiv) seeks to empower women and girls by demonstrating that when women "get fucked" it is not in a way that is free or equal. Instead, she makes apparent

that sexual consent is potentially never possible for women to achieve if heterosexual sex is solely constructed through dominance. Similarly pointing out patriarchal constraints, but also marking rape as having a very broad definition, Catherine MacKinnon (1987) describes rape as "whenever a woman has sex and feels violated" (82). MacKinnon (1987) argues that it has become increasingly common for men to access sex from women in ways that are unwanted and coercive, and that often rape is not acknowledged because it is not based on how violated women feel. Specifically, MacKinnon (1989b) feels that there is no difference between rape and consensual intercourse in the physical act, but only rather in the authoritative and legal sense which only revolves around men's interpretation. In this sense, it is difficult to distinguish the difference between rape and intercourse as they both occur within male dominance (MacKinnon, 1989a).

Though positive in their push against patriarchy, the feminist *freedom from* perspective still reflected a view of sex as a constant threat of rape. So, not only was sex specifically viewed as confusing for women, thus contradicting the perceptions of sex as fun and pleasurable, but the AIDS pandemic of the 1980s further contributed to marking sex as dangerous and risky. The HIV/AIDS crisis lead to an increase in monitoring and awareness around sexual behaviour, particularly the practice of "safer sex". Safer sex arose from the medical approach to stopping the spread of HIV, limiting and altering the eroticism and sexual freedom which had previously been established in the 60s (Adelman, 1991). The new aspects regarding safe sex such as planned, public, cautious, and artificial were counter to those associated with unprotected sex such as spontaneous, pleasurable, private, and natural (Adelman, 1991). Safer sex prompted cautious rather than spontaneous sexual encounters. As such, more communication between partners pre-sex such as asking about a condom was viewed as important.

While the HIV/AIDS crisis did focus a lot on men who have sex with men, safe sex extended to everyone's sexual practices. However, the messages regarding the practice of safe sex was, and remains, gendered. Hunter (2004) analyzed Canadian government HIV awareness posters that were produced from the 1980s and 2000s and found that posters which targeted women focused on fear and avoidance of sex rather than sexuality or the actual communication of safer sex. Hunter and LaCroix (2016) more recently found that the messages towards women remained similarly focused on fear rather than agency. Hunter (2004), and Hunter and LaCroix (2016) note the posters targeting men differ from those targeting women, particularly that posters for men focused on safe sex through sex-positive messages rather than through fear. Further, Hunter (2004) argued that messages around safe sex for women were constrained within patriarchal social relations, where sex and negotiation of safe sex was still considered through men's sexual needs.

While the HIV/AIDS pandemic helped contribute to the moral and political conservatism around sex, other movements such as the anti-abortion movement were a direct backlash towards the progress made in the 60s, further contributing to the moralizing of sexual behaviour. Anti-abortion groups claimed to be defending their version of Christian beliefs in order to protect their traditional cultural view of morality (Clarke, 1987). Discussions around abortion was a conflict around women's rights and that of morally "good" or "bad" women. Deeper than that, however, Ginsburg (1984: 174) argues that the conflicts around abortion were that of "opposing interpretations of the social consequences of sexual activity". The two views, pro-choice and pro-life, each saw abortion as symbolically different. For pro-choice women, abortion provided them the freedom and power of control for when and with whom they could have children; whereas pro-life advocates, women advocates in particular, saw abortion as a moral challenge

and "devaluation" of motherhood and as an act of self-interest over self-sacrifice (Ginsburg, 1984). As Ginsburg (1984) states, people who were pro-life saw abortion as a negative effect of the separation of sexual pleasure from that of the traditional notions of reproduction, family, and motherhood. As such, "the work of pro-life activists to stop abortions is thus a movement for social reform grounded both literally and figuratively in the defence of sexual restriction" (Ginsburg, 1984: 174). Abortion thus challenged the cultural, social, and moral values held by many in North America: the traditional notions which connected having sex with that of having a husband and having children (Clarke, 1987; Ginsburg, 1984). The anti-abortion movement was attempting to maintain cultural values, with some anti-abortion activists stating that participating in anti-abortion campaigns served as a stand against "the rising tide of permissiveness" (Clarke, 1987: 241). Overall, the anti-abortion movement was another obstacle placed against the newly established sexual freedoms and pursuit of sexual pleasure for women.

Among the fight for and against abortion were protests of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Take Back the Night rallies and marches started in the 1970s to promote awareness and to protest sexual assault (Wodden, 2000). The rallies and marches marked a movement of women coming together as a protest towards patriarchal culture and the oppressions it creates for women in the household and workplaces, specifically related to sexual assault and sexual harassment (Wodden, 2000). These rallies represented public awareness strategies by feminists towards the systemic issue of violence towards women. The #MeToo movement, discussed above, is a continuation of these public movements towards awareness of the ongoing oppression of women in the forms of sexual violence. However, movements such as Take Back the Night did not completely shift the landscape of women's sexuality. The pushback from sex negative feminists, the anti-abortion movement, and the safe sex movement signaled new standards for

women's sexuality that perpetuated ideologies of fear. While these historical events are more complex and nuanced than can be explored here, we can nonetheless, see some of the broad patterns contributing to the maintenance of dichotomous gender roles and the creation of restrictions on women's sexuality.

The 1990s introduced a period of "girl power" (Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, & Weems, 2009). Women were waiting longer to get married, and there was an increase in women in science and politics (Yarrow, 2018). The more women advanced, however, the more they were pushed back. Yarrow (2018) argues that successful women in the 1990s were discredited by being called bitches and other degrading terms. Rather than representing the empowerment and equality of women, the 1990s continued to reinforce sexist and misogynistic views. Further, there continued to be underlying tensions and contradictions about heterosexuality. Zilbergeld (1995) argues that the 1990s presented a "fantasy model of sex". The messages conveyed about sexual behaviour in the 90s provided unrealistic expectations of how "bodies look and function, how people relate, and how they have sex" (Zilbergeld, 1995: 276). Zilbergeld (1995) emphasized an assumption that the sexual revolution somehow meant that everyone had overcome all prudishness and inhibitions, and that people are generally comfortable with their bodies and know what they want and enjoy about sex. According to Zilbergeld (1995), other myths about sex, all of which perpetuate heteronormativity, include ideas such as:

- men are not interested in discussing their emotions and feelings; men are always ready and wanting sex, and that men do not encounter sexual problems;
- sex is spontaneous, and that touching each other generally leads to sex, placing pressure on individuals to have undesired sex;
- men do not need to listen to women when having sex. Within popular culture, men are not often presented as taking women's refusals seriously;
- sex means PVI - all other actions are often described as simply leading up to intercourse;

- men should be able to provide women with incredible amounts of pleasure and the perception that having sex with a man is always great. This adds pressure on men to perform and leads to feelings of frustrating for both partners when this doesn't happen.

These assumptions described by Zilbergeld (1995), though discussed in the 1990s, are still reflective today. During my own research on how young adult sexuality was represented in romance novels for young adults, I found that female sexuality is completely centered on the actions of men (Russell, 2014). Fahs (2011) exploring women's sexuality, also found that women today continue to face contradictions between cultural scripts and defining their own sexuality.

Although there has never been a full social embrace of a pro-sex culture, there are feminists, sexologists, and researchers today advocating for a return to the pro-sex culture that found voice in the 1960s. For example, Kleinplatz et al. (2009) have examined aspects of optimal sexuality and what makes for great sex. The study of optimal sexuality, that is, experiences which go beyond that of functional or good, can help challenge sexual scripts, stereotypes, and unrealistic expectations of sex that are often depicted in popular culture (Kleinplatz et al., 2009). Sexual health educators such as Emily Nagoski and Esther Perel are also among those who support sex positivity. Nagoski (2015) challenges in her book, *Come as You Are.* the moral messages that women receive throughout their lifetime of being inadequate, dirty, or sluts. She also challenges the norms around heterosexuality such as simultaneous orgasm between partners being an ideal goal of sex. Perel (2009) offers insight into power relationships and alienation from the erotic. Perel points out how the politics and morals of sex have been carried into the bedroom, impacting couples' sexual lives, and, while more of a sex therapy focus, points out how to disrupt these pressures in order to have better sex. Another influential figure in sex positivism is pleasure activist adrienne maree brown (2019). brown argues that women have for

so long repressed the erotic, seeing it as confusing and disgusting, and supressing it as a source of power and happiness. brown (2019) seeks to bring back the erotic in every aspect of life and use it as a source of empowerment for women not only in sex, but in their confidence and happiness.

These educators, researchers, and activists reflect what Fahs (2014) labels both *freedom from* and *freedom to* as related to sex positivism, wherein individuals are free from expectations about specific sexual functions and instead are focused on intimacy and embodying the experience. Breanne Fahs, feminist and sex researcher, has contributed much in the way of research and literature attempting to shift perspectives on women's sexuality (see her book *Performing Sex: The Making and Unmaking of Women's Erotic Lives*, 2011). Her research is quite broad and encompassing, focusing on aspects of women's sexuality such as menstruation, body hair, sexual pleasure, performances of sex, anal sex, and faking orgasms. In discussing the sexual revolution and the feminist sex wars, Fahs comments that sex positivity needs to be a mixture of both *freedom to* (what sex positive feminists were fighting for in the 60s) and *freedom from* (what radical feminists were fighting for in the 60s):

> In order to move toward the ever-elusive ''sexual liberation'', women need to be able to deny access to their bodies, say no to sex as they choose, and engage in sexual expression free of oppressive homophobic, sexist, and racist intrusions. Women should have, when they choose, the freedom from unwanted, mediated versions of their sexuality (e.g., Facebook, internet intrusions, ''sexting''), heterosexist constructions of ''normal sex'', and sexist assumptions about what satisfies and pleases them. If women cannot have freedom from these things without social penalty, they therefore lack a key ingredient to their own empowerment. (Fahs, 2011: 282)

Heterosexism, defined by Collins (2000) as "the belief in inherent superiority of one form of sexual expression over another and thereby the right to dominate" (128), acts as a barrier to sexual liberation. To eliminate such constraints and have freedom from oppressive constructions, what is considered "normal sex" must be challenged (Tiefer, 2004).

Date rape, hookups, and rape culture: where are we now?

Cultural shifts in norms around marriage and women's sexual behaviour has led to research and exploration of hookup culture and what this means for consent. While hookups are not happening as much as people assume (Orenstein, 2020; Wade, 2017), and emerging adults may be moving towards some sexual conservatism in their views of casual sex (Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen & Lachowsky, 2014), hooking up is still part of youth sexual behaviour and is associated with unwanted sex. Hookups do not always include intercourse (about 35 to 40% include intercourse; Orenstein, 2020), and includes oral and anal sex, genital touching, kissing, or groping. However, due to the ambiguity of what happens in hookups, many feel pressured to fit in by engaging in undesired sex (Orenstein, 2020). Stemming from research on date rape, unwanted sex has been included in research which demonstrates that young women consent to unwanted sex, often without the threat of physical harm (Walker, 1997). Koss (1985) explored characteristics of rape victims and found that women who were acquainted with the perpetrator were more typical of "hidden victims", those whose victimization will go unacknowledged. Koss (1985) concludes that sexual assaults were not characterized as rape when the person was familiar or had been sexually intimate with the offender. Koss, Dinero, Seibel and Cox (1988) explored differences between acquaintance rape and stranger rape and found that women were more likely to hesitate and were less likely to use active avoidance with someone they were familiar with. Generally, unwanted sex can be neglected due to the normalized perceptions of sexual behaviours and hookups.

Stemming from the above research, the term "date rape" is used as a concept of failed negotiation of a sexual contract of consent within intimate sexual relations (Cowling & Reynolds, 2004). Distinguishing this term led to discussion regarding forced sex by a stranger as

being viewed differently from non-consensual sex with someone known (Swauger, Witham, & Shinberg, 2013). However, criminologists and sociologists Cowling and Reynolds (2004) note that by labeling some kinds of rape as different allows for a "space for some men to redefine their actions, and provide mitigation that rearticulates abuse as miscommunication, and emphasizes the challenges of more complex notions of consent to men's traditional stereotypical active and acquisitive sexuality" (3). The concept of date rape fits within the wider conversation on sexual consent, as the phenomenon accounts for relationships and power differentials between individuals. Further, the concept highlights the differences in victim experiences and the ways that someone interprets and understands their experiences. Often labeled as a case of miscommunication, date rape becomes normalized through the acceptance of men's stereotypical "active and acquisitive" sexuality.

Blurring lines of sexual violence between strangers and those we have a relationship with has resulted in "confusion and ambiguity" following a sexual encounter (Swauger et al., 2013). Specifically, they are the experiences which do not fall into a stereotypical sexual assault model of a rapist who comes out of the bushes to attack you, but still involve issues of coercion and unequal power dynamics. The line between consent and assault becomes further blurred when culture and mass media depict men successfully pressuring women into sex (Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler, & Tolman, 2007; Powell, 2008; Powell, 2010; Smith, 2012). Part of the problem perpetuating many of the issues around consent are rape myths. Otherwise known as rape culture, rape myths consist of blaming the victim of the sexual assault, while also normalizing male sexual violence (Burnett et al., 2009; Women Against Violence Against Women [WAVAW], 2013). Rape culture, a term coined in the 1970s by feminists, is normalized and perpetuated through the encouragement of male sexual aggression and female

objectification, especially through jokes, images, and advertising (WAVAW, 2014). The lifestyle that young people engage in, such as partying, drinking, doing drugs, and hooking up are often blamed for women being raped (Armstrong, 2006; Burnett et al., 2009).

Within rape culture, women are socialized with the understanding that it is their responsibility for controlling men's "naturally aggressive" behavior by restricting their own behavior (Williams, 2007). This cultural understanding creates a dichotomy where women are "responsible", while "boys will be boys." Women are told to be in control of their behavior so as not to influence the action of men (Chambers, van Loon, & Tincknell, 2004). Burnett et al. (2009) examined campus rape culture as a communication phenomenon, specifically at how expectations of young women and their experiences are marginalized. The dominant cultural discourse does not provide notions of what constitutes rape, leaving women with the inability to articulate what has happened to them. Women are expected to negotiate themselves within the dominant discourse of communication strategies, often leaving them without a voice. This muteness occurs within cultural contexts of campuses, communities, and society. Women experience a lot of challenges to articulate what has happened to them when they are being blamed and questioned, particularly regarding date rape where they are assumed to have "put themselves in that position" (Burnett et al, 2009). This is similar to what Williams (2019) argues, where the very concept of whether there was consent can be used as a tool against women, leaving them powerless to frame their own experience outside of those constructs. In other words, at times, the general concept of consent is used to interrogate women, a ready excuse for the actions of men.

Plante (2014) argues that many of the aspects of sex, both language and practice, are contradictory and confusing. The dichotomous messages between the sexual liberation and the

safe sex movements are further complicated for young people today by their often-limited sexual health education, party culture on campus, and use of alcohol (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). As such, sex and the cultural norms surrounding what is seen as normal can easily become confusing. Explored further in the next chapter, concepts and understandings of consent have come under scrutiny, and many seek to situate the problems of consent within frameworks of power and social coercion (see Powell, 2010). Overall, pressure from gender norms around sex, and in part, contradictions between the gap of *freedom to* sex and *freedom from* sex (Fahs, 2014) continues to guide unequal expectations and perceptions of sexual behaviour situated within a patriarchal culture, complicating consent and resulting in a grey area of sex which exists in a space between fully consensual and not consensual.

The sociology of sex

Although the history of the study of sexuality has tended to fall within psychology, sexology, and feminist studies, Ehrenreich et al. (1986) and Eig (2014) argue that researchers such as Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson provided opportunity for the discussion and research of taboos, group sex and subcultures, thereby opening up sociological discussions and studies of sex. Sociology is the study of social interactions and patterns (norms, power, class, and culture), seeking to understand how people and society are shaped by construction of these patterns (Charon & Vigilant, 2009). Sexual activity is one such social interaction with constantly changing norms, patterns, and constructions (Tiefer, 2004). The sociology of sex focuses on the "effects of social group membership in shaping, directing, influencing, or otherwise patterning human sexual behaviour" (Henslin, 1978:1). Sex is thus a social process, where sexual behaviour and sexual drives are culturally shaped by institutions as diverse as the media, family, economics, social organizations, science, and medicine (Seidman, 2010). Sociologists contribute

to the study of sex by examining and deconstructing taken for granted structures such as gender and sexuality, and the norms and stereotypes which support them. There are macro ways of looking at sex, such as through culture; the meso levels that define subcultures such as class, gender, and ethnicity; and the micro levels which look at small group interactions. Particular attention concerning the study of sex is given to sexual socialization, scripts, roles, and the life cycle (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Sociologists such as Simon and Gagnon (1984), who developed research on sexual scripts, have critiqued positivist views on sex and argued that sex is related to and influenced by the social meanings and structures we have created.

Seidman (2010) argues that sexual liberation should involve freeing ourselves from the notion of sexuality (who we desire to have sex with), and instead focus on desexualizing pleasure (this would also imply de-gendering pleasure), freeing pleasure from social control, norms, and ideals (see also Patel, 2006; Tiefer, 2004). Studying sex through sociology involves deconstructing the understandings and norms surrounding how and with whom we engage in sexual behaviour based on our gender and sexuality. The sociology of sex acknowledges and critiques the assumptions that we have about sexual relations and behaviour as they relate to ideologies and norms in our society (Seidman, 2010). Understanding the role of pleasure in both men's and women's understandings and negotiations of sexual consent has important implications for sociology because it reflects both gender and pleasure hierarchies which are present in cultural norms and sexual scripts. The concept of the "grey area" of sex where women and men feel uncomfortable or violated after having sex has implications and concerns about the way women's pleasure is ignored or viewed as a less relevant aspect of hetero-sex, and the ways through which men's sexuality is constructed as uncontrollable.

For the purpose of this dissertation, queer theory is a helpful lens for which to situate some of the arguments that are made, specifically those which challenge the norms and supposed naturalness of gender and sexuality. Queer sociology has a goal of challenging assumptions of static identities (Brubaker, Keegan, Guadalupe-Diaz, & Beasley, 2017). Queer theory helps destabilize the idea of a natural order, and to understand that sexuality is not only in discrete areas of social practice within particular levels of society, but that it is a large part of social life in general (Pascoe, 2005). Queer theory helps situate the role culture plays in the regulation and construction of what is deemed as normal; disrupting, highlighting, and resisting these normalizations and taken-for-granted assumptions which result in power relations (Browne & Nash, 2010; Dyer, 2020; Ward, 2008). The queer movement seeks to create a culture where bodies and sexualities are removed from social control (Seidman, 2010), and carries with it a rejection of the binaries surrounding sex and gender, capturing that experiences of sex can defy "generalization, categorization, and explanation" (Iasenza, 2010: 291). Queer theory does not just capture non-conforming experiences, but is also about those experiences which are transgressive, confusing, routine, or ecstatic, changing over the course of our lifetime (Iasenza, 2010). In short, much of how we talk about and experience sex is queer. Overall, queer theory is helpful for recognizing the power that patriarchy has over desires, acts, and identities, and for challenging that power. By challenging and questioning expectations and attitudes about sexual consent, it is my hope that this research contributes to disrupting power inequalities and empowers and educates young women and men.

Dissertation outline

In this dissertation, based on my interviews and focus groups with young adults, I develop a typology of consensual sex that distinguishes between feelings of consent as implicit which are

usually more related to "best" sexual experiences, to awkward or mediocre experiences where consent is negotiated more explicitly, to sex which falls into the grey area. Whereas sex that is just not going well is often described as awkward, sloppy, or otherwise unsatisfying, it is distinct from "grey area" sex because it is felt as clearly consensual. Instances where pleasure is not the mutual goal or where people feel used and "not like a person" mark grey area sexual encounters, arguably like the one Grace experienced with Ansari. Gender expectations and sexual scripts have led to increasingly confusing conditions in the bedroom. Because consent is most clearly expressed when partners feel comfortable communicating with each other and where there is mutual desire, casual encounters are seen as offering less room for explicit consent, instead guided by expected behaviour and responses.

There continue to be differences between what young people expect from their sexual encounters and partners, and what they actually experience. For example, men continue to be expected not to have a need for emotional intimacy (Cowling & Reynolds, 2004; Kim et al., 2007; Sakaluk et al., 2014; Simon & Gagnon, 1984), however, I found that the young men in my study associate emotional intimacy with increased pleasure. Women continue to be presented as sex objects and as passive, their sexual desire missing from discourses of sexuality (Connell, 2005; Oliver, van der Meulen, Larkin, & Flicker, 2013; Powell, 2010), which means they are more likely to experience the grey area. However, men are not exempt from grey area sex and women are not simply victims but are often assertive in their own pursuits of sexual pleasure. Finally, this dissertation offers insights into the ways that we can challenge this normalized behaviour through disrupting gender roles, increasing conversations around pleasure, and calling out this uncomfortable experience. People should not be having sex because they feel expected to, but rather because there is mutual desire between two or more parties.

The dissertation consists of nine chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 is the literature review in which I break down the definition of sex and explore arguments and research about unwanted sex, consent, coercion, hookups, pleasure, sexual regret, and communication. Chapter 3 outlines the theories which have been applied to answer the research question and provide a framework for my findings and analysis. Chapter 4 summarizes the methodology and qualitative methods of focus groups and individual interviews used in this research. Chapter 5 is the first findings chapter, exploring the ways that participants defined consent within the focus groups and their view of how consent is communicated, in principle and in practice. Chapter 6 discusses the ways that comfort, trust, and emotions make for implicitly consensual and enjoyable experiences. This chapter marks distinctions between what is interpreted as most consensual for women compared to men. Chapter 7 examines sexual experiences which are awkward, sloppy, and mediocre, but often more explicitly consensual. These experiences lack emotional and physical connection. Chapter 8 defines and discusses the grey area. By contrasting grey experiences to those which were the most enjoyable where consent was implicit, and those which were just not going well but consent was more explicit, we can begin to form a clearer picture of what marks the differences of the grey area and the ways in which they are related to larger cultural and social norms[4] about gender. These chapters are followed by a conclusion which summarizes my main findings, outlines my theoretical contribution, and discusses the limitations of the research.

[4] Norms in the case of this research refer to socially constructed standards and rules that are reinforced and policed in society; where divergent actions from the norms may result in informal sanctions. For example, the idea that heterosexuality is the norm, thus resulting in homosexuality being seen as deviant (Seidman, 2010)

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Relative to sexual assault, the experiences of those who feel sexually violated but not raped is an under-studied issue. There is clear evidence that sexual assault carries negative consequences for victims at the levels of both mental health (i.e., self-blame, anxiety, and depression) and social outcomes (i.e., lack of support, negative reactions, rape culture, and victim blaming) (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). We know less, however, about "grey zones" which occur when people have sex but did not necessarily want to; situations in which a participant ultimately yields to a sense of pressure without saying either yes or no. This kind of "non-consent" consent leaves people feeling regret, guilt, and emotions similar to assault (Akre et al., 2013; Bussel, 2008; Cameron, 2006; Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Jervis, 2008; Powell, 2010; Ruckh, 2014). Women, such Grace in her accusations against Ansari, are often blamed for not saying no, or are shamed as fickle if they change their minds about wanting to have sex. On the other hand, given cultural expectations that men always want sex, the sexual coercion of men is regarded more as a joke than a serious problem. However, I argue that the concept of the grey zone needs more attention in current literature as it is much more common than sexual assault as defined by the law and has important individual and social implications for both women and men. Not only can such unpleasant sexual encounters lead to feelings similar to those of sexual assault, but they also reflect and reinforce wider social norms about expected gender role behaviour both inside and outside the bedroom.

To distinguish between sexual assault and the "grey zone" requires first understanding the legal definition of consent under the Canadian Criminal Code, which is the: "voluntary

agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question" (*Canadian Criminal Code* section.273. 1(1)). According to this Code, consent is nullified:

> a. When the agreement is expressed by a third party and not by the complainant;
> b. When "the complainant is incapable of consenting";
> c. When the agreement is induced through the abuse of a position of trust, power, or authority; when
> d. "The complainant expresses, by words or conduct, a lack of agreement" to the sexual activity; and
> e. When the complainant expresses the unwillingness to continue the sexual activity *Canadian Criminal Code,* section.273.1 (2, a-e).

Section 273.2 of the criminal code states that:

> It is not a defence to a charge under section 271, 272, or 273 that the accused believed that the complainant consented to the activity that forms the subject-matter of the charge, where (a) the accused's belief arose from the accused's (i) self-induced intoxication, or (ii) recklessness or willful blindness; or (b) the accused did not take reasonable steps, in the circumstances known to the accused at the time, to ascertain that the complainant was consenting (*Canadian Criminal Code* s.273.2(a-b)).

In other words, the Canadian Criminal Code defines consent as an affirmative action (e.g., verbally saying yes) and allows greater space for assuming the withdrawal of consent via "words or conduct" than it does for assuming the giving of consent. According to Kramer (1994), this application of affirmative consent "…is one of the most progressive measures ever enacted in North America" (149) and offers a good template of consent which treats everyone as capable of making their own sexual decisions and expressing their own choices and sexual desires.

However, despite the law defining sexual consent in affirmative terms, nullifying the ability to consent when intoxicated or otherwise not fully conscious, the law is not always applied as written. As Koshan (2016:1392) states, "cases involving women who were unconscious at the time of the sexual assault, whether because of disability, medication, intoxication, or otherwise, are numerous and—in spite of section 273.1(2)(b) of the *Criminal Code* relating to capacity to consent—acquittals are not uncommon". Sexual assaults involving

drugs or alcohol are often defended on the basis that the victim consented prior to being unconscious, even though this is contrary to the Canadian Criminal Code.

Part of the discrepancy between the law and the interpretation of the law by courts is that the legal requirement of affirmative consent is not in line with normative sexual scripts. Sexual scripts are the sexual behaviours considered socially acceptable and culturally normal (Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005). From their analytic review of consent literature, Muehlenhard et al. (2016: 464) found that "[i]n contrast to an affirmative consent standard, many individuals hold sexual scripts in which consent is assumed until non-consent is actively communicated". Thus, many (heterosexual and LGBQ alike; Beres et al., 2004; Ford & Becker, 2020; Muehlenhard et al., 2016) often behave in a way that assumes consent has been given, even in silence, until otherwise noted verbally. But the law works in reverse—consent must be given verbally but can be revoked through implicit behavior.

As such, many examples of consensual sex do not meet the legal definition of consent because people are actually more likely to consent to sex through implicit means, such as by inviting someone home (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). In fact, behaviours that are most often used to indicate consent are those which are not always clear indicators, such as kissing or a lack of resistance, which may or may not indicate that the people involved want to engage in further sexual acts. Clear and direct indicators such as stating outright "I consent to sex" are deemed socially awkward or as a "passion killer" but are more legally binding (Gunby, Carline, & Beynon, 2012; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). MacKinnon (2003) argued that often consent is only applied as a defence, that is, "consent is more attributed than exercised" (268). In this sense, we may only think about or apply consent once it is considered as defence in a sexual assault case. Further, consent may not be viewed as important to all, as Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz,

Linkenbach, and Stark (2003) found that college men underestimated the importance of consent typically felt by both male and female peers.

Sexual scripts also help determine what is considered normal sexual behavior and what is taken as consent, relying on stereotypical characteristics for men and women (Sakaluk et al, 2014; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005). For example, sexual scripts suggest that aggressive sexual behavior in women is "slutty" but is normal for men. Current sexual scripts suggest that women will be more passive than men during sex (Kim et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2015; Powell, 2008; Wiederman, 2005). As such, women may struggle to assert their desires or end a sexual encounter, and their silence may be assumed to indicate consent (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). As a result of these social patterns, many men defend themselves against sexual assault accusations by saying that "she didn't say no" (Bussel, 2008), despite the fact that silence does not meet the legal definition of consent.

As Muehlenhard et al. (2016) argue, silence as a defence ignores the difference between wanting to have sex and consenting to have sex. People may be *willing* to have sex but not *want* to have sex (Peterson, 2013). In other words, people may have sex either to please the other person or to avoid an awkward situation of having to say no, but they may not actually want to for their own pleasure. As MacKinnon (2003: 268) states, "consent to sex is not the same as wanting it". For these reasons, many researchers (see Bussel, 2008; Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Millar, 2008; Powell, 2007; Powell, 2010) promote that consent should be "active" and "enthusiastic". An active model of consent means that there is constant positive and enthusiastic communication to indicate consent throughout sexual activity. The active model is also said to improve experiences of sex by promoting a clear, "non-assumption" model of consent. In this sense, the authors:

> Do not accept that it is reasonable for one partner to assume that there is consent because of another's apparent compliance or non-resistance; it makes it clear that there is a responsibility for all partners in a sexual encounter to take steps to ascertain that consent is freely given (Powell, 2010: 91).

Eliminating silence as consent and promoting "yes means yes" instead of "no means no", replaces silence and passivity with agency and pleasure, giving women the power to use their own active voices (Filipovic, 2008; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999).

As laudable as a goal as this may be, as will be demonstrated in this research, and supported by others such as Muehlenhard et al. (2016), achieving this goal faces significant hurdles considering that it goes against our social norms. In a tweet from January 14, 2018, Jessica Valenti, co-author of the book *Yes Means Yes*, tweeted that the "yes means yes" model of consent is necessary but also scares people, and that "…The idea that partners should always be enthusiastic goes against everything we've been taught about sex". Because women are not "supposed" to be enthusiastic about sex, the enthusiastic consent model challenges not only what many assume is the natural progression of sex, but also our fundamental assumptions of who men and women are as sexual beings and what role they are supposed to play in sexual activities.

Formal sexual health education in schools creates significant challenges in trying to eliminate grey zone sexual experiences and ensure consent because it has generally lacked any discourse related to pleasure and desire, particularly for women (Connell, 2005; Fine & McClelland, 2006). Many Canadian young adults acquire much of their sexual health education from peers and through websites or news outlets (Charest, Kleinplatz, & Lund, 2016). Although sexual health education in Canada falls under provincial jurisdiction and is not uniform across the country or across universities (Muehlenhard et al., 2016), most curricula focus more on the avoidance of dangers such as STIs, unwanted pregnancy, or assault (Connell, 2005; Oliver et al., 2013). There is little discussion of the goals of sex outside of procreation, despite the fact that

orgasm is often used to define and measure sexual encounters and whether they are satisfying (Fahs, 2014; Sprecher, 2002). Compared to when in relationships, women are less likely to experience pleasure in hookups (Kennair, Bendixen, & Buss, 2016; Wade, 2017), and are also more likely to regret vaginal sex with people they are less familiar with (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Uecker & Martinez, 2017). Sex education in schools fail to address changing social contexts of hookup culture, as well as women's pleasure. Thus, there is much that could be discussed within sex education that would be helpful for empowering young people and their sexual decisions outside of just STIs as consequences and procreation as the goal.

In order to better understand how the grey area happens, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature covering definitions of sex, unwanted sexual experiences, pleasure, communication styles, sexual scripts, and sexual regret. Each area examines gender differences in how sexual behaviour is experienced, and the expectations placed on men and women to maintain heteronormative behaviour. Based on this review of the literature, I suggest that sexual experiences fall into the "grey zone" of sexual consent when there is an expectation to follow social norms of sex, but without an accompanying feeling of an ability to stop the situation. These feelings of pressure, along with a lack of pleasure, are further magnified when gender norms negatively impair participants' abilities to effectively determine and communicate their desires.

Defining sex

The term "sex", and similar terms such as "safer sex", "sexually active", and "sexual behavior", are often poorly defined, resulting in inconsistent and often shifting definitions of what they mean (McCabe, Tanner, & Heiman, 2010; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Randall & Byers, 2003; Tiefer 2004). Hite (1979) argued that the definition of "sex" is insufficient to

capture the meaning of physical relations, and instead the definition is mostly centered on male orgasm. What "sex" means can differ by person and context, despite a general assumption that everyone knows what it means (Bogart, Cecil, Wagstaff, Pinkerton, & Abramson, 2000; Mehta, Sunner, Head, Crosby, & Shrier, 2011; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Sex is therefore "not simple, and it is far from a mere matter of 'doing what comes naturally'" (Waskul & Plante, 2010: 149). Cameron and Kulick (2003) indicate that sex can describe erotic desire and practice, often including orgasm. Although orgasm and genitals tend to be included in definitions of sex, Kleinplatz and Ménard (2007) found that in reality, the greatest sexual experiences for some people never involved orgasm or genital contact at all.

Oral sex is often the most controversial in terms of categorizing what counts as sex (Mehta et al., 2011). Both Randall and Byers (2003) and Pitts and Rahman (2001) found that roughly only one third of people consider oral sex in their definition of sex with recipients. Givers of oral sex are more likely than receivers to consider it sex (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Randall and Byers (2003), and Pitts and Rahman (2001) suggest that the majority of people have a more specific heteronormative understanding of sex, often only including penile-vaginal intercourse (PVI) in their definition of sex. Fewer consider penile-anal intercourse in heterosexual relationships as sex and those who do tend to be women (Pitts & Rahman, 2001; Randall & Byers, 2003). Both the term PVI and it's use as the term for definitions of sex is quite heterosexist. This understanding of intercourse also problematized how people come to frame and understand their experiences through a heterosexist lens. For example, Greta Christina (2005), in her article "Are We Having Sex Now or What?" discusses how her "tracking system" for what counted as sex broke after she began having sexual relations with women. Once Christina started having sex with women and the myriad of ways that women can have sex with

each other, the binary tracking system of penis-in-vagina sex had to go (2005). As Christina began to further explore sexual interactions, from masturbating in front of a viewer as she danced in nude peep shows, hosting an all-girl sex party, and participating in sadomasochism, she began to further question what defines "sex". She says that the conventional understanding equating "real" sex with vaginal intercourse has serious flaws and provides her own definition of sex as: "the conscious, consenting, mutually acknowledged pursuit of sexual pleasure of at least one of the people involved" (Christina, 2005:4). This definition is important as it emphasizes the idea of sex as mutual, even if only one person is receiving pleasure.

Unfortunately, many stereotypical understandings of sex are tied to heterosexual gender norms. McCabe et al. (2010) interviewed men and women aged 28 to 76 to understand how their participants discussed men and women as having different or similar meanings of sex. The authors found that their participants talked about aspects of sexuality in abstract and traditionally gendered and stereotypical ways. McCabe et al.'s (2010) findings demonstrate that the stereotypical assumptions surrounding sex are often framed under the assumed heterosexual behaviour of men and women. These assumptions include:

1) Sex is physical for men and emotional for women, with some participants noting that men focus more on their own physical pleasure and can overlook the needs of their partner.
2) Sex is more important for men than for women, supporting the notion that men can be ready for sex "at the drop of a hat".
3) Women's sexuality is associated with their physical appearance and sexual objectification; women noted that they are judged by those around them and in the media on their appearance and sexual activity.
4) Overall inattention is given to women's pleasure or desire, with participants discussing that women are "not expected to talk about sexual pleasure and to limit their sexual desire" (McCabe et al., 2010:256).

These stereotypes of sex demonstrate the assumption of heterosexuality for men and women's sexual behaviour. Women's discourse of their sexual pleasure is also limited within these understandings of sex, with sex being acted by and for men.

Additionally, men and women can label sexual activity differently, given expectations for their respective genders. Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007) suggest that these "motivational definitions" allow people to label their behavior in a way that promotes a favourable representation of themselves. If people expect their sexual experience to have negative consequences, whether as a personal stigma or gender norm deviance, they are motivated to define the experience as not sex (Mehta et al., 2011). As such, research has shown that women are less likely than men to label sexual experiences as "sex" due to their desire to appear chaste (or at least less promiscuous), while men's desire to appear more sexually experienced can lead to a more inclusive labeling system for what counts as "sex" (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Mehta et al. (2011) also found that young women labeled sex differently based on contextual factors of their romantic relationships. Sex within the context of a relationship was identified by young women as "having sex", however, outside of a relationship, the women in the study were more likely to label sex as "flings" or "one-night stands". They suggested that women used such vague terms to avoid the negative social consequences of engaging in sexual behavior outside of a steady relationship (Mehta et al., 2011). Given the contextually dependent nature of definitions of sex, for this study all definitions were left open to the participants. The purpose of this research was not to get at a precise definition of sex but to identify how people come to make sense of their sexual experiences and how that tied into their understandings of consent.

Unwanted sexual experiences

As alluded to in the introduction above, grey area sex is distinct from rape or sexual assault, but is an unwanted sexual experience that one consents to but does not necessarily desire (Bay-Cheng et al., 2008; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). People may feign sexual interest, or otherwise indicate consent despite not being interested in the activity or being unsure of their interest. Although both men and women engage in unwanted sexual activity, women, especially those who subscribe to traditional gender norms or who have not been taught to challenge traditional norms, are more likely to experience unwanted sex (Flack, Daubman, Caron, et al., 2007; Kennett, Humphreys, & Bramley, 2013; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998).

Many of the constructs of sexual behaviour, both consensual and assault, helps in maintaining men's privilege. As Kate Manne (2019) states below, women are constricted by moral standards of sexuality which only maintain male dominance:

> She [women] is morally in the wrong, as measured by the wrong moral standards – namely, his: the moral standards that work to protect historically privileged and powerful men from moral downfall. They also protect him from the ignominy of shame and the corrosive effects of guilt, as well as the social and legal costs of moral condemnation. They enable him to form views and make claims with the default presumption that he is good, right, or correct. And the women morally bound to him may not beg to differ. (Manne, 2019: xiv)

The guilt and shame imposed on women when they are sexually assaulted and/or when they are sexually empowered protect male privilege. Manne argues that women often have a "collective overinvestment in upholding male dominance", often going to great lengths to maintain this dominance without realizing so (2019:181). Therefore, it is not only men that uphold their own dominance, but women are socialized (and in turn socialize their own children) to contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of patriarchy (hooks, 2004; Katz, 2019).

While not every man coerces women into sex, subtle cultural and societal pressures support masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2002) which can normalize and perpetuate unwanted sexual encounters. As domination is normalized, coercion becomes less about direct force and intimidation, and instead becomes a part of everyday experiences and behaviours. Powell (2010) argues that it may therefore be difficult for some women, especially younger women, to recognize the pressure to engage in sex and to actively say "no". This is partly due to sexual scripts, but also due to the challenges that women face regarding their sexual empowerment, including:

> The unequal gender scripts about sexuality, the prioritization of men's pleasure, faking orgasm, double standards about "promiscuity", fusions between empowerment and consumerism, conflicting scripts about sex as power versus sex as oppression, and different entitlement to sexual pleasure and satisfaction (Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014: 501).

Gendered expectations of men and women's sexual behaviour through unequal scripts, double standards, and conflicting notions of pleasure and satisfaction have normalized pressure and conformity as sexual consent (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2010). MacKinnon (2003) takes the argument one step further, arguing that due to inequality, sex can look consensual even when it is not desired, and therefore under these inequalities of power between men and women, consent is never actually a free choice.

Decker and Baroni (2012) define coercion as a non-physical threat that is used to pressure others into acts. Terms such as "intimidation", "extortion", and "retaliation" are used to describe acts of sexual coercion (Decker & Baroni, 2012). Powell argues that sexual coercion is best understood in terms of indirect power. As she writes:

> …young women may also discipline themselves into accepting as normal their participation in sexual encounters that are not wanted. This is not to say that there is not *also* a very real problem of direct coercion by some young men towards some young women. Rather, that in addition there is a more subtle level of social and

> cultural pressure, operating through discourse, which may further explain the grey area of the sexual violence continuum… (Powell, 2010: 70-71)

Although some young men directly coerce young women into unwanted sex, there is also a more subtle aspect to coercive sex that is perpetuated by social and cultural pressures related to gender. Powell (2008) suggests that it is not an individual who is coercive, but that societal expectations of women's compliance leads women feeling pressured into saying yes to unwanted sex. Unfortunately, this behaviour has become normalized and accepted, reproducing situations where men are persistent and women give in to "underwhelming" sex in which they do not feel they are victims of rape, but are left feeling uncomfortable. This feeling was expressed in an article where a woman described a scenario where she was uncomfortable, but she did not see herself as a victim or that she was assaulted:

> It got to the point where he went to try to have sex with me, but I wasn't really feeling it. I said no, but he kept asking. I continued to say no, although maybe not as forcefully as I should have and he continued to push. Maybe I was too high, maybe I was too drunk, maybe I just didn't want to make it an issue, but eventually I said yes. I consented, albeit somewhat reluctantly. We had underwhelming sex and I quickly left his room, and then the party. (ChampagneShowers, *TotalSororityMove,* 2015).

Her experience demonstrates women's reluctance or uneasiness to "make an issue" and speak up; instead, we may end up maintaining and protecting patriarchal norms. As Williams (2019) states, women are "groomed for compliance", and there comes a discomfort when we know something is not okay but also have not been provided any space outside of patriarchal norms to say that it is not.

Stemple and Meyer (2014) explored the reporting rates from five federal U. S agencies and found that while both men and women report being coerced into sex (e.g., manipulated) and experiencing unwanted sexual contact (e.g., unwanted touching, groped, etc.), men are more likely than women to report the unwanted contact, and women more likely to report coercion. Thus, while men and women both experience unwanted contact and being sexually coerced, men

report coercion less in order to retain a sense of power. Fagen and Anderson (2012) argue that even in circumstances where heterosexual men have experienced unwanted sexual contact from women, they still frame sexual coercion as a gender-specific experience. Men labeled experiences as coercive when they were unable to stop the sexual act due to the "beauty" of the woman, or when they were left feeling on the wrong side of the traditional sexual script. When the men felt used or as though the woman were taking power away from them, this led them to describe the situation as coercive: "The coercion was blamed, in part, on the fact that she was beautiful, older and popular and that she used this beauty to seduce him and 'get what she wanted'" (Fagen & Anderson, 2012: 266). Coercion in this sense is still being constructed within a power imbalance between men and women, yet perpetuates the idea that men are governed by their sexual desires (the idea of them thinking with their penis and not with their brain). By feeling coerced because a woman was beautiful and therefore could not refuse sex with them, women continue to be framed within a double standard of oversexualized yet responsible, and men as governed by sexual conquest.

Seduction, on the other hand, is sometimes seen as the opposite of coercion. Baudrillard (1990) describes seduction as the strength of the feminine, and includes the ability to play, challenge, and form strategies of appearance. Seduction, in practical sociological research, are the actions of dressing a certain way, gazing/eye contact, flirting, dancing, kissing, and touching (Brak-Lamy, 2015). Audrey Lorde (1978) states the use of the erotic as a resource for women, but one that has been devalued and constructed as something confusing, trivialized by men for power over women. Lorde understands erotic as "an assertation of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (1978: 89). In a similar vein,

Hakim (2010) offers a theory of erotic capital/erotic power in which women can use their sexuality and appearance as a source of power through seduction. There are six elements that outline a person's erotic capital/erotic power. The first is beauty (varying by culture), usually defined by symmetry and skin tone. Second is sexual attractiveness, such as a person's way of being, of dress, and their personality. Third is liveliness, meaning being involved in sport/physical fitness, having humor and a contagious energy. Similar to traits of seduction, the fourth and fifth characteristics are social skills: grace, charm, making people like you and desire you; and social presentation: makeup, perfume, social status, and/or wealth. Lastly is sexuality itself, consisting of sexual competence, playfulness, sex drive, and erotic imagination (Hakim, 2010). These theories of the erotic from Lorde and Hakim can provide women with a sense of empowerment over their sexuality and sexual interactions. Having power over one's body, women may feel as though they have more agency in their sexual decisions.

While Hakim (2010) and Baudrillard (1990) present seduction in a positive framework which supports women's agency, there are other views of seduction that frame it as very similar to coercion. In fact, Jensen and Kleiner (1999) include seductive behaviour in a list of workplace harassment behaviours, defining seduction as "unwanted physical or verbal behaviour ranging from sexual advances to physical attempts to seduce the victim" (25). Vandervort (2013) defines that seduction in a sexual context, involving non-consensual touching and "ambiguous communication" refers to:

> …the emotional, psychological, cognitive, and psycho-sexual effects of social interaction between two persons who are attracted to one another and who, through the seduction process, move from being acquaintances toward a more intense, often intimate, sexual relationship (156)

Seduction uses positive reinforcement to entice someone into doing something that he or she might not have otherwise done. While both seduction and coercion are presented as a "free

choice", coercion uses threat of fear, whereas seduction offers something that is desired such as pleasure (Vandervort, 2013). Any acts of manipulation through seduction, once the attraction is mutual and the outcome has been positive, are retrospectively seen as harmless. However, Vandervort (2013) points out that these same actions of the seducer presuming mutual attraction and "who touch first and ask later", are defence arguments used by sexual offenders. Similarly, Littleton and Axsom (2003) found that student's scripts for both seduction and rape had overlapping characteristics.

Sometimes to tease or play with their partner, someone will say no to sex even though they intend to consent, a behaviour dubbed "token resistance" (Emmers-Sommer, 2016; Krahé, Scheinberger-Olwig, & Kolpin, 2000; Muehlenhard, 2011). Token resistance is often seen as a form of sex play to tease partners, however, only 55.1% of men and 45.7% of women reported that their use of token resistance resulted in a pleasant experience (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1994). This ambiguous form of communication can place someone at risk of experiencing unwanted sex (Krahé et al., 2000). Reasons for both men and women's use of token resistance in O'Sullivan and Allgeier's (1994) study included: teasing one's partner; as a way to control the situation; concern with being interrupted; or because they wanted to slow things down. Women's reasons for engaging in token resistance are often due to feeling that their sexual partner believes in the sexual double standard, and therefore engage in token resistance as a way to engage in sex without actually acknowledging their desire and appearing "easy" (Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). Similarly, O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1994) found that men were most likely to use token resistance as a practical concern over issues such as being interrupted or worried "about being seen as just interested in sex" (1046). While our culture continues to frame consent as though "no" is part of a seduction method that women use (Filipovic, 2008; Jervis, 2008), research

shows that men actually use token resistance more than women (Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1998; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1994). More up to date research would be important to explore the use of token resistance for both men and women.

Alcohol consumption

Drinking alcohol is often associated as a social lubricant, helping people engage in casual sexual encounters (Claxton, DeLuca, & van Dulmen, 2015; Gunby, et al., 2012; Kramer, 1994; Sumnall, Beynon, Conchie, Riley, & Cole, 2007). Alcohol consumption often leads to more negative consequences such as unpleasurable sex (e.g., not being able to maintain an erection, inability to self-lubricate) and sexual regret (LaBrie, Hummer, Ghaidarov, Lac, & Kenney, 2014; Orchowski, Mastroleo, & Borsari, 2012; Reissing, Andruff & Wentland, 2012). LaBrie et al. (2014) argued that alcohol presents an issue of whether people can fully consent while drunk, especially when having sex with strangers or acquaintances. Individuals who drink more than once a week are more likely to experience incidents of unwanted sexual activity (Flack et al., 2007). More recently, Herbenick, Fu, Dodge, and Fortenberry (2018) found that for both men and women, alcohol was linked to less pleasurable and more unwanted (but consensual) sex. While there was no specific difference in wantedness between sober participants and those who had a small amount of alcohol to drink, participants who were drunk reported higher incidents of agreeing to sex that they did not want. Further, the participants who were sober reported much higher levels of sexual satisfaction than those who had a few drinks, as well as those who were drunk (Herbenick et al., 2018).

Kramer (1994) argues that there are three primary social beliefs underlying alcohol-related sexual assaults: gender stereotypes regarding sexual behaviour, social expectations about behaviour when drinking, and double standards towards men and women when drinking. In

heterosexual circumstances, women are typically seen as more accountable and responsible for unwanted sex when they are drunk, whereas men are more likely to be excused for their drunken behaviour (Goodman, 2009; Kramer, 1994). Gunby et al. (2012) conducted a study on alcohol consumption and sexual assault cases and found that participants felt that if both parties were drunk, responsibility of consent fell to whomever was the most sober. However, participants noted women should take responsibility when drinking to avoid negative consequences for themselves. Thus, as one participant noted, women need to be responsible for saying no earlier in the encounter:

> 'She needs to say no beforehand. There's no point in saying I didn't want to do it afterwards…that's just gonna confuse everyone. So, like yeah, it's up to the woman to say before it happens, yes or no in an obvious or clear way' (FG3, F3) (Gunby et al., 2012: 100).

Thus, when there are questions of blame, responsibility seems to fall on women.

Drinking can also cause alcohol myopia, a kind of "tunnel vision" where an individual's perceptions of events and cues are chemically altered (Benson, Gohm, & Gross, 2007; Connell, 2015; Goodman, 2009). Goodman (2009) suggests that alcohol myopia impairs not only the ability to read signs but also to send clear signals of resistance. In the cases where silence and lack of resistance convey consent (Muehlenhard et al., 2016), women may not intend to consent, or may consent to sex play but not to actual intercourse:

> Depending upon the level of intoxication…If the woman sees "preliminary activities" as a substitute rather than a precursor to sexual intercourse, she may be even less aware that her silence indicates consent to not only preliminary activities, but also to intercourse (Goodman, 2009: 96).

While Goodman attributes the issue only to women, alcohol can interfere with anyone's ability to say no or to convey disinterest more effectively. The problem is amplified, however, in the case of a male aggressor and a female gatekeeper, as any lack of resistance from women can be misconstrued as a yes, especially when alcohol impaired (Kramer, 1994). These vulnerabilities

while drinking demonstrate a need for better education about how to mix alcohol and sex safely, well before the opportunity for such an encounter arises.

Hookups, relationships, and consent

The type of relationship in which a person is having sex can also impact their chances of experiencing an unwanted sexual encounter. Differences in relationships such as hookups, casual sex, friends with benefits, or long-term relationships can impact the types of communication styles, comfort with communication, and experiences of pleasure, thereby contributing to potentially experiencing “grey zone” sex. Plante (2014: 164) refers to synonyms for hookups as “scoring”, “getting lucky”, “booty calls”, “one-night stand”, “having/being a fuckbuddy”, or “friends with benefits”. In their research on the Canadian context of hookups, Wentland and Reissing (2014) describe and divide casual relationships into four categories:

> *One Night Stand*: Sex between strangers or people who do not know each other that well, these two usually meet while out in a social setting (e.g., bar, party), sexual activity is not planned ahead of time, one or both are usually under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, there are no expectations that the two will see each other again (even if they exchange contact information).
>
> *Booty Call*: Sex between two people who know each other, one person calls or texts the other person with the intention of having sex with that person within the next few hours, often late at night, one person is usually under the influence of alcohol/and or drugs, these two engage in sex with each other occasionally.
>
> *Fuck Buddy*: Sex between people who know each other, they engage in sexual activity when they hang out with each other, they are usually not under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, these two engage in sex with each other regularly.
>
> *Friend with Benefits*: Sex between two people who have an existing friendship, these two may or may not engage in sexual activity when they hang out with each other, they are usually not under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, these two engage in sex with each other regularly.

The authors found that the difference between "friends with benefits" and "fuck buddy" is that the latter is much more sexually focused with friendship prior to their sexual relationship (Wentland & Reissing, 2014).

The definition of "hooking up" can vary from person to person, and can also become quite ambiguous (Plante, 2014). Generally, hooking up is defined as a no-strings-attached (not "dating") sexual encounter between two or more people. While there is not an abundance of research related to gay, lesbian, and queer experiences of unwanted sex and hookups, brown (2019) asked some LGBTQ individuals their perceptions of hookups. Participant answers included similar definitions of non-romantic, outside of an ongoing relationship, no strings attached sex. The main component of a hookup is some sort of sexual activity in a non-emotional, uncommitted relationship (Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009; LaBrie, et al., 2014; Lewis, Atkins, Blayney, Dent, & Kaysen, 2013; Pham, 2017; Plante, 2014; Wade, 2017). Wesche, Espinosa-Hernández, and Lefkowitz (2016), and brown (2019) emphasize the purpose of hookups and casual sex as focusing on pleasure and orgasm.

Parties and alcohol are seen as the main facilitators of engaging in casual sex (Berntson, Hoffman, & Luff, 2014; Epstein et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2013; Pham, 2017). In recent years, hookups have been assumed to be a prevalent means of finding sexual or relationship partners among young adults today (Pham, 2017; Wade, 2017). However, empirical research shows that random or one-time hookups between strangers occur less often than hookups among people who know each other and that hookups often lead to longer-term, committed relationships (Epstein et al. 2009; Wade 2017). Further, Berntson et al. (2014) found that men were more likely to engage in hookups and friends with benefits than are women.

Berntson et al. (2014), Pham (2017), Wade (2017), and Wesche et al. (2016) argue that while hookup culture is challenging traditional gender roles by women engaging in hookups and promoting pre-marital sex, there are still between-gender differences with approaches and acceptance of hooking up. However, Wade (2017) also states that (assumingly related to heterosexual behaviours) there is not actually enough casual sex happening for male domination to be challenged. Plante (2014: 177) argues that hookups are used as a way of "confirming both gender identity *and* heterosexuality for both men and women". Based on understandings of coercion, unwanted sex, and hookups thus far, hookups may cause more issues for heterosexual rather than LGBQ individuals, however, further research is needed. Adding to this, the social rules of hookups still have a double standard for women in which men are given more freedom than women to seek pleasure (Pham, 2017). Orenstein (2020) argues that women often feel used in hookups but that men discussed no such similarity in her interviews with them. She argues that hookup culture fits into the values of masculinity, specifically seeing partners as disposable and seeking conquest over emotional connection. Even when heterosexual women engage in hookups and are presumed to be interested in sex, social norms continue to expect women to display an innocent and gatekeeping role (Berntson et al., 2014). As a result of this expectation, while women engage in hookups for pleasure, men report higher levels of satisfaction than women in heterosexual hookups (Pham, 2017; Wade, 2017). Epstein et al. (2009) found that contrary to traditional gender roles and sexual scripts, men in their study do develop caring feelings for women that they are hooking up with.

Nonetheless, traditional gender norms are sustained by what Sweeney (2014a) calls *college party discourse,* particularly by privileged men in fraternities (at least in the United States). This discourse presents college as a time for men to engage in hedonistic behaviours, let

loose, and drink heavily and frequently. Sweeney's (2014a) male participants said that they often helped each other to ensure that their buddies were hooking up. Many of the men took part in what Sweeney (2014b) labels "player masculinity…. a masculinity project focused on male bonding, assertions of heterosexuality through the objectification and mastery of women (men *play* and women *get played*), and a conspicuous indulgence in carefree socializing and group revelry" (375). In his study, Sweeney (2014a) found that some fraternity members who did not want to drink and party all the time still went along with this sexist and heteronormative "player masculinity" anyway, as it was part of a socially policed expectation for men in the fraternity. As Sweeney (2014b: 385) notes:

> Because imperatives of player masculinity necessitate the interactional conversion of private sexual desires and experiences into the collective domain, individual men have to calibrate their sexual interests and practices with peers' approval. Their individual approaches to sex are a public concern-watched over and judged by peers.

Though such activities can seem "fun," Sweeney (2014b) and Wade (2017) both argue that these roles and expectations to party and hook up with women are constraining to men. Orenstein's (2020) participants stated that in order to be seen as a man, the expectation was to not only be hooking up, but be good at hooking up. Wade (2017) describes hookup culture as a "hostile environment" for men, in part because their sexual choices and performances need approval from other men. Sweeney (2014b) found that one man who was known as the "porn star" to his fraternity brothers, actually only made out with girls behind closed doors because he felt as though sex is better between two people who trust one another.

The performance men feel they must display to be seen as masculine demonstrates that heteropatriarchal roles have a powerful impact on the construction of expected and appropriate sexual relations that not only negatively impact women, but men as well. Similar to what hooks (2004) has pointed out, Katz (2019) situates men's socialization in a culture which promotes

violence against women in video games, pornography, and music. These sources often provide little alternatives to performing masculinity. When Orenstein (2020) had the young men in her study describe the ideal guy, many of them provided descriptions such as emotionally reserved, ripped, having sexual prowess, and being athletic. As she states, the young men who had grown up in the 2000s were “channeling 1955; their definition of masculinity had barely budged” (Orenstein, 2020: 14). Perceptions of masculinity – being sexually attracted to and getting with women – is therefore still centered around quite traditional and rigid perceptions of what it means to be a man, even if this is a challenge and not felt or desired by all men (Sweeney, 2014b; Orenstein, 2020).

Recently, a new term “fuckboy” (also known as “fuckboi”) has appeared in popular culture, similar to Sweeney’s (2014b) “player masculinity,” to describe men who are constantly trying to get sex from women. By virtue of the term, “fuckboys” are associated with being sexually aggressive given that words such as “fucking”, “screwing”, “ramming” and “banging” are often used to describe sex in an aggressive manner (Murnen, 2000). As “fuckboy” has yet to be included in any academic studies, the top-rated definition on Urban Dictionary is:

> Asshole boy who is into strictly sexual relationships; he will lead a girl on and let her down, then apologize only to ask for "pics" once the girl has welcomed him back into her trust. Boys like this will pretend to genuinely care about the girl but always fail to prove the supposed affection. He almost never makes plans because he has to hangout on his terms which could be the most whimsical of times, and if the girl rejects those plans because she has a legitimate reason for not being able to hang out, he will get pissed. However, if plans are made he will bail on them without a second thought. If a girl tries to stand up to this asshole he will most likely deny everything and turn it all around on the girl making it seem as though the conflict at stake is her fault and he has done nothing wrong and hates when girls bitch at him for "no reason." He will always come crawling back because he is a horny prick and can not withstand the dispossession of one of his baes[5], because he has more than one that's for sure. Texting such a boy will consist of the girl carrying the conversation and the guy responding with short answers 10 or more minutes after the girl's response, but when she asks why he takes so long to answer it will be

[5] Bae stands for “before anyone else”

> because he is "busy" but he promises he likes her. Boys like this are egotistical assholes who can not be trusted and are hard to get rid of because they say all the right things to get the girl back (Urban Dictionary, user mediocremind, 2015)

Other definitions on Urban Dictionary include men (or boys) who lead multiple girls on but is only ever interested in hooking up, specifically using various social media apps to do so. User "kiritokum" (Urban Dictionary, 2014) offers a highly rated definition for the term "fuckboy," as men "who have no respect for women and are unable to find the clitoris". This definition has been given a thumbs up 27,743 times as of July 2020. A "fuckboy" is therefore someone who cares only about his own pleasure and not that of his partner. This new term may indicate that there is less tolerance and social acceptability of men who are "players". By defining "fuckboys" negatively for being concerned only with their own pleasure, women defend the legitimacy of their own desires and wants.

Although the rise of hookup culture has raised some concerns about consent (Berntson et al., 2014; Pham, 2017; Sweeney, 2014ab; Wade, 2017), people in committed relationships also experience unwanted sex. Canadian law states that whoever initiates sex needs to ask for consent, regardless of whether previous consent has been given. However, the common assumption for heterosexual couples is that husbands and wives do not need to consent to sex every time due to a false belief that marriage implies "continuous consent" (Lazar, 2010). Before the abolition of the "marital rape exemption" in Canada in 1983, it was legal for a husband to rape his wife.

Lazar (2010) explores cases of "wife rape" within the Canadian legal system, arguing that "the language of couples" is taken as a defence due to the fact that people in long term relationships are presumed to have continuous sexual consent. Within Lazar's (2010) study, one lawyer asks: "When does coercion become a lack of consent?" questioning whether blackmailing

a spouse with special favors such as certain meals in return for sex is sexual coercion. Lazar (2010) argues that radical feminists would view bothering a spouse all night until they had sex as non-consensual; whereas a more liberal perspective would see such a situation as consent not being negated (they said yes, whether it was begrudging or not). Often, this type of situation is not seen as rape, as it is assumed rape cannot occur in stable relationships; instead, that sort of situation (where a spouse has sex against their will to please their partner), is seen as bad, unwanted sex, or sex gone wrong (Lazar, 2010: 356). Lazar (2010) found that lawyers who work wife rape cases discussed implicit “codes”, “signals”, “communication”, “expressions”, and “interaction” that are shared by two people within long-term relationships. The “language of relationships”, though specifically heterosexual relationships, while associated with secret rules, unique codes of behavior, implicit signs, and familiarity (Lazar, 2010), do not mean automatic consent. While there is a lack of research on unwanted sex between gay and queer couples, Gendron (2018) aimed to understand gay men’s sexual relationships when situated within contradictory sociopolitical systems, specifically sexual scripts. Gendron (2018) found that coupled gay men needed to navigate and challenge dominant sexual scripts in a way that balanced out power dynamics within the relationship.

O’Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) found that college students in committed heterosexual relationships were more likely than single students to engage in consensual but unwanted sexual activity. However, the participants in their study felt that consenting to unwanted sexual activity did not cause them any negative emotional consequences. In fact, the participants noted positive outcomes of consenting to unwanted sexual activity with a dating partner, with the results being pleasant and promoting intimacy within the relationship. Both men and women in committed relationships consented to unwanted sexual activity for similar reasons: needing to feel desired,

wanting to strengthen the relationship, and feeling as though they should engage in sex (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998).

Attachment style

A psychological component which may cause a person to be more likely to have unwanted sex is their attachment style (Schachner & Shaver, 2004). Attachment theory, developed by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby, stems from children's attachments with their mother. The three types of attachment styles include secure, avoidant, and anxious (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Attachment style and behaviour refers to "any of the various forms of behaviour that the person engages in from time to time to obtain and/or maintain a desired proximity" (Bowlby, 2005: 31). Attachment styles also influence romantic relationships, with types of attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) impacting communication and sexual satisfaction (McNeil, Rehman, & Fallis, 2018; Péloquin Brassard, Lafontaine, & Shaver, 2014). Bartholomew (1990) examined various research on adult attachment styles and provided four types adult attachment: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful. *Preoccupied* consists of people who are overly dependent and ambivalent; *dismissing* is those who are counter-dependent and deny attachment; and *fearful* is those who are socially avoidant and fearful of attachment (Bartholomew, 1990).

McNeil et al. (2018) studied the impact of attachment styles on how people communicate their sexual preferences and desires. The authors found that having an avoidant attachment style negatively impacts a person's ability to communicate within committed sexual relationships. Comparatively, people with avoidant styles are more likely to engage in casual sex in order to fit in to social groups due to peer pressure or to be able to brag about their experiences while maintaining their preferences to avoid attachment (Schachner & Shaver, 2004: 191). Davis,

Shaver and Vernon (2004) found that those with anxious and insecure types of attachment tend to seek sex as a way of preserving emotional closeness, reassurances, and enhancing their self-esteem. Davis et al. (2004) also found that sex can be used as a coercive strategy for manipulating attachment behaviours from a partner. Persons with an anxious attachment style are therefore more easily pressured to have sex out of their fears of abandonment compared to those with secure attachment (Schachner & Shaver, 2004).

These findings relate to research from Pauletti, Coopers, Aults, Hodges, and Perry (2016) who found that men adopt avoidant styles, while women are more likely to have preoccupied styles. Pauletti et al. (2016) argue that these differences are associated with evolutionary attraction theories where women aim to secure male partners, and men seek to avoid settling down with only one partner. Contrary to this belief in evolutionary traits, Li, He, and Li (2009) argue that these differences between genders is culturally derived, not universal. Therefore, while attachment theory is helpful for accounting for reasons why individuals may consent when they do not want, it is important to consider that it still exists within a cultural context of expectations placed on relationship behaviours.

Pleasure

Relationships can also moderate levels of physical pleasure. Wade (2017) argues that there is much more give and take in a relationship context, with women in relationships experiencing more pleasure than women engaging in hookups. Although orgasm is often seen as the end goal of sex, sexual pleasure is not only about physical aspects of sex, but also about emotional pleasure (Fahs, 2014; Sprecher, 2002). adrienne maree brown (2019: 13) defines pleasure as “a feeling of happy satisfaction or enjoyment” and “to give sexual enjoyment or satisfaction to another”. Pleasure can be in the form of physical or emotional, and what makes

for "good" or "great" sex can depend on context, and as with other aspects of sex that I have discussed thus far, can also be examined through a gendered lens.

Kleinplatz and Ménard (2007) examined what made for good sex for both men and women, concluding that being present, authentic, having intense emotional connection, sexual intimacy, and communication were the among the most salient factors that made for great sex. Exploring how women define their good sexual experiences, Fahs and Plante (2017) identified common themes of what makes for good sex, including: a) control over sexual scripts, with attention being on the woman; b) emotional connection; c) physical pleasure, sexual wanting, and orgasm; and d) experiences that felt natural and comfortable. Good sex for women happened when they were free to engage in sex that is not in line with traditional gender role expectations and scripts (Fahs & Plante, 2017). Metz and McCarthy (2007), within a frame of couple sex therapy, also describe what they call "good-enough sex", where couples should focus, among other things, on having realistic and positive expectations of sex that are representative of their bodies and selves, rather than on unrealistic expectations and myths presented in the media. The authors state that this model is a way to replace "the traditional male perfect intercourse performance criterion" (Metz & McCarthy, 2007: 631). Metz and McCarthy (2007) also emphasize that couples should recognize that the quality of sex can vary, and that having realistic expectations of sex rather than the notion that sex should be very good all of the time, can help with relationship satisfaction.

Patel (2006) and Tiefer (2004) argue that sexual pleasure is traditionally looked at through medicine and commercial media, limiting the boundaries of sexual pleasure to what is considered normal and natural. The commercialization of sexual pleasure and the "pleasure industry" constrain the boundaries of pleasure through heteronormative standards, limiting the

language available within intimate interactions (Patel, 2006). Patel (2006) advocates for opening and neutralizing the discussion surrounding sexual pleasure to one that is more gender-neutral and not always associated with heterosexuals and two partner intimacies. Tiefer (2004) also advocates for more open discourse of sexual materials, specifically those that would empower women. The more knowledge that we can provide to women about sexual health and pleasure, the more empowered they become.

To move in this direction, they suggest eliminating the "coital imperative" which defines penile-vaginal intercourse (PVI) culminating with a male orgasm as the ultimate defining feature and final goal of hetero-sex (Bogart et al., 2000; McPhillips, Braun, & Gavey, 2001; Plante, 2014). This coital imperative contributes to less pleasurable sexual encounters for both men and women, even though it contributes to men being more likely to regularly achieve orgasm (Hite, 1979; Tiefer, 2004). Sex can be less pleasurable for women because they are less likely than men to experience an orgasm during PVI due to lack of stimulation of the clitoris (Hite, 1979), and because women often tolerate sexual pain (Fahs, 2014). This then leads many women to fake orgasms to make their male partner feel sexually competent, to help strengthen their relationship, to end sexual interactions, or to avoid feelings of shame or abnormality (Fahs, 2014; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). Often this behaviour stems from women's socialization as always providing. Drawing on Kate Manne's (2018) philosophy that some women are human *givers*, while men are human *beings*, Nagoski and Nagoski (2019) label this as the "Human Giver Syndrome". This is mainly associated with women always being on the receiving end of requests and feeling obliged to provide something to someone else.

Part of the challenge of women's access to pleasure is the constraining norms and shame around female masturbation. Kinsey and colleagues had written about female masturbation as

something that was good for both men and women back in the 1940s and 1950s (Eig, 2014; Kinsey et al., 1953). While the introduction of the birth control pill changed the culture of women's sexuality by focusing on women's pleasure rather than their reproduction, there has been further increase in attention to female masturbation and sexual pleasure thanks to popular sex-positive artists such as Cyndi Lauper, Nicki Minaj, Christina Aguilera, Janet Jackson, Alanis Morrisette, Miley Cyrus, Hailey Steinfeld, Lil' Kim, Cardi B, and Rihanna (Kraus, 2017; Vincent, 2018). Regardless of the sexual revolution and much of the research showing that many women do masturbate (Eig, 2014; Hite, 1979; Vause, 2004), there is still a lack of discourse and a taboo around women's pleasure and masturbation (Dodson, 2004; Fahs & Swank, 2013; Friedman, 2017). Nagoski (via podcast; Parrish, 2019) stated that since girls are babies and parents move their hands away when they touch themselves, they learn that their bodies are not their own. Friedman (2017: np) argues that "Our culture has a long history of struggling to accept the reality that women enjoy sex as much as men do—and that women can satisfy their desire on their own. The more our culture encourages women to enjoy the pleasure of their own company, the more attitudes will change". When children are younger, boys learn that touching themselves is okay, and girls learn that touching themselves is bad (Wiederman, 2005). While the perception of boys and men masturbating is acceptable, young women express shock when asked about their own masturbation (Hogarth & Ingham, 2009). In fact, Hogarth and Ingham's (2009) young female participants associated any pleasure or sexual touching they receive to come from men, and that touching themselves was dirty and did not feel right. As Hogarth and Ingham (2009) found, young women's passage through sexual experiences were marked as ambiguous and contradictory, with high expectations of sexual enjoyment and romantic attachment, yet were often met with negative emotions and disappointment afterwards.

Women are not given enough information about pleasure or their bodies to form realistic expectations of sex. Without the freedom to explore what does feel good and being familiar with their bodies, women are more likely to have grey area experiences due to external pressure and notions derived from concepts such as the coital imperative.

Part of eliminating the perceived distastefulness of masturbation requires providing young women access to more inclusive formal sexual health education. While there exists a wealth of sexual health education, especially from sex-positive and pleasure activists such as Emily Nagoski (2015) who aims to empower women's sexuality and pleasure, a lot of these messages about sexuality and pleasure are missing from the formal sexual health education most young Canadians receive. Connell (2005) explored the lack of women's pleasure within sexual health education curriculums in Ontario. Pleasure, as Wood, Hirst, Wilson, and Burns-O'Connell (2019) argue, is part of a wider discussion around consent and equality. Wood et al. (2019) found that pleasure should be presented as something that may require work and communication, and that also may or may not occur.

In a more recent Canadian survey, Oliver, van der Meulen, Larkin and Flicker in association with the Toronto Teen Survey Research Team (2013) argued that current sexual curricula do not provide girls with education about desire and pleasure, and instead only provide strategies for "fending off" men's advances. Oliver et al. (2013) found that challenges facing the inclusion of pleasure in sexual health education included teachers' discomfort in teaching young students about orgasm and masturbation (see also Cohen, Byers, & Sears, 2012). Wood et al. (2019) found that a barrier faced by practitioners included needing to emphasize health risks and prevention. There is thus a time-management challenge in being able to incorporate all factors of sexual health, but certain ones such as STI's are given more importance. However, if schools,

parents, peers, and media are not able to provide ample information on women's desire and pleasure, the norms of women needing to "fend off" men will be perpetuated.

Sexual regret

There is a persistent belief that some women who make sexual assault accusations are falsely crying rape due to feelings of regret over a freely consensual sexual experience. While rates of false allegations are actually extremely low, social media stories can lead to the erroneous conclusion that this is a prevalent issue when in fact it is not (Ferguson & Malouff, 2016; Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010; O'Neal, Spohn, Tellis, & White, 2014; Spohn, White, & Tellis, 2014). Nonetheless, some people do re-label consensual experiences as assault when they feel that they were taken advantage of and regret the sexual encounter (De Zutter, Horselenberg, & van Koppen, 2017; O'Neal et al., 2014). Regret is defined as "an unpleasant emotion that people experience when they realize or imagine that their present situation would have been better had they decided or acted differently in the past" (Martino, Collins, Elliott, Kanouse, & Berry, 2009: 93). Zeelenberg, van Dijk, Manstead, and van der Pligt (2000) argue that regret occurs when decisions or actions are not in line with expected outcomes, resulting in one feeling responsible for the occurrence of the negative event. Sexual regret is the feeling of regret after a sexual experience and usually involves self-blame for the decisions made (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Orchowski et al., 2012; Uecker & Martinez, 2017).

There are many reasons why a person might experience sexual regret, especially if they felt pressured, alcohol was involved, they wanted to wait to have sex until marriage, a condom was not used, or they contracted a disease (Oswalt, Cameron, & Koob, 2005). Sexual regret is more commonly felt after a hookup (Uecker & Martinez, 2017), with women being more likely to

experience regret than men (Fisher, Worth, Garcia, & Meredith, 2012). Women especially felt regret in situations where they had sex with someone only once or had known for less than 24 hours (Eshbaug & Gute, 2008; Fielder & Carry, 2010; Uecker & Martinez, 2017). Uecker and Martinez (2017) also found that women experienced greater sexual regret following vaginal sex, due to the feeling that men had more control over the activity than the women did. Concerning control and regret for sexual experiences, more research should explore sexual regret related to condom use or use of dildos. Further, while authors such as Ford and Becker (2020) examine control in sexual situations for gay and bisexual men, research is needed to measure the sexual regret relating to LGBTQ hookups. Overall, there has been a substantial decline in the reported rates of university students who report sexual regret from vaginal intercourse from 75% in Oswalt et al.'s (2005) study, to 16% of women and 11% of men in Uecker and Martinez's (2017) study. These results may differ due to hookups increasingly being viewed as more normalized (Wade, 2017) or to differences in their samples and measurements.

Pleasure can impact feelings of regret, with both men and women less likely to regret sex that is pleasurable. In a Canadian study of sexual regret following uncommitted sex, Fisher et al. (2012) found that high-quality sex alleviated negative feelings when engaging in non-committed sexual experiences, and poor-quality sex increased negative feelings of resentment and having wasted their time. Akre et al. (2013) described sexual regret as a grey area in which there is a "negative turn of events" due to misperception or a lack of communication, which can happen after both wanted and unwanted sexual experiences. Zeelenberg et al. (2000) argue that sexual regret happens through a disconnect between expectations and actual outcomes. This is demonstrated empirically by Martino et al. (2009) who found that men who have been exposed to higher sexual expectations through sexual content from television often regretted their first

sexual experiences compared to men who had less experience watching television with sexual content. Television content provided people with unrealistic expectations of what sex should be like, causing them to feel disappointed in reality and thus regret the experience.

Fisher et al. (2012) found that the quality of sex influenced feelings of regret for both men and women, however, men are generally more likely to report being satisfied and, thus, women were more likely to report feeling regret or disappointment (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Within hookups in particular, research also shows that men's pleasure tends to be prioritized (Uecker & Martinez, 2017; Wade, 2017). As demonstrated in the graph below, Kennair, Bendixen, and Buss (2016) found that women experience much less pleasure and do not achieve orgasm in situations of both regret and non-regret, while men's level of satisfaction is still high even in situations of regret.

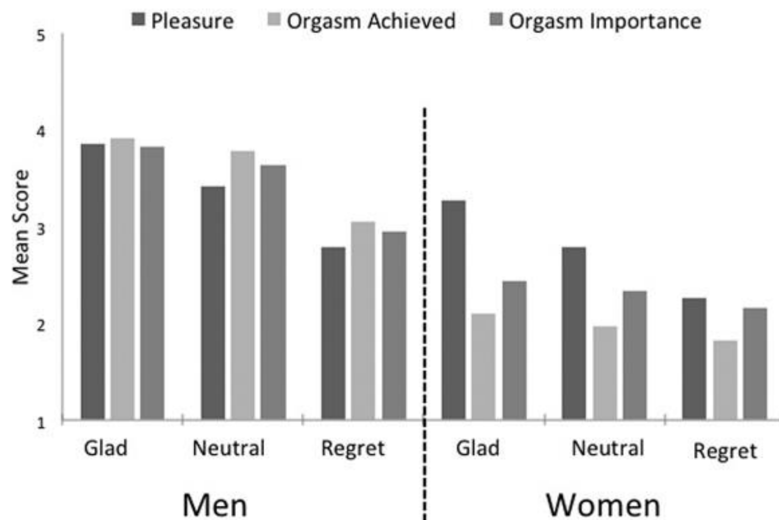

Figure 1. Gender differences in mean scores on sexual pleasure by degree of sexual regret (Table source: Kennair et al., 2016)

Part of the gender differences in regret can be explained by differences in the types of regret one can experience: regret of commission and regret of omission. Regret of commission is when a person did something and later wishes that they had not; regret of omission is when someone fails to do something and later wishes they had (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995). In their

study on temporal aspects of regret, Gilovich and Medvec (1995) argue that actions are more regrettable within the short term, but inactions are often more troubling in the long run. In line with sexual script expectations of active versus passive roles (Kim et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2015; Powell, 2008; Wiederman, 2005), men are more likely to regret acts of omission (inaction), whereas women are more likely to regret acts of commission (action) (Fisher et al., 2012; Kennair et al., 2016; Kennair, Wyckoff, Asao, Buss, & Bendixen, 2018). Based on these findings, we can see that men would be more likely to regret not having pursued a sexual encounter, whereas women would be more likely to regret having agreed to sex. As such, women would be more likely than men to rethink why they consented to a regrettable but otherwise consensual sexual experience, or even to question whether the experience was consensual to begin with.

Communication styles and sexual scripts

Communicating one's consent to sexual activity is often unclearly articulated and typically involves non-verbal cues which draw on cultural assumptions of what is expected of men and of women (Powell, 2007). There is clear evidence in the literature that there are unwritten sexual scripts that guide actors to perform sexual behaviors in what are assumed to be culturally appropriate sequences of sex (Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005). However, communication is hindered between participants when sexual scripts lead men to take active roles as seekers of sexual pleasure and women to take on passive gatekeeper roles (Kim et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2015; Powell, 2008; Wiederman, 2005). This is particularly problematic when women are socialized not to make waves and to be accommodating to others in general.

There is a general cultural assumption, reinforced through popular culture, that men and women communicate differently (e.g., the idea of "men are from Mars, women are from

Venus”). Women are often perceived as ineffective and non-assertive communicators, while “men’s language” is taken as straightforward and seen as the universal norm (Cameron, 2006). Research from the 70s, 80s, and 90s found that women had difficulties in refusing unwanted sex, citing a lack of skills to be able to do so (Campbell & Barndlund, 1977; Frith & Kitzinger, 1998; Howard, 1985). Reasons for having difficulty in communicating refusal was argued by Murnen, Perot, and Byrne (1989) as due to the internalization of stereotypical gender roles for women. This apparent problem has led to “assertiveness training” for women to enhance their confidence in communicating and to encourage them to speak directly and clearly to avoid potentially being misunderstood (Cameron, 2006), without any equivalent “training” for men on how to be less aggressive or more passive. This gendered notion of language maintains the idea that avoiding miscommunication is women’s responsibility (Cameron, 2008; Powell, 2008) and can lead to victim blaming in cases of sexual assault where women victims are accused of sending mixed signals (Bussel, 2008; Cameron, 2006; Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Powell, 2010; Rumney & Morgan-Taylor, 2004).

Kitzinger and Frith (1999) found that women’s refusals for sex are reflective of normal conversations, and that men who claim to not understand the refusals are thus claiming to not understand normal conversational interaction. By claiming miscommunication, the authors argue that men are just being ignorant of refusals which are routinely part of everyday life. Women have a difficult time saying “no” because outright statements of no are not normal conversational activity, instead, many people often word things in ways which are not rude (e.g., maybe later, not right now, etc.). Kitzinger & Frith (1999: 310) argue that it “is not that men do not understand sexual refusals, but that they do not like them”. The authors argue that there should

not be efforts into coming up with new refusals (or to engage women in assertiveness training), as this gives power to men's claims of misunderstanding:

> …there are normatively understood ways of doing refusals which are generally understood to be refusals, and consequently we believe that there is no reason why feminists concerned about sexual coercion should respond to men's allegations of their 'ambiguity' by taking upon ourselves the task of inventing new ways of doing refusals. As feminists, we have allowed men (disingenuously claiming not to understand normative conversational conventions) to set the agenda, such that we have accepted the need to educate women to produce refusals which men cannot claim to have 'misunderstood'. (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999: 311).

Women do not need to change the ways that they communicate, as this only gives power to men that women are indeed the problem.

Because women have to tread a thin line between expectations that they be deemed neither "slutty" nor prudish, young women are more likely than men to use indirect verbal signals such as dancing in a bar or club or asking about a condom, than to explicitly state their sexual intent or physically touch or kiss a potential partner (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Meuhlenhard et al., 2016). However, Fagen and Anderson (2012) found that women's indirect signals such as asking if a man had a condom were often described by men as promiscuous, nonetheless. Regardless of the specific ways in which the indirect verbal signals are given, Epstein et al. (2009) demonstrate that:

> Once the initial behavior is enacted, the script outlines how the rest of the sequence is to be carried out. In the case of hooking up, for example, attending a party, drinking alcohol, and dancing may be the initial steps to engaging in sexual behavior with a brief acquaintance. The accessibility of the script ensures that both parties are familiar with the consequent steps (in the case of hooking up—carrying out sexual behavior and not expecting any subsequent romantic contact) (415).

This highlights the implicit process many use to communicate non-verbally their desire to have sex with someone (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Lim & Roloff, 1999; Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

Further, whereas one partner could *imply* an interest in sex (Block, 2004), another partner may, correctly or incorrectly, *infer* that consent was being implied based on observed behavior. Thus, one might infer that inaction or silence implies consent. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) stress the importance of distinguishing between inferred and implied consent as one refers to an observation of another, when they write:

> To refer to consent in this sense, we refer to the observers inferring an individual's consent and to behaviors, cues, or signals that are interpreted as indicative of that consent. When these behaviors, cues, or signals are done intentionally, we refer to that person as *communicating* or *signaling* their own consent (463).

Someone may infer another's consent based on actions such as dancing at a bar, or inviting someone over, but that person may or may not actually be signalling their own consent. Consent can therefore be normalized as quite an implicit process when both are implying consent. The danger is when one assumes and infers consent when there was no intention from the other person.

Conclusion

Legally and morally, consent should be clear, yet this chapter demonstrates the myriad of ways that communicating consent is challenged by cultural expectations for men's and women's sexual behaviours. Unequal gender ideals lead to differential expectations of what is normal sexual behaviour for men and women. While some people do regret sex, especially women who have unpleasurable vaginal sex in hookups, regret does not adequately or accurately capture the grey area. The above literature demonstrates that sex is more likely to shift from good to grey in situations where gender roles are clearly delineated, when women are not sexually empowered, and when alcohol is involved. The pressure on men from other men to hookup with women, the ways that men and women are expected and taught to communicate, and potentially even one's attachment styles can also guide our understandings and interpretations of consent. In the next

chapter, I seek to explain how these social norms perpetuate grey area experiences of sex, uncovering the roles of patriarchy, sexual scripts, and compulsory heterosexuality in constraining sexual behaviour.

Chapter 3: Theory

This research is guided broadly by an interpretivist theoretical perspective which integrates theories of expectation states (Ridgeway, 2006), sexual scripts (Simon & Gagnon 1984), and compulsory heterosexuality (Bem, 1995; Rich, 1980) to examine how intersecting social constructions of gender and sexuality influence understandings of sexual behaviour which may impact consent. The interpretivist paradigm or interpretive sociology consists of analyzing meaning and social action from the perspective of the actor (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2010; Schultz & Hatch, 1996; Tracy, 2013). Interpretive research focuses on individuals' experiences that form and modify the meanings and perspectives of themselves and others (Denzin, 2001). This research seeks to understand how expectations and actual experiences of sex impact or modify one's understanding of what makes an act consensual or not.

Beginning with German theorist Max Weber's concept of *verstehen* (understanding) (Weber, 1981), interpretivism emerged within Sociology in the late 19th century as a rejection of the early French positivist Sociology of Durkheim and Comte (Crossman, 2019). Whereas Durkheim sought to bring the empirical investigation of "facts" and "explanations" found in natural sciences to the scientific study of society, Weber was more interested in the value of subjective "understandings" (O'Donoghue, 2006) to best explore and study the complexity of social life. Weber (1981) argues that social action cannot be understood in the way that one can understand chemistry or the other natural sciences, because social actions will change depending on the expectations of behaviour or actions of others. Whereas chemical reactions can be predicted based on the principle components, human behavior is dependent on the subjective assessment of the "actual or anticipated potential behavior of other individuals" (Weber, 1981: 160). Weber (1981) further clarifies that expectations do not need to necessarily mean action,

but can also refer to the emotional state of others, such as whether or not our actions, behaviours, or expressed beliefs, bring joy to others. Thus, interpretive sociology focuses on how social actions are "subjectively related in *meaning* to the behavior of others" (Weber, 1981: 159).

Interpretivist studies often use terms such as "understandings," meanings, and "perspectives" interchangeably (O'Donogue, 2006). Perspectives is defined as filters through which people interpret and perceive everything around them (Charon, 1992). Blackledge and Hunt (1985) suggest that this filtering of meaning results in ongoing processes of negotiations of meanings in everyday life through which people can modify their views and understandings. Charon (1992) states that negotiation means each person does not get their own way, but that input and actions from each person emerges to form the overall result. Therefore, rules, notions, and what direction a group takes are all negotiated through interactions.

Multiple theoretical perspectives have been built on the premise of interpretivism. Examples include postmodernism and symbolic interactionism. As interpretivism focuses on the premise that the social world is subjective and that meaning is made within interactions (Weber, 1981; Adorjan & Kelly, 2017), theories which follow are based on varying methods and approaches as to how we can gather these understandings and the extent to which reality exists. For example, compared to other perspectives such as symbolic interactionism and feminism, post-modernists are less tied to the notion of reality and the ability to make generalizations about society (Lembcke, 1993). Whereas Weber's interpretivism applies the scientific method to understand the multiple ways in which meanings are made, post-modernists focus on indeterminacy and abandon "the Weberian search for relatedness and methodological pretense of generalization" (Lembcke, 1993: 62).

The main theoretical perspective that was built on interpretivism is symbolic interactionism. Compared to interpretivism, symbolic interactionism takes on a more robust methodological focus (Adorjan & Kelly, 2017). Using methodologies such as ethnography and participant observation, symbolic interactionists focus on the "direct examination of the empirical world…" (Adorjan & Kelly, 2017, p. 5). Symbolic interactionism is thus best for studies where the researcher can directly witness the making of meanings and interactions. Unlike post-modernist paradigm, symbolic interactionism focuses on practical assumptions that social reality does exist due to individual's capacity to think and manipulate symbols (Stryker & Vryan, 2006). In this way, social reality or society is created from interaction, and in turn, society helps create individuals. In other words, "just as society derives from social process, so do people: both take on meanings that emerge in and through social interaction" (Stryker & Vryan, 2006: 4).

Symbolic interactionism stems from Cooley (2010 [1902]) who discussed the "Looking Glass Self", or rather, our social selves. The Looking Glass Self is characterized by how we view ourselves in the minds of others. Cooley describes this process as "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification" (2010: 189). Mead (2010[1929]) expands on the concept of the self in relation to society and interactions. Mead states that the self is "…essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience" (2010: 226). Specifically, Mead explores that we can have different selves depending on relationships and reactions. Applying these concepts from Mead and Cooley, Blumer developed symbolic interactionism within sociology. Symbolic interactionists seek to explain the ways that meanings are derived through interactions and social action (Blumer, 1969). There are three assumptions within

interactionism: individual's act based on the meanings they associate with people and objects; people arrive at meanings through interactions with others; and meanings are modified and redefined through the way individuals interpret interactions (Blumer, 1969). Compared to Marxists who would view workers as entirely constrained and thus limiting any free choice, symbolic interactionists generally see people as having greater degree of free choice, while recognizing that choice is constrained within the constructed social and cultural norms (Benzies & Allen, 2001).

As the topic under study does not necessarily lend itself specifically to the methods and assumptions of either symbolic interactionism or post-modernism, this research examines meaning from the perspective of the actor, and broadly applies related theories on the ways that meanings and actions are understood and negotiated within the constraints of heteropatriarchal norms. For example, gender theorist Judith Butler (2007) describes gender performativity, the notion that individuals are in constant and ongoing performances of their gender that are seen to be compliant with the constructed and expected norms. Gender performances are thus guided by what each action means, and how we expect others to act in turn with that behaviour. This premise of gender forms the basis of the theories explored below, which emphasize the ways that choices and actions are guided by the expected and occurring action of others.

Gender and expectations: theories informing the grey area

The concept of gender is a social construction that exists through systems of inequality found in images and language, intersecting and overlapping with race and class to form stereotypical perceptions of how men and women should be (Collins, 2000; Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013). Cultural constructions of appropriate gender behaviour are reinforced through social interactions and institutions, such as government, family, religion, law, and

education (Powell, 2010). The term gender refers to the management of activity and behavior based on which category one belongs in (or feels they belong in), identifying the social differences in expectations for and between men and women (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Delphy, 1993). In this way, sex is something that is ascribed at birth, whereas gender is something that is achieved (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Using the term gender allows social researchers to see that not all differences between men and women are a result of biology (Pryzgoda & Chrisler, 2000), and distinguishes between biological sex differences and the social presentation of these differences (Foster, 1999; Connell, 2009). Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz (2013: 296) state that gender (and race and class) is a "cultural construction that is real in its consequences". Ridgeway and Correll (2004) highlight that cultural schemas of gender often operate in shared dichotomous stereotypes of men versus women.

Similarly, sexuality (i.e. the expression of one's sexual preferences and desires) and sexual orientation (i.e., the preferred gender for the object of one's sexual preferences and desires) are also maintained by norms dictating what is socially acceptable behaviour (Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Weeks, 2010). MacKinnon (1989b: 341) states that sexuality is culturally specific, and is "social and relational, constructing and constructed of power". In this sense, MacKinnon (1989b) argues that sexuality both is given and gives social meaning to experiences and actions. Aspects of sexuality include guidance and meaning related to when and where you have sex, the type of arrangement you prefer, your number of partners, whether you are monogamous, and whether you have sex for fun, pleasure, love, reproduction, power, or other reasons (Rutter & Schwartz, 2012; Seidman, 2010).

Foucault (1978) has emphasized the ways that power operates in the repression and restriction of sexuality through the discipline and surveillance of people. Sex is controlled by

society, where rules are set up to regulate sexual conduct in terms of age, gender, and bodily condition (Foucault, 1985). This discipline and surveillance occur through discourse, where the presence or absence of discourse related to sexuality regulates and guides our behaviour. The absence of women's discourse of desire in sexual health education contributes to limiting young women's agency (Allen, 2013), while discourses in popular culture and music normalize sexual violence (Khan, 2016). Sex becomes disciplined through the ways that it is talked about (or not talked about) and classified (Foucault, 1978). These discourses can act as barriers or guidelines informing expectations that are most specifically tied to gender.

Drawing on Weber's notion of expectations as the "anticipated potential behavior of other individuals" (Weber, 1981: 160), expectation states theory (Ridgeway, 2006), suggests that status characteristics (e.g., gender, age, etc.) are associated with performance expectations and outcomes. These expectations guide decisions for how to act in a group situation (Ridgeway, 2006). Performance expectations based on characteristics guide how others determine someone's competence at a task. These expectations will determine how people receive or interpret information or actions about a person depending how their behaviour matches the expectation associated with their status. Expectation states theory emphasizes that expectations:

> …determine how one should behave toward others in the situation. That behavior may then reinforce the existing expectations (i.e., the existing definition of the situation) or stimulate further changes that generate new expectations (as, for example, when a new actor enters the situation). Note that interaction may generate expectation *directly*, through the evaluation actors make of their own and each other's participation, or *indirectly*, through the activation of external chunks of meaning (e.g., status characteristics or referential structures) that their interaction has made salient. Thus, an actor who believes that men are generally more capable than women will automatically incorporate that belief into his (or her) expectations toward others in the situation if those others include at least one member of the opposite sex. (Wagner, 2007: 125).

Ridgeway (2006) argues that status characteristics such as gender are "implicitly salient in [a] situation, they shape actors' performance expectations whether or not the characteristics are logically relevant to the task. However, the more relevant to the task a status characteristic is perceived to be, the stronger its impact on performance expectations" (Ridgeway, 2006: 350). An example would be the association that men, especially those adhering to quite traditional and stereotypical male roles such as frat boys, are always pursuing sex with women. The status, man, is associated with the performance expectation, that men will put all their effort into getting a woman to have sex with them (Sweeney, 2014a). When men delineate from this expected behaviour, there are feelings of discomfort and worry from the men as to how they will be perceived by others (Ford, 2018).

Considering that few things are more "gendered" than sexuality and sexual orientation, the relevance of gender as a status characteristic will play a central role in determining expectations regarding sexual behaviour performance, specifically creating inequalities between men and women due to the differential expectations (Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985). Mediated by cultural, personal, and situational contexts, sexual desire is framed around feelings of sexual wanting (Rutter & Schwartz, 2012; Tolman, 2000; Weeks, 2010) and what we expect the outcome to be with whom or what we desire. Therefore, sexual experience outcomes (feeling of pleasure, feeling of consent) are based on what we expect to happen with that person, and the meaning associated with the action or lack of action.

Expectations of sexual behaviour and whom we should or do desire are a result of the intersection of gender roles, sexual orientation, and sexuality, guiding the actions and interpretations of sexual behaviour within a heteronormative society (Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Weeks, 2010). The specific ways in which sexual activities come to pass are highly influenced

by gendered expectations, most prominently through sexual scripts. Sexual scripts frame the ways that someone understands what is considered appropriate sexual conduct (Bogart et al., 2000; McCabe et al., 2010; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Sexual scripts guide who should orgasm first and when, the length of time sex should take, what noises to make during sex, who should initiate sex, and which verbal and non-verbal signals are used (Mehta et al., 2011; Randall & Byers, 2003; Rutter & Schwartz, 2012).

Sexual scripts are communicated through culture and mass media, and are described as having three components: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts (Wiederman, 2005). Cultural scenarios work as guides to direct collective life. Cultural scenarios work at the institutional level, providing systems of signs and symbols that guide specific roles and expectations of sex and sexual relations between individuals (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Interpersonal scripts then emerge at the second level where the institutionally provided expectations are acted out by individuals who become partial scriptwriters to adjust to the context of actual situations. These interpersonal scripts shape our immediate social context and direct interaction with people (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Intrapsychic scripting is then found at a third level with internalized dialogues within the self (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), where our individual desires are linked to social meanings (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Intrapsychic "maps" provide direction on how to think, feel, and behave (Wiederman, 2005). Scripts are reflective of Cooley's (2010[1902]) description of the self, in that people engage in sexual behaviour by considering themselves in relation to others (interpersonal), with internal reaction and feelings related to how we think others perceive us (intrapsychic).

Like expectations, scripts provide "meaning and direction for responding to sexual cues and for behaving sexually" (Wiederman, 2005: 496). Drawing on how someone interprets sexual

behaviour of themselves and others (Frith, 2009; McCormick, 2010), sexual script theorists see room for free choice in sexual behavior, but nonetheless, identify the ways in which many of the sexual experiences of young adults are based on conservative, ritualized, dichotomous, and stereotyped ways of performing (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). As sexual scripts are interpreted, men and women are faced with a burden of trying to see if and how they can re-interpret them towards more empowering scripts. The challenge is that often "empowerment discourses are swiftly appropriated and distorted" (Fahs, 2011: 9). Further, McCabe et al. (2010) found that when men and women shift away from traditional gender roles in other aspects of their lives, they still discuss and engage in sex through dichotomously gendered sexual scripts. Thus, even if individuals divert from traditional notions of gender, there are still inherent expectations that men and women are supposed to behave differently in intimate circumstances. Often, these expectations are based within an ideology of hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality.

The term "hegemony" refers to physical or economic violence which supports dominant culture and norms to uphold the values of those in power (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is the social construction of male identities that can be used to wield and maintain men's power. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the practices that permit men's "collective dominance over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 840). Men's hegemonic power is further maintained by "emphasized femininity": the expectation that women be compliant and fulfill men's desires (Connell, 1987). Ridgeway (2011) argues that these stereotypical representations provide patterns for people to rely on as guides on appropriate ways to act in public settings.

Stereotypes are not only used in general public settings but also where many people take their cues for performances of sex. As Butler (2007) maintains, performing masculinity is about being sexually attracted to women, while performing femininity involves wanting to be desired by men. As a result of this gendered organization for social and sexual life, much of women's worth becomes associated with being desirable and gaining attention from men. Williams (2019: 282) wrote that "female desirability is the illusion of power", and that when a man had taken her into a backyard (where she was later raped by him), she had felt lucky that he had chosen her. These expected roles place men and women at significant power differentials, and that power (as was the case for Williams) can be used against young women, placing them in very unwanted situations as a result of needing to feel desired.

While Foucault did not discuss women's sexuality (see also Silverman, 2003), his connection of power and sexuality can be applied to this notion of women's illusion of power stated by Williams (2019). Powell (2010) drew on Foucault's notion of "discursive power" to argue that women are disciplined into having unwanted sex due to the power and control that restricts women from being encouraged towards knowledge of their bodies. This same power structure, which I have argued above is related to heteropatriarchy, does not require direct coercion from men for women to end up in situations of unwanted sex, but rather is already a subtle expectation placed on them. This notion of expectations as they relate to gender is what begins to tie in many of the problems related to the concepts and understandings of consent, specifically the idea that consent is supposed to be a tool of power, yet can also be used to oppress women (Williams, 2019). These notions of power and performance are ingrained within sexual scripts and the appropriate roles and behaviour for men and women.

When studying college hookups, Currier (2013) focuses on components of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity found in their interview data. These components consist of men having a hyper-focus on bonding with other men and their heterosexual sexual activity; while women focus mostly on downplaying their own sexual desires, being sexually compliant to men's desires, and walking a "fine line between hooking up 'enough' but not 'too much'" (Currier, 2013: 705). Plante (2014: 64) describes the "Goldilocks" theory of everything related to sexuality, in the sense that "there is a 'just right' amount of anything we should have, be, or desire". The struggle then, when faced with the stereotypes, is this expectation of being "just right" in our performances.

Traditional heterosexual sex scripts for men and women are different yet complementary. The hegemonic sex script for men is that they are heterosexual, active, and persistently consumed by sexual thoughts, boasting about their sexual experiences, and are to be the sexual strategists and initiators of sex (Kim et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2015). Further, men are presented as wanting sexual fulfillment and not emotional connections (Kim et al., 2007). Women are presented as being both objectified and engaging in self-objectification; as passive towards men's sexual assertiveness; and as the ones responsible for setting sexual limits (Cameron, 2008; Kim et al, 2007; Morrison et al, 2015; Payne, 2010; Powell, 2008). These descriptions of men's and women's sexual scripts are consistent with traditional gender roles (Morrison et al., 2015) and support heteronormative understanding of sexuality. Young women are said to base their sexual activity on relationships and emotion (Mehta et al., 2011; Sakaluk, et al., 2014) where sex must have meaning. Boys and men, on the other hand, are assumed to have pleasure-centered scripts, where physical pleasure is seemingly unassociated with emotions, marking men's only goal as orgasm (McCabe et al., 2010; Wiederman, 2005). This dichotomy

between physical pleasure and emotional connection being separate, especially in hookups, is often not the case (Epstein et al., 2009; Wade, 2017)

Scripts for gay, lesbian, and queer persons are also similar to aspects of expected gender roles and heterosexual scripts. Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) found that gay men were still more likely to emphasize sexual aspects of the date and to have sex on the first date compared to the lesbians in their study. However, in same-sex partners there was no role differentiation, meaning that there was a perceived lack of a "gatekeeper" role in the men's scripts, and of an "initiator" role for the women. This research, however, is quite dated and requires updated information. In a more recent study, Beres et al. (2004) recruited gay, bisexual, queer, lesbian, and transgender participants from universities in both Canada and the USA in order to explore sexual scripts and communication of consent. Participants overall were more likely to use nonverbal behaviours to indicate consent than verbal indicators to ask for and give consent. However, the authors found that men who had sex with men were more likely than women who had sex with women to use nonverbal behaviours to indicate consent. The authors argue that their findings support that overall, there is a societal script in which consent is provided nonverbally rather than verbally. However, Beres et al. (2004) argued that due to the general lack of differences in the use of type of behaviour, that men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women may "subvert gender stereotypes by crossing the stereotypes generally assigned to their sex and accepting behaviors typically assigned to the other sex" (484). Thus, while socialization into the same gender system can impact responses to consent (Beres et al., 2004; Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994), and although LGBQ members are not exempt from the grey area or sexual assaults in relationships, there may be more room in non-heterosexual relationships to challenge and subvert expected roles.

These notions and expectations of sexual behaviour begin when children are young and boys learn that touching their genitals is okay, and girls learn that touching their genitals is immoral (Wiederman, 2005; see also Nagoski, via Parrish, 2019). Women are responsible for setting sexual limits and stopping advances, as well as for dealing with the negative consequences of sexual activity (Kim et al., 2007; Wiederman, 2005). Men are presented with situations in popular media, as well as real life situations, where their uninvited sexual approaches were met with success (Kim et al., 2007). As men are socialized and expected to be the initiators of sex and women as gatekeepers (Milestone & Meyer, 2012; Powell, 2010; Sakaluk et al., 2014; Seidman, 2010), more emphasis is placed on men's pleasure-centered scripts, and more opportunities are afforded for using miscommunication as an excuse for behaviour (Wiederman, 2005).

Expectation states theory can help explain how consensual but unwanted sexual experiences come to pass (Mehta et al, 2011; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Pitts & Rahman, 2001; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). The status of one's gender, including power, along with the overarching expectations associated with that gender, can trump internal desires. Oriel (2005) argues that normative sexual scripts suggest that men are more satisfied with sex when dominating women, while women receive pleasure from pleasing men. There is clear evidence in the literature of women willing to consent to undesired sex to keep their male partner happy (see Akre 2013; Bay Cheng et al., 2008; Flack et al., 2007). An example of this is found with women who participate in anal sex. Fahs and Gonzalez (2014) found that while some women are curious to try anal sex, most women in their study either felt pressured by their male partner to try it, wanted to please him, or were physically forced into the act. The women experienced pain during the experience, and even when their partners knew they were in pain, would proceed

anyway, although trying to be “gentle” and “careful”. Many of the women felt pressure to agree to anal sex, which blurred the line between agency and coercion (Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014).

Consenting to unwanted sex is most common in situations with greater adherence to traditional sexual scripts which carry expectations for women to be passive and sexually complicit and men to be active pursuers of sex (Farvid & Braun, 2006; Firminger, 2008; Kim et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2015; Sakaluk et al., 2014; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). The action and understanding of consenting to sex is therefore subjectively related to how others and ourselves behave or are expected to behave. Consent is mediated by expectations based on the characteristics (e.g. gender) of the persons involved in the interaction (e.g. sexual activity). To more deeply understand these processes and identify how sexual expectations related to gender are being maintained, we look to compulsory heterosexuality and the policing of sexuality.

Compulsory heterosexuality

Rutter and Schwartz (2012) explore the connections of gender, sexual orientation, and sexuality regarding sexual behavior. They establish that sexual desire, i.e. what “turns people on,” precedes sexual behavior and is both biologically and socially constructed (Rutter & Schwartz, 2012). Taking on an integrative approach to demonstrate how nature and nurture intersect to produce sexualities, they argue that sex (length, appropriate noises, foreplay, positions, orgasms) is different in every culture (Rutter & Schwartz, 2012). Thus, the social control of sexuality, the punishments or sanctions for deviations from these social norms for sexuality, as well as the health regulations imposed on the society, will also be culturally dependent (Rutter & Schwartz, 2012). While bisexuality and homosexuality have become more widely accepted, heterosexuality remains normative, or, as Adrienne Rich (1980) most famously called this, we live in a system of “compulsory heterosexuality”.

Compulsory heterosexuality is the cultural practice of regulating gender identities and imperatives that organize sexual desire to reinforce heterosexual, but also gendered, norms (Butler, 2007; Rich 1980; Weeks, 2010; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Seidman (2010) and Connell (2009) state that heterosexuality, constructed as healthy and natural sexuality, is maintained by constructing homosexuality as dangerous, abnormal, and unnatural. Compulsory heterosexuality is upheld by framing homosexuality as something perverse in order for heterosexuality to be perceived as "normal" (Bem, 1995; Rich, 1980). This also means that there continues to be a gendered expectation that sexual activities will be carried out between two people, one of whom is in a more dominant position. Feminist researchers have argued that the links between gender and sexuality impose more pressure on women than men, confining them within expectations of submissive heterosexual roles (Collins, 2000; Foster, 1999; Hite, 1979; Kergoat, 2009; Rich, 1980; Wittig, 1992). This expected heterosexual behaviour frames women around men's desires and pleasure. These normative definitions of sex are reflective of a gender order hierarchy.

Socialization is the process of how norms and attitudes become adopted and internalized through formal and informal structures such as popular culture, media, school, peer groups, and family. The development of heterosexual norms happens most during socialization in social settings such as school during childhood and pre-adolescence but can also occur earlier. For example, Nagoski (via podcast; Parrish, 2019) draws on an often-occurring situation where a baby girl may touch themselves during a diaper change but is then redirected by the parent away from her own vagina. This suggests that her body is not her own to touch and is often not something that is practiced with baby boys. Kinsey et al. (1953) argued that children should receive information on sex from their parents by the time they are ten or twelve, otherwise they

will learn it from friends. The authors (1953) state that attitudes towards sex have already been developed when children are quite young.

Girls and boys begin to re-orient the relationship they have with each other around heterosexual norms and the “status hierarchy” that the norms create (Cameron, 2006). Within Thorne’s (1993) research on gender play in schools, she observed hierarchies of gender and sexuality among children as they entered the sexual socialization process, when girls forming relationships with boys are given more prestige. Through their socialization at school, children begin to learn what is expected and accepted versus what is non-conventional, leading to higher human worth being associated with heterosexual identity over homosexual identity (Thorne, 1993).

Further socialization of compulsory heterosexuality occurs through popular culture and the policing of sexuality though the use of language. Terms such as “slut” and “fag” exert social control over both heterosexual and homosexual people, privileging heterosexual relationships (Wittig, 1992). Payne (2010) notes that the term “slut” is a “regulatory image” for lesbian, queer, and straight women by devaluing young women who are seen as hyper-desirable and having sex outside of relationships. Hakim (2010) argues that women who display erotic capital (empowered women who demonstrate their beauty and sexuality) are often denigrated through the use of the term “slut” or “gold-digger”. Hakim (2010) discusses that disdain and contempt for women who are not afraid to use erotic capital supports a framework that places female heterosexuality as a setting for all of male violence against women. By framing women who are proud of their erotic capital in a negative way, sex as a male activity with male centered pleasure is perpetuated as the norm (Hakim, 2010). The cultural power associated with masculinity defines women as weak and homosexuals as mentally ill, placing constraints on and denying

access to their social practices (Connell, 1987). Homosexuality is therefore not seen as a valid choice for women (Rich, 1980). This assumption is similarly related to Dodson's (2004) argument that the taboo around women's masturbation is to keep them tied to heteronormativity. Heterosexuality is the presumed natural sexual preference for women, with emphasis placed on women being attracted to and submitting their desires to men.

The negativity around homosexuality also applies pressure on men regarding sexual performances. For men, the term "fag" is used by young people to emphasize the difference between being penetrated (lacking power) and being the penetrator (having power) (Pascoe, 2005), once again highlighting salient power roles within sex. Notably, "fag" is often used not against men who are actually homosexual, but to keep their heterosexual peers in line, resulting in young men attempting to avoid being labeled as such (Pascoe, 2005). For example, in a study of men's unwanted sexual experiences, Ford (2018) explores how men worry that disrupting a sexual encounter could result in them being viewed as gay. Ford (2018: 1315) states that: "It is notable here that these terms are very different from the kinds of terms (i.e., "tease," "prude") applied to women who say no to sex." Ford (2018) found that men would go to great lengths to not appear gay. One participant in her study noted that he had lost his erection twice when having unwanted sex, but that he preferred to live with the idea that he could not keep his erection rather than be associated with being gay. Ford's (2018) participants described that objecting to sex with a woman would make them seem "weird" and associated their objection with the gendered expectations that men always enjoy sex. One of Ford's (2018: 1314) participants described having "unwanted" and "unconsensual" vaginal sex to avoid "any impressions of weirdness". The fear of being associated with being gay and, therefore, "less masculine" leads men to employ gender policing on themselves and others.

Someone can be so securely tied to status characteristics and their associated behavioural scripts that when confronted with a change or disruption, can completely flip perspectives of what is okay and what is not. Ford (2018) and Fagen and Anderson (2012) found that as women take on what is more traditionally men's sexual script role of initiating sex or being aggressive in their pursuit of sex, men are experiencing unwanted sexual activity and feelings of violation for being placed into what is traditionally the female role. As such, their status characteristic is being challenged, along with the meaning behind their actions. For example, one of Fagen and Anderson's (2012) participants was taken advantage of by a woman while he was intoxicated and he said that he would not have been angry if he would have initiated the interaction earlier in the evening, but "…if a guy did it to a girl they'd probably call it rape" (Fagen & Anderson, 2012: 268). Men's experiences of unwanted sexual activity often involve being put into a non-dominant position during a sexual encounter, which can lead to difficulty in navigating feelings of victimization or pride (Fagen & Anderson, 2012; Krahé, Scheinberger-Olwigm, & Bieneck, 2003).

Bisexuality is also constructed as invalid under the frame of compulsory heterosexuality, stemming from a lack of understanding, and a primary focus on solely heterosexuality and homosexuality. Bisexuals exist in a space that occupies both heterosexual and homosexual constructs. Most association and discussion about bisexuality is related to Alfred Kinsey and his homosexual/heterosexual rating scale. Kinsey argued that people were not so dichotomous in their sexuality, and instead existed on a continuum, therefore advancing the idea of bisexuality (Kinsey, 1948 as cited in Rutter & Schwartz, 2012). Bisexuality is sometimes denied by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Instead, bisexuality is chalked up to people experimenting, providing an escape from gay identity, and keeping a form of heterosexual privilege (Rich, 1980;

Rutter & Schwartz, 2012). Not only does compulsory heterosexuality force people to declare a heterosexual identity, dividing sexual feeling and acts into categories of normal and abnormal, but gay movements also pressure its members into only conforming to one identity as well (Seidman, 2010).

The theoretical constructs that I have applied above demonstrate the heteropatriarchal constraints placed on men and women regarding sexual behaviour which can result in differential actions and understandings. The focus of this study is thus to understand, or more importantly, provide in-depth perspective into how participants interpret and put meaning behind their actions and those of others to arrive at an understanding of what consent is. Acknowledging that sexual behaviour is influenced by the above theoretical processes, how do these expectations impact the subjective understandings and negotiations of sexual consent in individuals' experiences of sex.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The purpose of my study is to understand and explore the contexts and experiences which can produce the grey area of sexual consent by analyzing gendered expectations of sexual behaviour related to consent. Using a feminist interpretivist framework (Kasper, 1994; Landman, 2006), I carried out a series of focus groups, in-depth one-on-one interviews, and collected demographic information with ten men and fourteen women between the ages of 18 to 25 between March 2017 and April 2018. My focus was on deconstructing the subjectivities and motivations behind expectations and negotiations of sexual consent while working toward social change that would improve the sexual agency of men and women.

Methodology

As discussed in the previous chapter, the interpretivist paradigm seeks to uncover the perspective individuals have on their behaviour, culture, society, and experience, as well as the actions people take due to these perspectives (O'Donoghue, 2006). Specifically: "interpretivists view knowledge as socially constructed through language and interaction, and reality as connected and known through society's cultural and ideological categories" (Tracy, 2013: 41). The methodological decisions and analysis thus stem from the notion that perceptions and reality are socially constructed and enacted through interactions. While symbolic interactionist methodology examines language, symbols, and interaction, I am not able to (nor would this approach match the epistemological framework of this research) directly observe participants negotiating consent prior to engaging in sex.

As such, I combine interpretivism with a feminist methodology, using participants own views of their experiences rather than prioritizing the researcher as somehow a more "objective"

narrator of events. As I am interested in how my participants negotiate and understand consent, my methodology focuses on interpreting how they reflect on and describe their own negotiations and understandings of interactions. Further, through the combination of one-on-one interviews and focus groups, I am able to discern the ways that participants discuss their understandings in a group setting, where their negotiation and understanding of consent can be further mediated through the discussion of others' understandings. Focus groups are also a popular method within feminist methodologies because of their ability to challenge dominant understandings by raising awareness collectively about things one might otherwise see as normal or not important to mention.

In general, feminist methodologies stem from second wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, as a means to challenge traditional male constructions of knowledge. By including women's standpoints (Smith, 1996) into mainstream conceptions of objectivity and knowledge creation, feminists seek to improve our understanding of social reality (Landman, 2006). Kasper argues that feminist methodology makes "…distinctions in women's lives between public and private meanings. Feminist authors explore the discrepancies between the scripts, roles, and expectations imposed on women by the dominant culture and those definitions that women acquire through their personal, lived experience" (Kasper, 1994: 265). Kasper discusses that analysing subjective data within feminist methodology is a process of uncovering "how events and meanings are related to over-arching themes in each women's 'experience'. Higher level analysis is where exploration of how women's experiences 'may be evidence of conflicts between socially-imposed meanings and women's lived experience'" (1994: 277). Feminist methodology also encourages participant reflexivity, which involves not only describing experiences but critiquing and offering deeper insight into why they may have felt a certain way

or done something (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). For example, in my research, participants would offer criticisms or reflections on statements they made, to more fully deconstruct their experiences as they described them.

Women are more often included in discussions of issues concerning sexual consent, specifically around unwanted (hetero)sexual experiences (see Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Powell, 2010, etc.). Men are often left out of research on hookups; Plante (2014) argues that this is due to researcher bias through the belief that for men, hooking up is somehow more natural and carries less consequences for them. As such, research has tended to focus on women's experiences of hookups. While there has been some research concerning men's unwanted sexual experiences (see Fagen & Anderson, 2012; Ford, 2018), my aim was to equally include men's voices in discussions and experiences of sexual consent. By employing a feminist interpretivist methodology, how meaning is made subjectively by individuals and how this is shaped by larger social and cultural forces guided my research at all stages of the project. This contrasts with a more positivist or "scientific" approach that perhaps favors a methodology focused on uncovering facts or truths of social life (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010; Tracy, 2013). This is not to say that this research employed a post-structuralist or post-modernist approach in that reality itself was viewed as subjective. Rather, my feminist-interpretivist methodological approach acknowledges that meanings are socially created, that some voices and understandings are heard more often than others, and that men and women have different social experiences and therefore different views. Thus, men's and women's experiences when considering consent should not be examined in isolation from one another.

Focus groups

The primary goal of using focus groups within this study was to identify how participants understand and define sex and sexual consent, in order to compare these results to the individual experiences discussed in the interviews to see how shared meanings may differ from actual lived experiences. While sex is a private experience, it is also both public and political. Focus groups were important for drawing out these public perceptions around sex. The mixed groups, in which men and women are able to break down these public perceptions together, is of value for understanding the shift happening and the challenges around sexual consent. Conversations between focus group participants offer relevant data to help identify cultural knowledge, as well as contradictions (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Mahoney, 1997; Wellings, Branigan, & Mitchell, 2000). They can also be used to examine various forms of behaviour that are not otherwise easy to study directly, such as sexual behaviour (Morgan, 2004; Tracy, 2013).

Focus groups have been used previously in sex research and sensitive research topics in general. Frith (2000) argues that focus groups are beneficial for research on sex because they can offer insight into the cultural language related to sex that peers use. Focus groups, as they create a sense of community, can help individuals feel comfortably sharing once they see that they are not the only one to have experienced something. Agreement or disagreement between group members can also help build an elaborated and fuller picture of their views (Frith, 2000). Although some criticize focus groups for potential "group think", this process is important and relevant to this study, as my aim is to uncover the variety of ways in which consent becomes socially constructed. I am not conducting positivism to uncover one "true" definition of consent. Focus groups are ideal for getting at the contradictions between what is public and private (Wellings et al., 2000). A significant part of the analysis is to dig into the contradictory notions

between expectations and lived behaviour, making focus groups helpful for examining how it is that people make meaning about ideas in a sort of generic, hypothetical way in groups versus how they make sense of the same concept within the context of their own actual lived experiences.

Focus groups are said to function best when groups share similar demographic characteristics by facilitating conversation around shared or similar experiences (Tracy, 2013). The overall homogeneity within the focus groups, such as similar age, gender, etc., helps the researcher access language, concepts, and cultural knowledge shared amongst group members (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Mahoney, 1997). Using groups of men and women, all-men, and all-women, allows for a discussion of various perspectives, as well as a place for common understandings and experiences to be shared and discussed. Wellings et al. (2000) also argue that mixed gender focus groups can help recreate gender conflict, providing evidence of differential attitudes and social norms. For the purpose of my study, I chose to have homogeneous and heterogeneous groups to have discussions rooted in differences in order to make comparisons. Hughes and DuMont (1993), as well as Mahoney (1997) argue that there should be at least two groups for each subset. As such, I carried out two focus groups for each subset: two men, two women, and two mixed groups.

Five out of the six focus groups were held at the campus of a university in a private conference room. The sixth focus group with male participants was conducted at a college in a private room. This all male focus group came from participants in the same college program, making them a very homogenous group of men. Participants were each given an informed consent form, information sheet, and debriefing form at the beginning of each focus group and interview. Participants were made aware that anonymity was not possible within the focus group

itself but that any information regarding places and names will remain confidential through pseudonyms within the transcripts and research paper. Participants were therefore asked to keep what was said within the focus group confidential to protect the privacy of the other participants.

As the focus groups were designed to acquire data on concepts and definitions of sex and sexual consent, one of the very first questions asked participants how they defined sex. Bogart et al. (2000) argue that because social scientists rely on self-reports of sexual behaviors, it is important to also examine the terms used by the participants to describe sexual behaviours. I asked focus group participants their own definition of sex to see if there is a difference between what people understand sex to be, versus what they later describe in their interviews. In other research studies the majority of people regularly include penile-vaginal-intercourse (PVI) in their definition of sex (Randall & Byers, 2003), while fewer consider penile-anal intercourse as sex (Randall & Byers, 2003; Pitts & Rahman, 2001). Acknowledging that women are less likely to achieve orgasm during PVI (Fahs, 2014; Hite, 1979; McPhillips et al., 2001; Tiefer, 2004), I guided the participants to discuss their own definitions of what pleasure was, often resulting in discussions of both physical and emotional pleasure. The full list of focus group questions is found in appendix A. The focus groups were helpful to distinguish the ways that people may define consent and sexual behaviour when interacting with a group versus when describing and reflecting on their own experiences.

Interviews

In order to collect subjective knowledge on participants' experiences and to examine the ways that consent is negotiated and understood, individual interviews with focus group participants were conducted following the focus groups. Used extensively in social science research, interviews are helpful for gathering explanations and justifications for people's beliefs

and behaviours. They are particularly beneficial for using participants' own language and vocabulary to provide information on concepts, understandings, and experiences that are not directly observable (Tracy, 2013). One-on-one interviews are also used to strengthen other data points (Tracy, 2013); in this case the focus groups and demographic surveys are strengthened through the use of comparisons between the interviews and focus groups. As expectations, sexual scripts, and sexual negotiations are not directly observable events or conscious decisions made on the part of the participant (Ridgeway et al., 1985), using semi-structured open-ended qualitative interviews was beneficial to gather details of events and to allow participants to think about the thought processes behind their actions (Mahoney, 1997).

The focus groups were conducted first to initiate a conversation around definitions of sexual consent in the abstract; interviews were applied to collect data on participants' actual experiences of sex, sexual communication, and negotiations of consent. The focus groups therefore provided the participants with a starting point for discussing the issues with others and with me, which also helped to establish a relationship prior to the start of a rather sensitive subject, making for a kind of "ice-breaker" before the interviews. This format also gave us more time to get to personal experiences in the interviews since we had already discussed general definitions of consent during the focus groups.

Because most of the participants were involved in both the interviews and focus groups, comparisons can be made between their discussed understandings and their lived experiences. The interview consisted of more personal questions concerning participant's actual sexual experiences. While some personal stories did come up in the focus groups due to people's willingness to share, these stories were followed up where relevant within their interview. Interviews allowed me to collect rich data on how participants experienced and understood

consent, especially concerning pleasure, negotiation tactics, and communication during sexual experiences.

The main themes of questions asked included: what their best and worst consensual sexual experiences were, what made the experience consensual, how pleasurable the experience was for them, and what they were expecting going into the experience. Best and worst experiences, used also by Paul and Hayes (2002) to prompt individuals to think about their hookup experiences, is useful for highlighting key sexual events that participants are likely to most easily remember. A limitation of asking participants about their best and worst sexual experience is simply the subjective nature of what one participant may consider their best or worst experience. As such, the follow up questions concerning consent and pleasure help to frame and ask the questions in a way that allows the participant to reflect on the situation in a similar manner across participants.

The full list of interview questions is found in Appendix B. Every interview began with a discussion of informed consent and having the participants sign the consent form. Participants were given an information sheet, a copy of the consent form, and a debriefing form. Interview length varied from 10 minutes to over 70 minutes, with an average length of 37 minutes for women and 33.5 minutes for men. Most interviews took place at the bilingual research university in a private room, but two took place in a private residence and one via Skype. The shortest interviews were all carried out with the three men from the community college trade program.

Researcher considerations

The gender of the researcher and the impact of social desirability response bias were major concerns when conducting this research. Gender can have an impact when collecting

sensitive data in terms of how much the participants are willing to disclose. When interviewing military men who hold more traditionally masculine characteristics, Deschaux-Beaume (2012) found that her position as a woman would lead men to disclose more personal information than they might not provide to a male interviewer. Social desirability response bias is also a concern in qualitative research, defined as the tendency for interviewees to provide answers that they feel reflect better on them and what they feel the researcher is looking for (Krumpal, 2013). One way I aimed to address the potential for social desirability response bias was by assuring participants that their material would be kept confidential and their identities anonymous, as well as by ensuring a non-judgemental environment throughout the interview (Blackstone, Houle, & Uggen, 2014; Bourne & Robson, 2015).

Overall, I felt that all participants were forthcoming with honest information. Examples of this are evident when participants shared feelings of non-consensual sexual experiences, experiences of assault, experiences with being accused of assault, and more emotional details of their relationships and sexual experiences. A couple of interviewees wanted confirmation of the confidentiality of the interview more than once before proceeding to share further information. Concern about my gender, however, was felt during the focus group and interviews with the working-class men, in that I sensed that my gender and academic position limited how much detail they gave. I think perhaps they felt that they were under scrutiny. However, they were comfortable enough with me to refer to women as “whores” upon occasion, which gave me confidence that they were not only giving me answers that they thought I wanted to hear. Nonetheless, there is still the possibility that social desirability drove participants’ answers, especially within focus groups where other participants were present. However, given that part of

the aim of the research is to uncover what is the socially desirable definition of consent, this may be a benefit, rather than a limitation of this research design.

Ethics

Ethics approval for the data collection of the study was obtained by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Ottawa. All participation in the study was voluntary and each step of the data gathering process was focused on ensuring the comfort and consent of all participants. While participants were at risk of feeling embarrassed or nervous when discussing sexual experiences, I assured participants that they could leave at any time to minimize feelings of discomfort. I was patient and allowed each participant sufficient time to answer the questions, keeping neutral and not passing judgement on the experiences and perceptions that they disclosed. Participants were provided with a debriefing form that included numbers they could contact for sexual health centers, emergency help lines, as well as my personal phone number. Aside from one participant not completely filling out the demographic form, all participants appeared to answer the questions to their fullest capability and comfort level.

Confidentiality within the research was ensured by safeguarding any identifying information through the use of pseudonyms for each participant, excluding names of identifying places, as well as storing all electronic data and transcripts on my personal password protected computer. All physical copies such as demographic surveys, written records, and printed transcripts have been stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home. All electronic data such as transcripts will be stored during a 5-year conservation period on a portable hard drive in a locked filing cabinet. Following the conservation period, all electronic data will be destroyed using secure deletion. All physical data such as demographic surveys, written records, and printed transcripts will be shredded after the successful defence of the research.

Many of the participants found the research to be very interesting and were happy to be part of the study. The study allowed for the expansion of knowledge regarding sexual consent, sexual health education, and the impact of gender socialization. By examining the experiences of young adults in their romantic relationships and how these experiences have impacted their understandings of sexual consent, this research can be applied to sexual health policies and programs, as well as bring awareness to and shed light on grey area experiences. This study is also beneficial in providing empirical data on the expectations of sex, how young people communicate regarding sex, and the sexual experiences of today's youth. All of this information is useful for wider patterns of social knowledge. More generally, this research expands on current literature surrounding sexual scripts, expectation states, youth sexual behaviour, and gaps in sexual health education. Participants were compensated by being entered into a draw for a 25$ gift card of their choice of either Tim Hortons, Second Cup or Starbucks. The winner was drawn after data was finished being collected and analyzed. They were notified and mailed their gift card.

Sample design and recruitment

The sample of this study consisted of self-identified men and women aged 18 to 25 (average age was 23) living in a large city in Eastern Ontario, Canada, who identified as having dating and/or sexual experience. Emerging adulthood, defined as ages 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2006), is a distinct time period in the life course when most are experimenting with sexual behaviours, have more freedom from parents and responsibilities, and are most likely to engage in hookups (Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006). The parameters for the study were open to allow for diversity in the sample and as to not exclude any gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. There was variation in sexual orientation and slight variation in racial groups for mainly female participants, and all

participants self-identified as men or women. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in English.

To recruit participants, English and French posters were placed around two universities and participants were also recruited through word of mouth. The poster was shared via social media such as Instagram and Twitter, and through a specific Facebook page dedicated to the study. I also attended some courses at a university with the permission of the professor to speak briefly to the class about the study and to leave behind posters and contact information. The recruitment poster included information about the study, participant eligibility parameters and my contact information. Sampling was a mixture of purposive and snowball. I specifically chose participants based on a parameter of age and to acquire at least 10 men and 10 women. Snowball sampling was applied as participants invited others that they knew to contact me (Tracy, 2013). There was difficulty in recruiting male participants, which could be due to the wording on the poster. While I wanted to maintain transparency and avoid any subversive methods, the word "consent" on the posters may have been a deterrent for male participants. Within the current #MeToo climate, men may be more reluctant to discuss issues of consent.

Given the epistemological assumption that people make meaning for themselves and is dependent on the particularities of one's individual history and experiences, a representative sample is neither desirable nor possible within feminist-interpretivist research. Thus, while the research is not generalizable to a larger population, the benefit of this research is the ability to obtain a richness of data towards the understanding and experiences of consent. As such, at the proposal stage there was an agreed commitment to 20 participant interviews and six focus groups. Upon completion of the data collection (from March 2017 to April 2018), I met this requirement, though ended up with more than the required number of participants (n=24) given

that some participants participated only in one or the other stage of the research. Although most participants were in both the focus groups and interviews, one man and two women participated only in a one-on-one interview and four women participated only in a focus group.

Focus groups were set up on a first come first served basis and respondents were given the choice to participate in a same gender or a mixed group. Generally, focus groups are recommended to consist of three to twelve participants, and a larger group is not considered to provide necessarily more rewarding data than a smaller one (Morgan, 1997; Tracy, 2013). While I aimed for six to eight participants for each focus group, due to individuals not showing up, they ranged in size from two to five participants. Because men were particularly challenging to recruit, pulling together enough men to form an all-men focus group took longer than the all-women and mixed groups. As such, one all-male focus group was originally scheduled as a one-on-one interview until the participant brought a friend, making it a two-man focus group. The other all-male focus group included three men, the two all-female groups included five and two women, and the two mixed groups each had two men, with two women in one and three women in the other. Thus, the six focus groups included a total of nine men and twelve women. Despite the small size of most of the focus groups, this allowed for more dynamic conversations surrounding understandings and definitions of sex and sexual consent, since there was plenty of time for everyone to be heard.

To ensure gender parity in the one-on-one interviews, all of the male focus group participants were included in the one-on-one interviews, with one additional man not in a focus group included to bring the male interview sample to ten. Eight of the ten female interview participants were chosen from the focus groups (with efforts to obtain a balance of women who were single and women who were in relationships), and due to no-shows, two additional women

were recruited for the interviews who had not participated in the focus groups. Because the focus groups and interviews involved different questions, those participants who had not participated in the focus group were asked the focus group questions at the beginning of their one-on-one interviews.

Sample demographics

A demographic survey was provided to each participant (Appendix C) in order to gather information such as age, self-identified gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, age at first romantic sexual experience, age at first sexual intercourse, and number of sexual partners. The average age of participants was 23 years old, with the majority (75%) of the participants being university or college students, the remaining 21% of participants were employed young adults not in school, and one participant was neither a student nor employed. Two participants were permanent Canadian residents, and the rest of the participants (92%) were all Canadian citizens. Table 1 and Table 2 below describe the general demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Descriptive participant information

NAME[†]	AGE	SEXUALITY	RELATIONSHIP STATUS
WOMEN			
EMILY	24	Heterosexual	Married
PAIGE	25	Heterosexual	Relationship
CHARLOTTE	25	Queer**	Single
ALICIA	21	Heterosexual	Relationship
HARPER	25	Queer**	Single
SCARLETT	24	Heterosexual	Single
TAYLOR	21	Heterosexual	Relationship
CAMILA	23	Queer**	Relationship
ALEXIS	24	Heterosexual	Single
MADELEINE	23	Heterosexual	Relationship
STEPHANIE*	24	Heterosexual	Relationship
DEBBY*	24	Queer**	Married
CHERRYL*	24	Heterosexual	Relationship
KACEY*	18	Queer**	Relationship
MEN			
LOGAN	22	Heterosexual	Relationship
CALEB	24	Heterosexual	Single
NATE	22	Queer**	Single
HENRY	21	Heterosexual	Single
LUCAS	21	Heterosexual	Relationship
DANIEL	24	Heterosexual	Single
ROB	25	Heterosexual	Married
AUSTIN	24	Heterosexual	Relationship
CONNOR	22	Heterosexual	Relationship
SHAWN	25	Heterosexual	Relationship

[†]All participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality of their responses.
*****Focus group only (no one-on-one interview)
****** To ensure anonymity, participants who identified as queer, lesbian, bisexual, or not quite straight have been described as queer for the purposes of the study as it best fits the umbrella term for individuals who do not identify as heterosexual (Barker, 2016).

More than half of my sample consisted of participants in relationships: thirteen were in non-married committed relationships, eight were single, and three were married.

Table 2. Participant demographics

DEMOGRAPHICS	% WOMEN	% MEN
RELATIONSHIP STATUS		
SINGLE	29%	40%
RELATIONSHIP	57%	50%
MARRIED	15%	10%
JOB STATUS		
STUDENT	50%	60%
WORKING	43%	40%
UNEMPLOYED	7%	0%
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION		
NONE	50%	60%
CATHOLIC	15%	30%
AGNOSTIC	15%	10%
CHRISTIAN	7%	0%
ATHEIST	7%	0%
INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY	7%	0%
SEXUALITY		
HETEROSEXUAL	64%	90%
BISEXUAL	7%	0%
QUEER	29%	10%
RACE/ETHNICITY/NATIONALITY*		
WHITE	72%	90%
BLACK	7%	0%
LATIN	7%	0%
ASIAN	7%	10%
MÉTIS	7%	0%
TOTAL N=	**14**	**10**

* Responses to an open-ended question on the demographic form asking for respondent's "ethnicity." As such, these categories reflect respondent's self-definitions, not official categories for race (White, Black, Asian), ethnicity (Latin), or nationality (Metis)

As shown in Table 2, the demographics of the participants was slightly more diverse for female participants than for male participants in terms of sexuality and racial/ethnic identity. While the research was open to any sexual orientation, the majority of the sample consisted of heterosexual participants, with 25% who identified as queer or bisexual. Two heterosexual couples participated together; one of them participated in the same focus group, while the other couple was placed in two different focus groups. Interview and focus group discussion was not limited to relationships, and included hookups, friends with benefits, and past relationships. By

examining various types of sexual relationships, I was able to identify differences in expectations and negotiations depending on how and how long they have known each other and what their relationship is.

Analysis

I applied an iterative thematic analysis to this mixed method feminist-interpretivist study in order to get as much description and detail as possible to deconstruct the understandings and experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tracy, 2003). This process takes into account new themes that emerge from the data while also acknowledging that the reviewed literature and theory have an impact on how the researcher handles the data; while themes emerge from the data (emic), the researcher is also accounting for existing explanations and theories (etic). This analysis helps examine the ways that meaning, experiences and events are the result of a range of actions, interpretations, and cultural ideologies within our society and is used for identifying and grouping data into patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Further, the iterative approach is helpful for organizing and describing data in plentiful detail using the research participants' own words (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gillham, 2005). The emerging themes are the result of the researcher grouping the collected data while reflecting on their relationship to the existing literature and theories (Tracy, 2013).

Applying an iterative thematic analysis uses thick description (Geertz, 1973) and the voices of my participants to deconstruct issues surrounding sexual consent. The steps for this analysis involved a circular re-checking and reflexive coding practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tracy, 2013), which allowed me to familiarize myself with the data and ensure that I was collecting the data that followed my research question and theories. This approach works well when using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) where data can

be easily moved around and coded, allowing for initial coding and secondary coding. CAQDAS is helpful for being able to succinctly organize data in ways that facilitate analysis (Gillham, 2005). For my study I used version 12 of NVivo, which allows the researcher to perform various queries within the program to aid the organization of data such as text search, matrix coding, and word frequency charts. The program also allows the researcher to associate sources of data, such as interview transcripts, with the demographics of the interview participant. I was therefore able to apply attributes such as gender, relationship status, and sexuality to the sources to make for a more robust analysis. NVivo allowed me to systematically organize and analyze my data for ease of discerning patterns, and allows me to see which themes, also termed "nodes", were coded into the most times and compare this across attributes

After transcribing the interviews word-for-word myself, I began the analysis by reading through transcripts as they were completed and scanning for any initial themes that stood out that would help familiarize myself with the data before entering the transcripts into NVivo. As the focus groups were used as a starting point to begin discussions on sexual consent, and the interviews collected in-depth data on lived experiences, the two were initially analyzed separately. Analyzing them separately allowed me to see overlapping themes for each set of data, such as themes around alcohol, differences in pleasure, and communication of consent. Upon this initial analysis of the data, I then merged the focus groups and interviews into one NVivo document so that both types of data could be coded into the same nodes/themes. Once all the files could be coded together, based on the initial themes, I conducted a secondary cycle of coding. The second cycle of coding provides a more critical examination of the codes that were identified within the initial coding stage, further organizing and synthesizing them (Tracy, 2013). Secondary analysis of the data resulted in more sub-nodes. A codebook, found in Appendix D, is

provided to show the descriptions given to the nodes as coding was completed. Codebooks are used as "legends" to describe what criteria were used to assess which quotes went into which nodes/themes. Including the codebook allows transparency and demonstrates how themes were coded and defined (Tracy, 2013). The codebook also reflects the research questions and sensitizing concepts (e.g., non-verbal consent, pleasure, masculinity, etc.) that were first developed to conduct the study.

Each interview, while guided by the same questions, did not always follow the same format of conversation. When discussing issues of sex, participants often discussed various topics all at once such as relationships, communication, and expectations. Compared to the focus groups, the interviews were less linear which made coding more challenging, hence the decision to initially analyze them separately. Often when discussing the first question about their best or worst consensual sexual experiences, many participants needed some prompts to be reminded of those experience. Consent is a complex and personal topic, so I felt it was important to have sub-questions about expectations, dislikes, and consent to help the participants discuss and reflect on their experiences. Talking about and dissecting both their best and worst sexual experiences is not something that participants are used to doing all the time. I always ended interviews and focus groups with an open question if they wanted to go more in depth, and oftentimes participants would expand on their general thoughts about consent and other experiences that may have been relevant.

Overall, the methodology chosen for this research reflects the subjective nature of the topic of sexual consent. Qualitative methods have been most conducive to examining whether pleasure has had an impact on negotiations and experiences of sexual consent. An iterative thematic analysis applies the participants' direct statements about their experiences, while also

considering previous research and the theoretical lens. Focus groups and interviews as a method of data collection complement each other, with broad discussion followed up by specific experiences of sexual consent. Using NVivo allowed me to organize themes and patterns, as well as more thoroughly examine the data.

Chapter 5: Definitions and discussion of sex, consent, and education

This first chapter of the results of my research presents findings primarily from the focus groups which set up the broad foundations and discussion for each of the following chapters. Participants in the focus groups were asked questions such as how sex is defined, what does and does not count as sex, and how they came to learn this definition. Other questions included what signals someone would make to show they do or do not want to have sex, how one knows if someone else is having a good time or a bad time, and when, if ever, is it appropriate for someone to convince someone else to have sex. The goal of the focus groups was to see what the broad social norms of sex are, and the ways that participants would discuss how consent happens and is negotiated. As respondents reported, the definition of sex can become quite problematic, going from broad to narrow depending on how one wanted to "count" their number of sexual partners. Most participants learned about sex through peers and media, rather than formal education or from their parents. Respondents discussed differences in communicating consent based on type of relationship. Relevant to the rest of the chapters, focus group participants also discussed the notion that sex, and therefore consent, follow an implicit progression based on body language.

Defining sex

When participants were asked to define sex, what does and does not count, it was evident that respondents were not accustomed to thinking about how they understand and define what sex is. Most participants defined having sex as some sort of interaction with their own or their partner's genitals, and that the goal of the activity was to achieve orgasm. More specifically, and discussed from mainly female participants, was that the goal was for at least one partner to orgasm, even if this goal may not necessarily be achieved each time. The intent of having a

pleasurable experience, or an experience "where you are capable of [achieving orgasm] from it" (*Female Focus Group 2*) indicated it was a sexual activity. If people are making out and touching, actions are not considered sex until a line has been crossed towards a goal of orgasm:

> I mean if you are fondling and you are just kind of making out and there is touching, a little bit of that, but the goal is just to get the hype going and not to cross that line, it's kind of like okay… [but if] there's more action that's starting with the goal of having or achieving orgasm, or have your partner achieve orgasm, I think that's more to do with sex. (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 2)*

Female participants noted, however, that even if orgasm is not reached but that you were working towards that goal that it would still be considered sex.

Besides some participants including pleasure as a marker for what defines sex, others noted that once genitals are touched it marked a sexual event. This participant also noted that sex can happen between two or more individuals:

> I think it would just be the physical act, and I guess it would encompass, in my mind, anything where two or more people, I guess, just anywhere there's some kind of exchange that is probably involving two sets, or more than two sets of genitals…so I would say that it's physical and once you start to transition to intimacy that is where the emotion comes in. So, I would still say that sex itself is sort of the physical act of either vaginal penetration, or anal penetration, or oral sex, or a hand job, all those kinds of things in my mind would be considered the physical act of sex. (*Female Group 1)*

A few participants argued that definitions of sex should be more inclusive in recognition that LGBTQ members and persons with disabilities do not always have genital contact or penile-vaginal penetrative sex:

> …does sex have to involve some kind of stimulation of the genitals? …for example, if, for people who are paraplegic or who are quadriplegic might not be able to have genital stimulation so you might gain stimulation, sexual stimulation on different parts of your body, it could be on your ear for example, it could be on different parts of your neck. So, I would be more inclined to say that there is a concept of arousal and that genital stimulation doesn't necessarily have to be a part of it. (*Male Participant, Mixed Group 1)*

To these participants, sex is not only about direct genital contact, but stimulation which can create a state of arousal that crosses a line into sex, further broadening the definition. The young

women in the focus group discussed that penetration is no longer the defining norm for sex, but instead includes a variety of behaviours:

> With the rejection of penetration now that LGBT sex is seen more on the foreground of what's considered normal, I think the fact that having sex is no longer defined as penetration, I think that definitely does blur the definition. But I would agree in the sense that it's any sort of exchange between two or more people and that…you know, anything, there is that line between intimacy and sex. But I think that's just, you know, any action in that spectrum. (*Female Group 1)*

Fetishes and their association with sexual arousal and sexual pleasure that do not include genitals was also discussed in one of the mixed focus groups. A broader definition of sex would therefore not only support the inclusion of LGBTQ people and people with dis/abilities, but also anyone with particular consensual fetishes that lead to sexual arousal. Stepping away from only PVI and genital stimulation thus adds a layer to the ways that we construct what sex means, allowing the definition to shift and change with experiences and negotiations in social contexts. These types of discussions allowed for definitions to be challenged and shifted some of the participants' perceptions about what sex is. These contradictions and acknowledgement of differences in social perspectives are one of the key components and benefits of using focus groups (Wellings, et al., 2000). For example, in the second mixed-gender focus group, a young man shared that he has a very biological view of sex as driven by hormones, which he expressed as being very different than the definitions given by the other participants in the group.

Often participants struggled to come up with a way to define sex (e.g., note the participant above using many "I guess" statements), with one male participant noting that: "[it's] just having sex, I don't know how to describe it". When reflecting on having a hard time discussing what defines sex, Connor (*22, Male, Heterosexual*) noted rather humorously: "…it's like, what the heck, it's sex, what do you mean?". Other participants, as reflected in the

statement below, indicated a concern with the lack of consistency in how other people define sex:

> I think it's really interesting when you have these conversations and you ask these questions because to me, I am a very self-assured independent woman, I know what I like, I know what I don't like, I'm not afraid to say yes or no, I'm not afraid to give my opinion at all. But to have these conversations and you are asking these questions some of them to me are no brainers and the fact that you are asking them is like, okay so there are people out there that have a different view than me and I know that, and I have friends like that, because girls talk about everything, and you have these conversations and it's interesting that it's sometimes not so clear cut. (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 2)*

In other words, people can take the definition of sex for granted, assuming that everyone must be on the same page and that it is a "no brainer". The female respondent noted that the varying definitions and understandings of sex demonstrate the ways that sex is not as clear as one would assume. However, participants stated that sexual activities such as manual/hand stimulation or oral sex may not always count as someone having actually had sex and differences in what counts as sex can lead to misunderstandings.

People may label sex as touching genitals and intent to orgasm, but when it comes down to counting who they had sex with, heterosexual participants were more likely to refer only to those circumstances when there had been penetration. These subjectivities of what counts to whom were discussed as causing problems in relationships and in social groups when two people define sex differently. For example, Alexis shared that when she and her boyfriend were discussing their number of sexual partners, they had inconsistent definitions:

> …an ex-boyfriend told me he's had sex with 30 people or something. I was like "what the hell" at first and then eventually [he told me] "I don't mean we full on did it I just mean we did something sexual, there was some sort of sexual contact", and I said "I don't count that". Like holy smokes if I counted that, that's just ridiculous to me, that seems like a lot if you were to count that sort of thing. So, for me I believe its penetration, I know it's different for other people though. (*Alexis, 24, Female, Heterosexual)*

Similar to Alexis' statement, female focus group participants also noted that when counting who they've "slept with", they only count penile-vaginal penetration:

> …so, I would count in general, I don't know, it could be a hand job if, orgasm was achieved, as sex, but I would not count it on my sex roster if I had one. Like I wouldn't count it as times that I've had sex, you know. (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 2*)

There were also notable gender differences in how sexual activities get labeled, with men suggesting a broader definition and women a narrower one. The mixed focus group had a discussion that both men and women may choose to label a sexual activity as "having had sex" often referring to PVI, with different outcomes for men and women:

> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: …if you have somebody who is bragging about "I just had sex" but it's two, like one person thought they had sex and one person didn't, and one person is bragging about it, that can obviously lead to…issues, especially in high school drama. Like if she gives a guy a blow job at a party and then he starts like "yeah I totally just had sex" and she [says] "no we didn't", you know that could significantly affect her
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: yeah
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: it doesn't have to be her, it could be the guy too
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: yeah
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: like, well usually I think it's more the girls that fall into that kind of danger zone
>
> MODERATOR: danger zone in terms of saying it wasn't?
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: I just think there's hypocrisy in society where guys get an "'atta boy" if you have a lot of sexual partners but girls, it's looked more negatively on. So, in terms of you know, your reputation being stained, I think there's a bigger threat for girls out there than guys. (*Mixed Group 2)*

As that participant pointed out, men and women were seen to label sex differently due to different social expectations about appropriate sexual behavior. Specifically, as Alexis' statement above suggested, participants felt that women may try to avoid negative perceptions of being seen as too sexual, whereas men are seeking to increase their number of sexual partners. These perceptions and expectations can result in manipulation and to feelings of confusion if one person considers the sexual encounter a romantic experience rather than just a physical act:

> MALE PARTICIPANT 2: but men do [twist the label of sex] too, because you know bragging about it and saying "oh I had sex" when they didn't, they are also twisting that then, in a different way
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: I think it gets more concerning when you have emotions tied to sex or when you think of sex in terms of like a more romantic experience potentially, right. So, um, yeah, then I think it gets confusing. So, like if I thought something was sex and I thought it was a romantic or intimate experience and they were like, no it wasn't, it was just this or whatever, just fooling around, then that could be hurtful. (*Mixed Group 2)*

More than simple mixed messages, an inconsistent definition of sex was described by participants as having a potential emotional impact. We can also see in the participant's statements elements of gender differences, specifically the dichotomous ways that men and women are expected to define and label sex to meet expected gendered sexual behaviour. These disparities and contradictions about sex are learned through both formal and informal systems.

(Lack of) education – formal and informal learning about sex and consent

According to participants, the sexual health education that they received in grade school provided them with general knowledge of reproduction and that abstinence is the best form of protection, with little information about the physical, emotional, or social complexities of sex and sexuality. While a few participants received education from their parents, most participants stated that their real knowledge of sex came from peers, experience, and popular culture. Some participants admitted that pornography was their primary source of sex education. Unfortunately, the information gathered from popular culture and porn is not usually reflective of real-life experiences or body types (see Nagoski[6], 2019):

> …until you actually have your first sexual encounter the only thing you have to go off of is movies, you know. Whether it's porn or an actual movie, like your impressions are entirely based off of a product that has been made to cater and doesn't actually represent what it's actually supposed to be like. (*Male Participant, Mixed Group 2)*

[6] For example, porn skews perceptions of body types by editing the look of women's labia (Nagoski, 2019).

Participants noted that pornography can set up inaccurate expectations of what sex should be like, but if schools or parents do not educate their children on this, young people will just continue to get their information from where they can:

> we've got fairly unmonitored resources out there for kids, and access with the internet, so it could very well be super [dis]respectful portrayals of any person, women, trans people, non-binary, men sometimes too. Men can sometimes be portrayed as dehumanized and degraded [in] pornography as well. So, I think in some ways that's a difficult field because there is so much information about there for us on the internet and it obviously can't be regulated, so I think people's understandings of sex probably comes from both sides of that, the kind of, the side that could be really beneficial to us, but also the side that could be detrimental to our understanding of what consensual sex is and what is "normal" (*Female Focus Group 1*).

Pornography is thus not seen as an ideal way to learn about consent and what is considered normal or everyday sex. Porn also normalizes the myth that genital response means sexual arousal (Nagoski, 2019). While some pornography could be beneficial if informative, as Daniel described below, it can also be powerfully detrimental to one's ideas about sex:

> …from the male's perspective when it comes to learning about the mechanics of sex, I think a lot of us learn it from pornography, and if you are not able to distinguish, like, how do I put this?... I definitely watch pornography, regularly, absolutely. Has it affected my sexual experiences? Totally. I think it's affected… it's definitely affected expectations…I shouldn't say expectations, expectations in so far as how I think I should be feeling when I'm engaging in sexual behaviour. But I think it's important too, because we don't learn about the mechanics of things, you're just kind of thrown in and you've got to hope for the best. So, I think, in so far as the mechanics go it's okay, but you need to be able to differentiate that "this is mechanic", it is not the sexual experience as a whole, there's so much more to it than just the physical part of it. So that's really interesting because, and I mean I know some of my friends, my female friends definitely watch pornography, but in terms of understanding the mechanics of things, I wonder how to implement something like that. To [say] "hey" because it's… do you talk about it with your parents? Traditionally, no. There are some parents that are really open about that, and others that really aren't, and even then, as a kid do you feel comfortable going in and talking to parents' kind of thing, that's what I mean. (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual)*

Although Daniel watched pornography, he still felt unprepared when the reality came to pass. He argues that pornography should be acknowledged for what it is, which is not the whole part of engaging in sex, but rather just the physical aspect (which is also often an inaccurate

representation of the physical realities of sex; Nagoski, 2019). Further, questioning how sex is portrayed in pornography is also tricky, as not all parents and children feel comfortable addressing the issue and having those conversations.

As most respondents did not receive any formal education which approached sex in a wholistic way, they generally learned on their own through trial-and-error. This sometimes led to unpleasurable and uncomfortable experiences, both physically and emotionally. Many of them identified this as a gap within sex education curricula in their school systems:

> … I didn't go to a Catholic school system but from a lot of friends that I talked to it was really taboo to talk about sex other than abstinence, right? And I think, and again, my school, I would say my high school was pretty liberal but I think we lacked some of that ability to **discuss the messiness of sex**. It's not just the pure physicality of it, but the social interactions and I think if from a younger age we were able to talk about sex or encouraged to talk about sex without shame, like sex not as a taboo, then I think it would be easier to have those discussions with your partner. But I think there's that fear because…we don't even, you know, we are not encouraged to necessarily. I'd say as you are older you start talking to your friends about it, you will be chatting about sex or you will be reading articles and things like that, but when you are younger, I don't think that's happening. I think a lot of young people in high school were first engaging or even first couple years of university that's when you are started, **I think it's still that pressure and the inability to speak about it because it's so taboo,** anything that really exists and puts a lot of people in uncomfortable situations. (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 1)*

The participant emphasizes the taboo and fear surrounding talk about sex, especially when people are younger. However, she notes that lacking an ability to speak about sex can result in even more uncomfortable situations. Acknowledging that sex is not a straightforward process, that it can be "messy", requires open communication and ability to address and speak to these issues, rather than being fearful.

As sex is not spoken about at length in school[7], many participants noted that they did not learn about the concept of consent until they were in university. For example, even when a participant seemed to have a pretty good health teacher at a Catholic school who talked about sex and potential consequences, he still was not introduced to consent until he got to university:

> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: yeah, I think to both those points, I went to a Catholic school board here in [city], French Catholic too yeah, now on that same note my 9th grade gym teacher who was also my health teacher was a lesbian Buddhist. She was really cool. [Laughter] yeah, she's super cool, but by that same token when we talked about sex in school, we talked about it in the context of the potential consequences of having sex. We were, yes, we were educated about birth control but we were educated about birth control in an attempt to control birth, and they always emphasized things in terms of percentages. They were saying okay if you use a condom it's 90%, if you use birth control it adds however much percent, but if you use abstinence it's 100%. [laughter] Like you know what I mean. And to your point [referring to female participant] I didn't know what consent was, the concept I had never heard it mentioned until my first year of university
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: yeah
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: so, I mean as something so fundamental to sex it's something that should be part of the curriculum, in my opinion. (*Mixed Group 1)*

The male respondent describes that even though consent is a central aspect of sex, it is absent from what is being taught. A female participant noted that not learning about consent when you are a teenager in high school can lead to engaging in sex one otherwise does not want. Without that education, a young girl may not have the tools to express herself:

> I think in general, in elementary school or high school they usually teach you what sex is about but they don't tell you how to verbally go about it so a lot of times what happens is when you have a young teenage girl who has never done it before and, like you said, feels like she has to do it, I don't think she's ever thought about how "oh, these are the ways I can express I don't want to do that." And keeping that education from children is kind of destructive in a way or even letting them know when to stop, **like what are the signs that you should stop**. That's something that we are not taught when we are younger. Obviously, it's easier to gauge when you are older but for some people, I know a lot of people they either don't care about reading social cues or they don't know how to so they don't know how to say stop or they don't know how to stop

[7] The changes to the Ontario sexual health education curriculum led to debate about just how much information children should be given in schools. Some parents do not want their children learning about sex ed, and currently, parents have the power to opt out their children from sexual health education (Posluns, 2019).

> themselves. It's like they don't know how to pick up on the fact that someone else doesn't want to and I think that knowledge could be a big piece to I guess solving some part of the problem, to start somewhere, but it's something that's never come up until I got to university, I think. I never got that education anywhere else. (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 1)*

As the average age was 17 for my participants first time having sex, with an age range of 14 to 24, many of them had been engaging in sex before getting to university. Not learning the concept of consent until university was noted as quite problematic and potentially destructive for young people.

Participants who attended university emphasized that university is "a whole different ballgame" of sexual education compared to other sources. A female participant noted that while high school taught more about human reproduction and the dangers of pregnancy, sexual education in university was a lot broader due to open discussion of experiences and the feelings around them:

> …in high school I saw it as penetration was sex because that was sort of the definition that was taught to you in high school, right. I mean we talked about oral sex, but it was penetration [that] was the scary bit, it was the "don't get pregnant" bit sort of thing that was the seriousness of it. And then university it got broader because people started talking about their feelings, I was a part of our queer-straight alliance and they were really open. We had a lot of nights where we talked about different sexualities and sex and stuff, and it was interesting to see how different people define it. And then I think just having partners over the years, like it broadened as well, how I felt about it. (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 2)*

For this participant, university offered a setting for which she could have honest conversations about sex that were not focused on fear or heteronormativity. Once she began to have her own sexual experiences, her understandings shifted again. Daniel, below, makes a similar statement. Once he got to university he learned about consent, and then when he started engaging in sexual activities, he was able to shift his understanding of consent even more to something less abstract:

> I grew up in the suburbs and I didn't, like we didn't talk about consent in school, I didn't know what it was until first year university. And even then, like it was just, it's not that it was an abstract concept, but I didn't really understand what it meant until I

> started having sex, until I started engaging in sexual behaviour (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual)*

While both participants were educated about the topic of consent in university and had broad understandings of sex before engaging in sexual activities, it was still the actual experiences which helped solidify their understandings and meanings around sex and consent.

Overall, the emphasis on consent in university made a notable difference in how participants who received a university education talked about sex throughout this study. Respondents were quite passionate about the role university played in opening their understandings of sex and addressing consent. They were also adamant that sexual health education for is not inclusive or comprehensive enough to help young people avoid bad situations and communicate openly and confidently about sex. Participants who did not attend university were less forthcoming with information on sex and less reflective of past experiences.

The implicit progression of sex

While what counts as sex is subjective based on individual education and experience, there was some agreement that how people engage in sex is reliant on body language cues. The ways that someone demonstrates sexual interest and consent was described by participants as primarily non-verbal. Respondents discussed that once kissing and touching happen, body language is the primary indicator of whether someone is interested in continuing to other activities such as penetration. While participants note that ideally, consent should be verbalized, consent is understood as implicitly communicated through a lack of a "no" and physical signs guiding indications that someone wants to continue further:

> PARTICIPANT 1: …you are kind of kissing and touching, it's almost like the assumption is that you are just going to keep progressing through those motions until one of you says stop. It's almost kind of, not necessarily need[ing] to check with the other person, I mean, okay, there's an assumption or an understanding that we are sort of taught that you don't need to check in with the person as you go through all of these

> kinds of motions, like kissing is automatically in your head going to lead to something more unless the other person says no, and then that something more is going to lead to more, unless the other person says no. So, there's not really…
>
> MODERATOR: so, it's non-verbal until it gets verbal?
>
> PARTICIPANT 2: until it gets to be where you refuse it as opposed to stopping and saying... "we're going to have sex right now" it's more "we're not going to have sex right now" (*Female Group 1*)

Consent is thus not a direct confirmation, but rather a lack of objection. The participant above describes that no one stops to confirm, but rather stops to say they do not want to continue. The assumption of sex then is that someone is going to continue non-verbally until they decide they do not want to have sex anymore; in which case they will say so verbally. However, as demonstrated below, these assumptions and the way that someone approaches sex are not shared by everyone:

> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: to me I find it's always been a very clear question or "how are you doing" …I mean I've never, unless you are talking about before you start dating someone, I think that's very different, there's a lot of subtleties there, but when it comes down to the actual act it's a very clear question at that point.
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 1: really? Because I find in my experience that it's been the exact opposite. So, I find that really interesting that both of you guys [the female participants in the focus group] ask, because in my experience and what I've originally thought to be was the vast majority: the confirmation that you want to have sex is not saying stop. You know, there's no clear cut "would you like to have sex now?" "yes" "okay, let's go". That doesn't, that's not sexy for me at all. Like if someone stopped in the middle of us making out and said "do you want to have sex" it's like, well I was going to get there eventually…**I find it's very much that consent is like the absence of not saying no**, you know, so if you start making out with somebody it's just kind of a silent agreement that, because we'll just keep going until someone says stop and "I don't want to go any farther", that's been my experience anyway, which you know obviously, I think your way is better because it takes…
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: but I mean it's also not like you are making out with someone and you step back, and you are like "would you like to have sex with me?" (M*ixed Group 2)*

The male participant interprets that directly asking if someone wants to have sex can appear unsexy. His comment about "getting there eventually" is also in line with the notion that men are the initiators, and anything else can feel uncomfortable (see also Ford, 2018). However, he feels

that the other participant's method of checking in with their partner is an ideal approach to ensuring consent. This give-and-take between the male and female participant demonstrates differences in perceptions and understanding of consent. Their discussion is another demonstration of the ways that understandings and meaning can become re-negotiated and constructed. In the case of this mixed focus group, the meaning of consent as a lack of no, which many respondents discussed as being seen as a norm, was also challenged by the female participants as not always being enough to identify actual consent.

Checking in with your partner was also mentioned by other participants as beneficial, especially if things may not seem to be going "with the flow". A male participant discussed that it is always easy and does not "kill the mood" to just have that quick conversation, rather than having one of the partners engage in unwanted sex:

> I think my biggest complaint with the [non-verbal signals] is it's so bad compared to just asking what everybody thinks. [That] asking now is somehow going to make the moment off, as if somebody was like "hey you want to have sex?" and you are like "well not now" [that you asked]. (*Male Group 1)*

Participants generally discussed that there is a kind of fear of talking during sex; that talking is somehow viewed as disrupting the moment. What the male participant above is arguing is that asking if someone wants to have sex is viewed as running the risk of ruining the mood because if they change their mind, this gives them the opportunity to say no. Thus, asking outright for consent is only seen as potentially "unsexy" if it runs the risk of someone actually saying no. In fact, participants shared that asking someone can be arousing. Paige (*25, Female, Heterosexual*) discussed that her ex-boyfriend enjoyed when she verbally stated "yes" to wanting to have sex with him. Similarly, a male participant in the focus groups noted that verbalizing consent can be arousing:

> I'd say a pro is when you verbalize it, in some cases that can actually be quite arousing because I mean you're engaging in foreplay and there is a lead up to it and the person says well "I want you" that can be very arousing at the time because you know there is a desire for you as a person, that's validating as well (*Male Participant, Mixed Group 1)*

Further, another male participant stated that while there is often a non-verbal lead-up to sex, verbal confirmation can also happen to break up felt tension by confirming that they will be having sex:

> …you get to the point where you can almost bear it no longer and then somebody speaks out and then they do it (*Male Participant, Mixed Group 1*).

Similarly, verbal consent happens only once body language has already indicated someone's interest and "you see the signs leading up to it" (*Male Participant, Male Group 1*). A male participant noted that it is easier to get verbal clarification, as body language can be harder to judge:

> …a verbal kind of "I want to have sex" [laughter] is a pretty good start, you know, that's kind of like the best way to you know…because you can't go off just non-verbal clues alone, you kind of have to have [verbal confirmation], and even then you need to be sort of constantly aware of like [how is] the situation going…is the person comfortable? So, you don't want to be pushy but, I guess like sort of reciprocation on the other half is probably a good place to kind of say "is this person into it?" "is this other person feeling what I'm putting down as well?" (*Connor, 22, Male, Heterosexual)*

Importantly in Connor's comment, is a key notion that even once verbal consent has been received at the beginning of the encounter, he continued to use body language to ensure that his partner's consent was ongoing, without feeling a need for verbal communication. Thus, while some participants highlighted verbalization as arousing, the consistent messages from respondents are the assumption that consensual sex flows naturally based on body language and a lack of talking. Not talking is described as the norm, and outright asking is seen as deviant, even though technically the latter more clearly demonstrates one's affirmative consent. As participants insisted through their discussion and critique of consent throughout their interviews

and focus group participation, checking in and having a conversation with your partner would most likely only enhance an experience. Generally, though, the ease of this conversation can be mediated by type of relationship.

Relationship type and the communication of consent

At its core, sexual consent is how we let someone know that we agree to have sex with them, and that we continue to agree as the sexual activity is happening. The "active" or "enthusiastic" model of sexual consent promotes constant communication where neither partner assumes consent, even if there is no resistance (Bussel, 2008; Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Millar, 2008; Powell, 2007, Powell, 2010). While enthusiastic consent is an ideal form of consenting, based on the examples below, clear, and active communication was often problematized by respondents' gender role expectations as well as the type of relationship in which the sex was occurring. Communication during sex was described by participants as partly impacted by the type of relationship one had with their sexual partner. Committed and established relationships were seen as providing more opportunity for explicit consent. In hookups, participants reported feeling more constrained to communicate and were more likely to be marked by implicit consent. Further, women participants discussed many more expectations and problems related to consent and communication for hookups than did men.

Respondents reported that compared to their experiences with hookups, relationships offer more space for verbal communication rather than body language alone. Alexis (*24, Female, Heterosexual*) stated that being in a relationship leads to more verbal communication of wanting sex such as just coming out and saying, "do you want to have sex?". She stated that in non-relationship contexts that one might be subtle about initiating a sexual encounter: "I guess in other social situations [hookups, casual sex] it's more subtle with the flirting and you know,

touching arms, eye contact and those subtle non-verbal communications". A male in a focus group reflected (*Male Group 2*) that: "…if it's a one-night stand you are probably less apt to actually talk about what you are going to be doing, it's more spur of the moment type of thing", and went on to say that one-night stands are more non-verbal actions that lead up to the hookup. In his interview, this participant also discussed that one of the main things he does not like about hookups is that the he feels less comfortable communicating in them due to them being in the moment and lacking chemistry with that person:

> I feel like if you have a relationship then you can actually be more comfortable at talking about [sex] and talking about things that you [enjoy]. …[with] one night stands its kind of like there in the moment so you don't… you don't have the chemistry. So, it's not really the same, I'm not a big of the whole one-night stand thing. (*Rob, 25, Male, Heterosexual*)

His remarks, along with those of a couple of other men, challenge stereotypical assumptions that men prefer hookups over relationships.

Consenting to sex in an established relationship was often described as happening both non-verbally and verbally. Many of the participants discussed that knowing their partner's interests, likes and dislikes, as well as knowing how they react to certain stimuli is important for enjoying sex and for knowing their partners want to have sex. Feeling more comfortable to be verbally direct in a relationship than in a hookup contributed to being more confident that sex was clearly consensual. Relationships were thus seen to help foster agency and communication for participants' wants and needs, resulting in more direct and explicit consent.

> …I think that when you are in a committed relationship it's maybe less blurry, but I think definitely when you are meeting people or you are not in like that kind of context, it gets very blurry. You have to…I feel like there is a lot of trying to read a situation, and maybe you're reading it wrong, or maybe you might find that you're assuming that person wants something to happen but they don't, and vice versa, they might assume you want something to happen and you don't. And, like you said, it gets very blurry, you may be just friendly and nice and enjoying a conversation and being flirty,

> and that could be misconstrued. So, I agree that it can be very blurry for sure. (*Female Group 2)*

Participants reported that having sex with someone they did not know well and thus may not be able to read their signals well, can make for blurred understandings and intentions. Respondents offered that this lack of knowledge about someone makes it hard to know their boundaries:

> …when you are in a relationship you are kind of like "this is my line, this is what it is, this is what it isn't", so say you've been married for ten years, you've most likely had a couple of conversations to say that is what I want and this isn't, versus when you are not in a relationship you don't have that conversation so you don't know what the lines are (*Female Participant, Mixed group 2)*

Women were not the only ones to report that poor communication in hookups led to less positive outcomes than in relationships. Similarly, male focus group participants noted that in a relationship you actually talk about a problem and figure it out. They emphasize that compared to a relationship, hookups are usually "shit" due to this lack of knowledge of each other's thoughts, feelings, and desires:

> MALE PARTICIPANT 3: you actually talk, figure it out. Like I did say earlier, I like the whole relationship better because then you can actually cater to each other's wants and needs, because it's kind of like one and done [sleeping with one person and then never talking to them again]
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 2: [a one-night stand] could be good, it could be shit. Usually it's shit
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 3: yeah, exactly.
>
> MODERATOR: usually it's shit?
>
> MALE PARTICIAPNT 3: you never know what you are getting [laughs]). Or, if you've done it with the same person, not even a relationship, just somebody that you've been sexually active with for a while
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 2: they know, it's your fuck buddy
>
> MALE PARTICIAPNT 3: yeah, exactly.
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 2: they know what you want, and you know what they want.
>
> MALE PARTICIPANT 3: and normally anytime you are talking to them it's because you both want it, so there you go (*Male Group 2)*

The last statement also seems to equate fuck buddies with implied consent, because the relationship itself is solely about having sex. Showing up to the encounter or messaging the person means they are there to have sex. Further, relationships (fuck buddies included) can provide more space for negotiation of continued sex, such as the ability to take breaks and time outs if someone is not enjoying themselves or having difficulty maintaining an erection.

While both male and female participants raised issues about the ways that consent is communicated in general, female focus group participants brought up an issue that was not discussed by any male participants. Women felt that before even going on a date with a person, they must decide if they want to engage in sexual activity and to what degree. This decision is often made long before the date happens and can change over the course of their interactions. Female participants felt that women and men have divergent expectations around sex, and therefore different experiences of how consent has to be decided. There was a theme that even just talking to a man or saying yes to going out with them already carries expectations that a woman will sleep with him. Therefore, the first step in not consenting to sex was to say no to a date or not even talk to the interested party:

> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: … how you say no [to sex] is by not dating or not going out with them, or not going back home with them
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: or not talking to them
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: yeah, if you did all that stuff [talking, going on a date], it means you want [to have sex], so you are not really allowed to say no then
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: yeah totally, where you feel, well I've done all these things that like would hypothetically mean they probably think I want to have sex with them, but then it can change, I think, and you have the right to change how you feel about yourself and like what situations you want to put yourself in, so I think that's a good point (*Female Group 1)*

Participant 1 notes, "doing all that stuff" implies that you want to have sex, and by simply going on a date is itself seen as consent; one says no by not going out with them or not going back

home with someone. For example, a female focus group participant shared her Tinder experience where a man felt he was automatically owed sex from her due to the "efforts" he had put in:

> I was on Tinder for a little bit…and then I met a guy, and again he wanted to meet up…I was like okay let's meet up in a public place… for a drink. He's like "no, no, you should come to my apartment, I live in my parent's basement, you should come to my basement and hang out with me". I was like "no I want to meet you before I do anything with you". We met and it was like no, it was just not happening, never again, no. And at the end of the date, I [said] "thank you so much but I'm just not feeling it, I don't mind being friends with you but I'm just not into you", and he [said] but you matched with me on Tinder and I [replied] "that doesn't mean that you get an all access pass, it's not what that meant, it just meant I thought you were cute". And then he just said to me "I'm not looking for friends, this isn't what my Tinder project is about, so thank you for wasting my time". I was really kind of taken aback by that whole encounter just being like is that an automatic assumption that just because I swiped yes to you on Tinder you assumed you get to have sex with me. So, I just deleted the app, that's just too much work. But it was interesting, it made me wary, to just have someone assume because I said yes to you on a dating app that [meant I wanted to have sex] (*Female Participant, Mixed Group 2)*

This participant was not alone in experiencing men who expected sex for little effort, nor in thinking that these expectations were unwarranted. Men also made statements regarding men's expectations and entitlement for sex. Daniel argued that men who consider themselves "nice guys" and those who are more obviously "douche bags" both seem to have a sense that they deserve a return on their investments in wooing women:

> I think it's this notion of like the "nice guy" and the "douche bag" or whatever, are equally at fault. Even though the nice guy will say that they are not. Because while the douche bag will go out and take and take and take, the nice guy will go out and give and give and give and will always expect something in return for what they've given. So, it's this notion that relationships are investments and that you expect some kind of return on your investments. So, I think that's where the entitlement comes from.
>
> I remember my first girlfriend made a really good point, I love this metaphor, I never thought of it this way. She said that women are not vending machines that pump out sex when you put "nice" tokens into them. I thought it was really good, and it really gave me pause… we've talked about it a little bit in class and things like that, and it's like "oh if you go out and you buy a girl a drink, or a girl a couple of drinks, why isn't she dancing with you, why isn't she making out with you at the club" or "oh I was nice to you and this other guy wasn't, why aren't you asking me to come home with you?"

> Well, they don't owe you anything. I genuinely believe that this sense of entitlement, and it works well for [both] the nice guy and for the douche bag, but for different reasons. (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

"Nice guys" who expect sex from women are thus equally guilty of being entitled, and perhaps almost worse than men who are seen as "douche bags" or "fuck boys", because they think that there should be some type of exchange based on the effort that they have put in.

Discussion

The above results demonstrate the ways that participants' understandings of sex and consent can vary based on their education, experiences, and types of relationship. While verbalizing consent and having conversations with partners was encouraged, focus group participants agreed that consensual sex, especially in hookups, is often expected to occur explicitly through body language. Only when someone wants to stop the sexual activity is someone supposed to speak up. While talking was encouraged, participants acknowledged the general perception of deviance towards directly asking for consent. Participants felt that relationships helped mediate capabilities of communication, resulting in being more confident about consent. Further, what actually counts as sex can be taken for granted and subjective. Participants mostly agreed that sex has to do with genitals and orgasm, while others noted the rejection of PVI as the norm of sex. However, there was discussion that what counts as sex is often still based on the coital imperative. Variations of definitions and what counts as sex can problematize what expectations a person has of sex and how to communicate consent verbally and non-verbally. This murky understanding of sex was further confused when participants learned about sex through media and pornography, providing them with expectations of sex which do not reflect the overall contexts and emotionality of sex.

Because the reality and "messiness" of sex are not often discussed in sexual health education, or from parents, peers, and media, knowing how to communicate about sex becomes a struggle. Based on participant responses, this seems especially true for women. Tying these findings back to the literature review, we can see the ways in which inconsistent definitions, lack of education, and labels of sex were seen to stem from the social constructions of expected gender behaviour. Socially constructed stereotypes and double standards, such as women only having sex in a relationship (Mehta et al., 2011; Sakaluk et al., 2014) or labeling situations not as sex to avoid being labeled as promiscuous (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007), not only lead to blurred definitions, but can also lead to expectations about circumstances someone will have sex in. If there is an expectation that a woman will only have sex in a relationship, this could potentially lead someone else to use that information to get sex through a dishonest offer of a relationship.

Consistent with studies from Mehta et al. (2011), and Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007), participants noted different motivations for how sex is defined for men and women that are in keeping with gender differentiated social norms about appropriate sexual conduct. Some participants discussed the definition broadly as including oral and manual sex but discussed that what "counts" as sex is often still penile-vaginal intercourse (PVI). While the majority of participants were heterosexual, and though their general definition of sex provided in the focus groups was broad, these broad definitions became inconsistent once they were discussing aspects such as how many people they "actually" had sex with (i.e., what "counted" as sex). Thus, while PVI as the norm may be challenged, for heterosexual participants, considering what counts as having sex may still reflect heterosexist standards and gender roles. For example, Alexis only labels penetrative sex as having had sex, whereas her ex-boyfriend counts every sexual

experience as sex. She did not count hand jobs or blow jobs as sex because she said it would seem like she had had too many partners, whereas her ex-boyfriend had a broader definition of sex in order to claim more sexual partners.

Unlike McCabe et al., (2010) who found differences between men's and women's definition of and approach to sex (e.g. men=physical pleasure; women=emotional pleasure), but similar to findings from Pitts and Rahman (2001), Bogart et al. (2000) and Mehta et al. (2011), both my male and female participants included orgasm as the goal of sex. Participants generally suggested that sex involves genitals with a mutual goal of getting at least one person to orgasm. Women, however, emphasized a definition of sex where the goal was to at least try to reach orgasm. Reflective of the argument from Hite (1979) that women are less likely to orgasm from PVI alone, I argue that women discussing that just the goal of orgasm, even when not achieved, meant sex counted for them due to not always reaching orgasm. Thus, women may be more likely to construct and frame sex as them having a goal of their partner and themselves at least *trying* to reach orgasm.

Similar to findings from Fahs and Gonzalez (2014), young women discussed that the pressure placed on them and the need to decide about consenting to sex before a date even happens is based on men feeling entitled to sex after they have put some kind of effort in. This concept of needing to decide beforehand is also similar to findings from Gunby et al. (2012) that in drinking situations, men believe that women have to decide about the encounter earlier on so that things do not get confusing. This need to decide earlier on, I argue, stems from the internalization of a hierarchy of pleasure and consent, based on the policing and maintenance of heterosexuality which constructs dichotomous perceptions of sex (Bem, 1995; Rich, 1980), namely that men want and are ready for sex at all times. This leads not only to pressure on

women to navigate these expectations, but places equal pressure on men to meet these expectations. However, this navigation is made more difficult for women due to perceived risks of danger for going against the grain of sexual scripts. While women are still agentic in whether they want to pursue these relationships, there is still that subtle domination which is always at the forefront, providing a sense of pressure on women to engage in sex (Powell, 2010). Alternatively, men did not discuss a need to decide beforehand or of women's entitlement. Exploring these norms of how sex is negotiated and the ways that women feel men are more entitled to pleasure within hookups is important for understanding the grey area.

The implicitness of consent, based on a natural flow or build up towards sex, was discussed by many participants when asking how they know someone wants to have sex. Rather than asking someone directly if they want to have sex, consent was described as stemming from non-verbal body language. This body language would indicate interest and desire, where one action leads to another unless otherwise verbally stopped. While participants did not directly discuss mutual desire, these types of actions described around implicitness may be most consistent with an encounter having mutual desire. The implicit consent described generally by participants without being related to specific experiences such as those outlined in the next chapter, are reflective of mutual desire. If mutual desire between partners seems clear based on body language, respondents – though mainly men – noted asking for consent may be perceived or understood as lessening the "romance" and as "unsexy". This is consistent with findings from Muehlenhard et al. (2016) and Gunby et al. (2012), who's participants stated that it can be perceived as awkward to just come out and ask someone "do you want to have sex" outside a relationship, and that asking such things can be a "passion killer". This implicitness is therefore more beneficial to men – through implicit consent, men run less risk of someone saying no, and

can thus maintain their feelings as initiators and their ability to achieve sex (Fahs & Plante, 2017; Ford, 2018; Sweeney, 2014b). This construction of consent as a lack of "no" constrains young adults within an assumed norm of sex as a "natural progression". However, this natural progression, as we will see in the following chapters, can act as both enhancing pleasure and as a deterrent to communication.

Participants discussed that communicating consent is different based on the type of relationship one is having sex in. As previously discussed, there is an assumed "language of relationships" where partners share implicit cues of communicating sexual wants and desires (Lazar, 2010). However, based on focus group discussions, I would argue the opposite. Participants expressed that being in a committed and established relationship with a basis of trust and communication provides the opportunity for consent to be more explicit. Comparatively, outside of an established relationship context, communicating consent is subtle and less clear cut. As male respondents noted, hookups are more spur of the moment and lack a comfort of being able to talk with that person. This subtlety within hookups is compounded by the notion that asking for explicit consent is disruptive and may go against sexual norms (see also Gunby et al., 2012; Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

A compounding factor to issues of communicating consent during sex is a lack of education. This lack of education was described as potentially destructive, for both young women and men. Participants often did not learn about sex in an open format through broad and inclusive sexual health education, leaving them with the inability to clearly communicate when having sex. As Hogarth and Ingham (2009) found, young women are provided with ambiguous notions of sex, and thus often have negative emotions after a sexual experience. Sexual health education often does not provide young women with education on desire and pleasure, instead

focusing on avoiding negative encounters with men (Toronto Teen Survey Research Team, 2013). Rather, I argue that both young men and women need to have comprehensive education that happens in a group setting, rather than segregated and hushed as though what boys learn and what girls learn needs to be kept tightly under wraps from each other. For example, my participant telling a fellow participant about ensuring consent through verbal communication based on her experiences, demonstrates the importance of opening up communication about consent and educating people more comprehensively in mixed group settings. These conversations can foster insight into perceptions about what is okay to do, the norms that men and women perceive as true or false, and also help address the negative perceptions around explicit consent. When we educate young men and women differently and separately, there is little chance that communicating when it comes to having sex is going to be easy.

Based on participant statements, there is a lack of open conversation that happens during sexual activities. If people have different definitions of sex, as well as variation in expectations due to a lack of education, communicating consent will be no easy task. As people are already engaging in sex before they have been introduced to more comprehensive education, participants felt that consent needs to be introduced much earlier than their frosh week at university. This introduction to more comprehensive sexual education could also address potential class or social economic differences in experiences and understandings of consent. Generally, social class impacts how individuals recognize and interpret potential risks to their health (Wight, Abraham, & Scott, 1998; see also Wardle & Steptoe, 2003). As will be explored in the next chapter, knowledge of sex, open communication, and the rejection of traditional gender norms are factors which contribute to having good sex for both men and women.

Chapter 6: Clearly consensual? Implicit consent and best sexual experiences

To explore what makes sex feel consensual and in what ways expectations around gender roles impact positive and negative sexual encounters, I asked participants to think and reflect on their best and worst consensual sexual experiences. As the aim of this research was not to explore sexual assault, I emphasized that they were to choose a consensual experience and that we would discuss what components of the experience made it feel more or less consensual. Once participants chose their experience, I asked the same questions about each experience: what the context was, how pleasurable it was, did they let their partner know what they liked or did not like, what made it consensual, and what were the main differences between the two experiences. There were clear differences in the way that consent was communicated between best and worst experiences. This chapter focuses on the respondents' discussion of their best sexual experience, followed by chapters on the worst experiences which are broken down into those which were just awkward and mediocre versus those which are reflective of the grey area. How participants chose their "best" was subjective, with "best" generally implying the experience was positive rather than negative.

This chapter details what made for the most positive and best sexual experiences, what makes them feel consensual, the role of pleasure, and how the contexts of hookups versus relationships make for better or worse experiences. Feeling safe, trusting their partner, and having an emotional connection were consistently reported as what made for the best sex. Somewhat surprisingly, the young men more so than the women emphasized an emotional connection being most important for their best sexual experiences. Young women emphasized pleasure, but also identified that the ability to talk during sex and being listened to contributed to making them feel comfortable, all of which led to their identifying such experiences as their best.

Both men and women noted that part of what characterized their best experiences were those which "progressed naturally" towards sex and relied upon implicit consent through body language. Thus, these best sexual experiences, in some ways, go against notions of "enthusiastic" or legal definitions of consent.

Contexts of best sexual experiences

Part of what made a sexual experience one of their best was who the participant was having sex with. Men emphasized, more so than women, that their best experiences were with someone they were currently or previously in a committed relationship with. The sexual experiences the men had chosen to discuss were ones of intense emotional and physical connection. Examples of what made men's experiences their best included not having seen their partner in a while, or if having sex signalled progress in their relationship. Female participants' best sexual experiences also mostly took place within relationships; however, a few of the women included experiences that were outside of a serious relationship. Women were more likely to emphasize best experiences as ones where they felt the most relaxed, accepted, respected, comfortable, and where they experienced the most physical pleasure, sometimes experiencing multiple orgasms. Or, as one respondent put it, when she felt like the "star of the show". Thus, somewhat contrary to stereotypical expectations and sexual scripts (Kim et al., 2007; McCabe et al., 2010; Sakaluk et al., 2014; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005), men's best sexual experiences were defined by intense emotional connection with a partner, whereas women's best experiences were those where they felt the most comfortable (i.e., safe, trusted their partner) and physically pleasured.

What made it consensual?

The ways that participants are able to communicate with their partners had the most impact on positive experiences, especially for women. As demonstrated in Figure 2 below, men reported only non-verbal or mixed (verbal and non-verbal) consent in their positive experiences, whereas women reported both verbal and non-verbal consent.

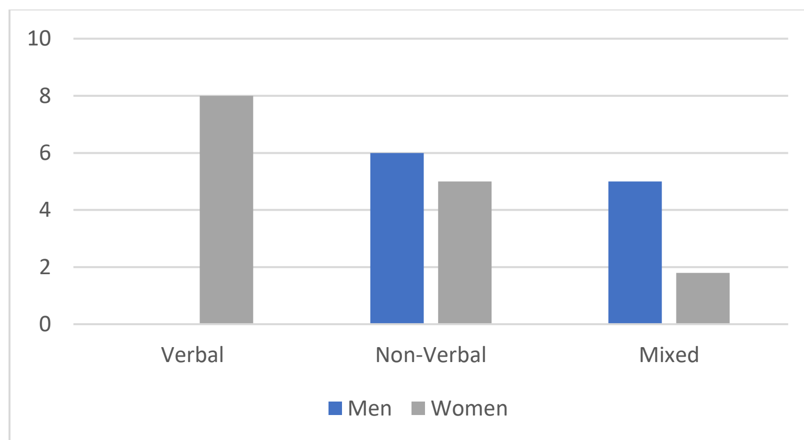

Figure 2. Gender differences in communication of consent - best experiences

Madeleine (*23, Female, Heterosexual*) discussed that what made her experience good was her partner's willingness to check in and talk with her more often to make sure she indeed wanted to have sex:

> we do talk a lot about it and even we tried in the last years really to ask "do you want [to have sex?]" and "how are you feeling about this?". So, we really try to verbalize what we want during sex. Before also, like, because I was really, it was difficult for me because I thought I would always, I should always want to have sex and I told him that, and so now we can easily say "oh, do you want to have sex or no?" and it's becoming very normal. So, I feel more comfortable saying no or yes when I feel like [having or not having sex]. (*Madeleine, 23, Female, Heterosexual*)

When asked what made her best experience consensual and positive, Alicia (*21, Female, Heterosexual*) said that her partner listened to what she asked for and would stop if she asked him to:

> Him mostly listening to my demands and everything and telling him I wouldn't do certain things. You know, even when he pushed a little bit, in the end he didn't continue doing what it was I told him to stop. So, I guess that's what made it consensual, I guess. A lot of people would probably, [and] I know a lot of feminists too probably would be like "oh that's so rude, oh like he should have just listened to you the first time" but in my mind it's like there's so many factors that influence this one person. It was probably his friends who told him about their experiences and what he sees in the media and there is just so many things that might have influenced why he kept pushing for more but I don't use that to judge him fully as a person because I would say that okay you are innately forceful but you know **he probably has this expectation built up from past experiences** and just like social experiences and stuff like that so I didn't hold it against him (*Alicia, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

For Alicia, her partner's pushiness did not negate consent because he still stopped when she asked him to. While Alicia states that there may be expectation from some, especially feminists, that men should just stop the first time when asked, instead of judging him for being pushy, she reflected on his personality and socialization as influencing his own understandings and expectations of sexual behaviour and consent. This could be an example that while men's socialization is acknowledged as being problematic, the behaviour is still being normalized as just the way men grow up and interact with their friends rather than being challenged or further problematized by the participant. In a way then, this could be an example of the maintenance of patriarchy (see also Manne, 2019; Williams, 2019).

In contrast, Taylor expressed comfort from a partner who did not push her at all and whom she trusted to stop as soon as she said something:

> well we both sort of talked about it before and then, um, we moved from there just to like, we asked each other "Are you okay with this? Is this comfortable for you?" and then if things weren't, then it stopped immediately. So, it wasn't like, "okay well I'm going to push you anyways just to see" (*Taylor, 21, Female, Heterosexual)*

While Alicia and Taylor had different tolerances for pushiness, they both trusted that their sexual partners would stop when they wanted them to and ultimately felt listened to, contributing to how they understood consent during their experiences. While explicit and direct request for consent is seen by some as disruptive or as killing the passion (Gunby et al., 2012; Muehlenhard

et al., 2016), women who felt that they had a clear choice described sex as much more enjoyable. Thus, contrary to traditional sexual script behaviour which applies men as initiators and women as passive, women had better experiences when they felt some control over the situation; similar to findings from Fahs and Plante (2017). Experiences which delineate from traditional sexual norms were those in which participants were most comfortable and had the best experiences (Kleinplatz & Ménard, 2007).

Body language and the "natural progression" of sex

Characteristics of good sex were often marked by implicit signals of consent, for both men and women, although non-verbal signals were mentioned more by male than female participants (see Figure 2):

> INTERVIEWER: What about negotiations beforehand though, was there anything leading up to it that you thought, okay it is going to happen, or…?
>
> CALEB: No, there was very little verbal communication, it was kind of that awkward silence where she is at the door and then you kiss and, I'm sure you know how it goes after that. Yeah, no, so we didn't have much of a discussion beforehand. (*Caleb, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

Caleb expressed that there was very little verbal communication, and he felt it was consensual because his female partner did not tell him to stop. His discomfort at communicating about sex was reflected in his not wanting to go into detail about what happened after they kissed by saying "I'm sure you know how it goes after that". Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I did not think it was ethical to push this participant further to get more details[8]. Nonetheless, his response is resonant of the idea of a natural progression of sex discussed in the previous chapter. Tiefer (2004) argues that assuming a "natural progression" during sex and not actually voicing "how it

[8] This interaction highlights a complex question around the use of in-depth interviews to gather sensitive data. While qualitative research is about gaining depth of experiences, the researcher also needs to be wary about reactions the participant is demonstrating. While some participants are very open, for some participants there is a need to gauge their reactions to questions.

goes" can be problematic for both parties if one of them is not actually feeling good about the situation, but the other cannot deduce that from body language. Although Caleb first shared that he knew his best sexual experience was consensual because his sexual partner did not tell him to stop, upon reflection from prior discussion in his focus group, he seemed less sure since he never got actual verbal confirmation:

> CALEB: Well I hope it was consensual because she didn't tell me to stop, and I remember in our discussion [in the focus] group…a person in the discussion group said "yeah, I'm all for…I want to do this [ask for consent] before [this] happen[s]", where for me that feels very unnatural
>
> INTERVIEWER: Right, yes, saying it verbally beforehand-
>
> CALEB: Yeah, exactly, I wouldn't stop making out to say "hey, can we keep going", it's my kind of experience is you go up to someone and say stop, so the fact that you know, she was kissing back and then not really resisting or anything, like that in my mind was our consent, I guess.
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, like a natural - [9]
>
> CALEB: Yeah, her consent was a lack of objection. (*Caleb, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

This idea that a lack of an explicit "no" constitutes consent was also reflected by other men. Daniel expressed that if the other person speaks out or if there is some resistance, that is when you know to stop, otherwise things just progress:

> in terms of consent it was just…there was always a give and take, I found. Like in that particular experience and in my best experiences I've found, it varied 50/50 kind of thing. Whether it's in terms of positions or whether it's in terms of who's taking the lead, and there's always just this kind of understanding where you look at the person and the person goes with it and you are like "okay, I'm good", and if the person is eventually going to be uncomfortable with it, they speak out, and then you just stop and then that's it. And this particular case there was no, like I don't like using the word, but there just wasn't any resistance because we both knew, we were on the exact same page, we knew it was going to happen, we knew we were going to go about doing it, and it just happened and that was it…it [was] an unspoken agreement…it was almost implied. And then that was it. I think it was just the shared understanding that we were like "yeah, we know why we are here, and we know what this is about" and that's it. So unfortunately, and just because of the circumstances there wasn't a whole lot of, I

[9] The term natural was brought up in relation to the focus group he had been part of where the notion of "natural" was previously discussed. Bringing in this term was therefore in reference to previous discussion with the participant at an earlier point.

> guess, discussion or like verbal communication leading up to it, other than the kind of banter and being like "why am I here" and just making small talk before diving into it. (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

Similar to Caleb's assumption of "you know what happened next", Daniel is describing that both he and his partner knew why they were there and "what this is about". Due to both his and his partner's body language, Daniel assessed that consent was implicitly given by both of them.

Although men were more likely to discuss this natural progression, there were women who shared similar experiences. Alicia described her best sexual experience as being mostly non-verbal where they began kissing and "things progressed from there":

> it was more non-verbal than verbal where he would, we were kind of watching a movie, of course - I feel that's how it mostly starts and never happens[10]- and then he, you know, made the eyes I guess, he initiated by kissing me [and] I was open to it and so I guess things progressed from there, there was just light touching and then he led us to his bedroom. I think that's basically where everything started. (*Alicia, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

Similarly, Harper (*25, Female, Queer*) discussed her own best sexual experience which happened during a trip with a male friend she met during an education program. The two of them became close over the course of the program and shared a lot of chemistry. Harper's experience was mainly a non-verbal "natural progression" from kissing to the bedroom:

> it was just like a natural progression… I was cold, I was shivering and so he just started holding me tighter and then we started kissing and then we got so cold. So, he was like, okay, let's go back up to the cabin and then we went back to the cabin. And, yeah, it was just like a very, yeah… one thing leading to another. It was because of the ease and how slowly it built up, like it wasn't, like there was, we had, we were talking about intimate things, like, important, not sexual things but like really, like emotionally intimate things, um. So, there was that trust that was already built up and that ease of communication that was already built up between the two of us because things were slow moving and because we started making out like in one location, we were cold, and then decided to move inside. That would have been a really easy time to be like "actually I just want to go to bed" you know, and it would have been super easy, or me just say my sister is in the next room I don't want to do it. There was just so many opportunities to say no and we were both kind of like…we were in a room with two

[10] This statement references the popular culture term "Netflix and chill", where couples suggest the idea is to "start a movie" or plan to "watch a movie" on Netflix, but the intent is actually to have sex.

> separate beds and we both decided to go in the same bed, right. Like there were just all of these very clear cues. There was no alcohol involved, it was just like, yeah. So, I would say even though we never explicitly said anything, just the comfort level to say something and the slow build up to have time to actually say something, they were all there and nothing was ever said too, like, yeah nothing was ever hinted at to say no, like neither of us were indicating that at all. Yeah, yeah, no cues I suppose. (*Harper, 25, Female, Queer*)

The lack of objection that Harper felt each of them could have provided at any point, especially during those times where they changed locations, along with the choice to stay in the same bed, implied clear signs of consent. Specifically, she describes that the build up towards sex was slow enough that it also provided enough indication that if either of them did not want to have sex, the progression towards it had plenty of time to be interrupted. Thus, without explicit conversation, Harper felt very confident that sex was consensual. This description of her experience, which Harper seemed quite fond of, goes against the idea that consent should be explicitly enthusiastic.

During my interview with Camila when I asked what made her best sexual experience feel consensual, she realized that both herself and her female partner had just assumed that consent was there because of the body language between each other. While they had some discussion throughout sex such as asking each other "do you like that, does that feel good?" the lead up to engaging in sex was still non-verbal. Camila describes that while they were both shy, the flirting and chemistry was described as very mutual. She goes on to say that once you begin to think about these aspects that it becomes "kind of crazy" that people just assume consent based on body language:

> …I guess once we were at my place… this is so hard, this is so hard to answer, I'm sure you hear this all the time… I guess the fact that we were both [shared the same] body language, we were both going for it you know, there wasn't any physically pushing away or anything like that…that's such a tough question…it's so complex, it's such a deep question because you don't really know, a lot of times you don't say anything, you are just, yeah you just go for it and it's like you just assume it's consensual which is kind of crazy. (*Camila, 23, Female, Queer*)

While this is only the experience of one participant, the findings are in line with Beres et al. (2004) that consent scripts for same-sex partners still follow non-verbal confirmation.

After reflecting on their experiences, a few other participants also realized that there was a danger in assuming they had received consent and should have sought verbal consent instead. However, most participants did not seem as reflexive about their best experiences, compared to their worst experiences, because they had felt pleasure and comfort, and thus had little negative feelings to reflect on. Despite the different outcomes, as mentioned above and expanded on in Chapter 8, the same script of assumed consent from non-verbal communication was experienced in grey area experiences.

Sometimes participants experienced a mixture of verbal and non-verbal consent where consent was at first provided non-verbally, but discussion emerged throughout the experience. This happened mostly in a context of previous knowledge of the partner's wants, where trust had already been established. Nate (*22, Male, Queer*) knew his best sexual experience was consensual because of all the signs combined with his previous knowledge of his sex partner:

> she initiated which was a huge thing, because you can't read minds, the fact that she initiated and wanted to do this meant that I got to make the secondary decision of yes, I also want to partake in this. So, there was no doubt of "this is consensual now". We were also, we weren't in a relationship but she had experience, like I said, we were still doing stuff, so there was the, I knew there was already an attraction there, I knew we were trustworthy and comfortable with each other and we've never done anything that would break that trust in the physical aspect with each other. So, I had no doubt that it was consensual, and she let me know that, both verbally and through you know, physically initiating. (*Nate, 22, Male, Queer*)

Due to Nate and his partner having previously engaged in intercourse, combined with the fact that she initiated sex, he felt there was no doubt about consent. Having some kind of relationship can therefore provide situations of trust and being better at reading your partner's body language. While he mentions that he got to make the "secondary decision of yes", Nate's discussion of his

experience demonstrates that concern was still mainly for his partners consent and not his own. This is reflective of other male participant's absence of conversation around their need for consent. For example, Connor also noted that it was his partner's initiation of sex that marks the clearest way to know his partner was consenting. Connor discussed a time he came home to find his girlfriend waiting on their bed in lingerie, signalling to him that she wanted to have sex. Connor explored the idea that consent in the situation did not require clarification:

> It was the implications of what she was wearing and just sort of the eyes, oh my god. But uh, yeah there wasn't a doubt in my mind at that time that I was like…"do I need to clarify this, is this what you want?", like, so it was just sort of, and I think sometimes that's refreshing instead of like either initiating or you know, like kind of, well like the foreplay or if you just sort of like that "let's just get to it sort of thing" (*Connor, 22, Male, Heterosexual*)

Overall, consent for best experiences was quite implicit. Though there was often no verbal confirmation of consent, this was not seen as problematic, as the experience and outcome were positive. The ways that someone interprets consent is subjectively related to how they feel about the experience as it progresses and once it is over.

Pleasure

When I asked participants how pleasurable their best sexual experience was and why, many people started off with general statements of "it felt really good" to answer the *why*, but the *how* resulted in some variation. What makes good sex pleasurable? While orgasm was a marker of good sex, especially for women, for many, overall pleasure was tied to the emotional aspects of the experience:

> I came to the realization that to have pleasurable sexual experiences that were rewarding, I would need to do them with people that I knew that I cared about and actually have relationships with instead of just meaningless sex where I didn't really care about the other person because when you are not emotionally invested it's a lot different for me. (*Paige, 25, Female, Heterosexual*)

While the stereotypical assumptions are that women desire more of an emotional connection with sex (Kim et al., 2007; McCabe et al., 2010; Wiederman, 2005), male participants were more likely to draw on the emotional aspect of the experience as to the reason why it was so pleasurable. In describing his best sexual encounter, Daniel described a time that he and an ex-girlfriend both knew would be the last time they would be physically intimate:

> … when you were asking me about what made it so enjoyable and I talked about the vulnerability, like when you really care about someone and that person really cares about you and you know what it's going to be like the last time that you do it, it's not, you are feeling a lot at the same time. You are feeling pleasure, but you are also feeling sadness and it's just this onslaught of emotion and that affects you physically. (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

Both Rob and Shawn shared that the emotional connection they had with their girlfriends was what made their experiences more pleasurable:

> It was very pleasurable, like I said we had this connection so like it felt like, I don't know, it felt like we had this bond, not just emotionally but physically, and we were very connected and yeah it was good like that (*Rob, 25, Male, Heterosexual*)

> Well, one, I'm attracted to her so that helps a lot and, yeah, emotional I guess, as weird and gay as that sounds sometimes [laughter]. (*Shawn, 25, Male, Heterosexual*)

Considering that nearly all of the men in this research study reflected on the emotional aspects of sex as adding to their experiences, Shawn's statement that the emotional aspects that made sex better make him sound "weird and gay" highlights the presence of underlying cultural messages about what masculinity should be.

Women also discussed the emotionality of the experience as making sex more pleasurable. Madeleine shared about the interconnection between her emotions and physical sensations, which made her feel relaxed, increasing her overall pleasure:

> It was very relaxing, you know, I could feel all my body [laughter], all the stress goes and all the worries go and just being in the moment, and being very aware of the feelings, like, physical or emotional, so everything was feeling good. (*Madeleine, 23, Female, Heterosexual*)

Trust was important for a lot of the women to be able to experience both physical and emotional

pleasure. Alexis was explicit when she shared:

> ALEXIS: I think it was the blindfold. It was definitely something new, I hadn't done that before, and it was trusting someone that much. It was great. I think mentally it's a lot more pleasurable to trust someone, yeah.
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, having that trust there increased the physical and emotional pleasure?
>
> ALEXIS: yeah, definitely. (*Alexis, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

Women were more likely than men to use words such as "trust" to describe the emotions they felt during sexual experiences, whereas men were more likely to use words such as "caring". Male participants expressed less worry about aspects such as trust and safety, whereas having trust and feeling safe were part of what made the women's experiences feel both consensual and pleasurable.

While emotional pleasure was an important aspect of good sex, female participants often based their determination of an experience being positive on whether they had an orgasm. For a couple of the women, their best experiences which were clearly consensual consisted of the first time they had an orgasm, or the first time that they experienced multiple orgasms. Emily shared the happiness that she and her partner felt after she had an orgasm for the first time, and the depth this brought to their relationship:

> EMILY: It was the first time [I orgasmed], and I was like "yes this is awesome". [Afterwards] he was really happy because before [when I did not have an orgasm], he wanted me to also have a good time and feel good and stuff and I think he also kind of felt bad like "you never really felt that before" so…it was like intimate moment because we were both satisfied
>
> INTERVIEWER: yeah, okay, so it made it more pleasurable because you and him were happy?
>
> EMILY: yeah…it was such an intimate moment and like afterwards we just, like we were just like so happy and happy that we were, like our relationship moved to another level and getting to that new place and figuring out what works for us. It made us feel good to make the other person feel good. (*Emily, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

Because she was able to orgasm for the first time, it not only made Emily very happy, but made her partner content as well. Other women described good sex as the times that their partner helped to ensure that they reached orgasm. Taylor describes having all the attention placed on her needs rather than just being present:

> …it was really pleasurable for me, just because I was like the star of the show, I guess. And but we both worked together towards each other's pleasure so it was like, it was a team effort, so, yeah. (*Taylor, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

Taylor went on to contrast this good experience to bad experiences where the sex had not been about her pleasure at all, leaving her feeling "just present".

While women described having their partner focus on their pleasure made for their best sexual experiences, men were more likely to discuss only needing to focus on their own pleasure and not having anything else to worry about. Nate discussed that only needing to focus on having sex instead of various worries such as whether his partner was enjoying it, or being body-conscious, made for his best sexual experience:

> It was just, it was nice. It was very pleasurable, both in the sense that it was one of the only times I had to only focus on just the act, not "oh I hope she's enjoying this", "is this okay", do I look alright" stuff like that. Or, [other worries such as], are we going to [have sex] tonight, should I prepare for that, [thinking about] changing your clothes. (*Nate, 22, Male, Queer*)

Nate felt that not having anything on your mind besides being in and enjoying the moment were what made the experience the most pleasurable. Lucas also said that part of what defined his best sex experience was being able to focus on his own pleasure. Instead of being "other-focused", his best experience was when neither of them was putting pressure on themselves to perform a certain way to ensure the other person's pleasure:

> LUCAS: It was nice because we were having sex and because it was natural and you know wasn't "stop, start", there wasn't this pressure of hyper-observance that can happen when people are in a relationship because they are more other-focused.
>
> INTERVIEWER: like focused on the other person's pleasure you mean?

> LUCAS: yeah, when we are in a [relationship], or sometimes even when you're not [in a relationship], … your goal will be the other person's [pleasure] and that puts a lot of pressure on them. It does, when they are aware of it at least. And so not having that can sometimes allow for a much more pleasurable experience both ways. (*Lucas, 21, Male, Heterosexual*)

During a focus group, a male participant voiced a similar feeling that decreasing the pressure of trying to make your partner have an orgasm can increase the enjoyment of the experience:

> … for me when I first started having sexual experiences …I had heard [from female] friends of mine who [had been] having sex before I did, and they were always saying… how "oh, well you know, this was unfulfilling" or something like that. So, for me when I first started having sex I was convinced that the only way that it's going to be good is if I make sure that my partner is in good shape, but it wasn't until years later that I realized that that notion is, I think in itself a little bit backwards, because it puts a tremendous amount of pressure on your partner to say that if I'm not enjoying it then that person isn't enjoying it. …And so, as a result, you kind of, I guess take a bit more a balanced approach and kind of understand that it's supposed to be…I guess there's a balance kind of…in terms of enjoyment, as a means to minimize pressure on one partner, potentially both partners. (*Male Participant, Mixed Group 1*)

The participant feels that sex is much more enjoyable without the pressure to make sure their partner reaches orgasm. Comparatively, women felt that physical pleasure was increased by having attention placed on getting them to orgasm. Therefore, while women appreciate the emphasis placed on their pleasure, the men felt that just enjoying the experience without pressure to get their partner to climax is more enjoyable.

Relationships versus hookups

Most of participants' best sexual experiences were with partners with whom they had physical and emotional connections with. When discussing the general differences between their best and worst experiences, relationship context was one of the main aspects impacting what made sex more or less enjoyable. Shawn expressed that pleasure matters more when you are in a relationship with that person, that he cares more about what she thinks and how she feels. He expressed that his friends often say they are jealous of the relationship he has but he noted that

such relationships take time to foster. Comparing his long-term relationship to the relationships of his male friend who hooks up with a lot of women, he shared:

> SHAWN:…it took me almost two years to be where I am with this woman, whereas my buddy sleeps with 13 different women in the last four months, he doesn't talk to people [he sleeps with], so it [being in a relationship with a woman] definitely gives you more [of an] emotional side… you get a definite feel for women, I'll say that
>
> INTERVIEWER: and you think that makes the experience better overall?
>
> SHAWN: yes, because you care more about what they think or how they feel (*Shawn, 25, Male, Heterosexual*)

Shawn added that having sex with someone you do not know is therefore not as fun or rewarding as sleeping with someone with whom you can "fool around for longer".

Harper also states that relationships can provide more pleasure by creating a stronger foundation on which to negotiate pleasurable sexual experiences:

> I think there's a lot to be said about [being in a serious relationship]. I think it's difficult because there's timelines [that] have changed in today's generation and [the time it takes] to actually foster and create [and] invest in long term relationships. Especially in my lifestyle, in living different locations so often, there's kind of the romanticized version of one-night stands and week-long flings when you travel and they have their fun to them, but there is a lot to be said about long term relationships that have time to build and strengthen. …I do think in regard to negotiation and pleasure, a lot of that, there's a lot to be said about stability…and allowing that to build up, having a foundation before getting to the ultimate climax, right? And I think that's, you know, part of this culture that we have now of instant gratification. I think maybe…some people are losing the ability to build foundations before attempting to reach that climax. Yeah, so, I guess with negotiations that can just be step by step by step by step over a long period of time instead of…like I don't know how you can necessarily reach that with one-night stands (*Harper, 25, Female, Queer*)

Harper finds that relationships offer a space to foster more stability and capability to negotiate pleasure, resulting in a deeper connection. While she says that sometimes one-night stands or flings can result in some fun, one will not necessarily reach that level of depth that leads to more pleasurable experiences. Further, she notes that rushing into sexual experiences may be the result of the current culture, where young people are looking for instant gratification. This search for instant satisfaction may lead to less enjoyable experiences because there is not enough time to

negotiate each step and build a foundation based on what each person enjoys. Daniel also found that emotional connections and chemistry make for more fulfilling experiences compared to hooking up:

> … sex and emotions are so tightly wound, it's very difficult to take the two away from each other. And so when you are with someone who you trust and who you know and who knows you, and who you care about and this person cares about you, it's a much more fulfilling experience because you don't feel the same pressure that you do when you are in a situation like my bad sexual experience [with no sexual chemistry], or an example of a bad sexual experience because it was just a one night stand. So, I'd say relationship and emotional connection is a really big one. I'd say that's the biggest difference. (*Daniel, 24, Male Heterosexual*)

Logan (*22, Male, Heterosexual*) also prefers relationships to one-night stands. Overall, respondents suggested that having open lines of communication with one's partner to let them know what you like or do not like can have a significant impact on the result of sex and feelings of consent.

Whereas relationships are seen as facilitating better communication due to increased comfort and trust, some respondents saw hookups as spaces for meeting their sexual needs. For example, Scarlett shared that she is not afraid to challenge her hookup partner in order to make sex better. She states that she does not want to waste time in a hookup if they are not able to provide her with pleasure, whereas in a relationship there is more time for give and take. Other female participants noted it's not as big of a deal if they or their partner do not have an orgasm during sex within a relationship because there is time to discuss ways to make sex better and have a more satisfying experience the next time. Scarlett notes that for one-night stands where the goal is to reach orgasm (see also Wesche et al., 2016), and where it is much easier for men to "get off", she can focus more on her own needs and ensuring she has a good time:

> …it's like well I'm not going to waste my time, like if you are not going to make me come then why are you in my bed, GTFO [get the fuck out], like it's not worth it to me. Um, I just want to be like "I have a vibrator for that, I don't need you if you are

> not going to make me come". And then with a relationship it's like, not to sound too cheesy, but there's almost another level to it right because I am not just sharing my body with you, I'm sharing my like, you know, my past, you know my experiences. Like… I've been with you before, I've shared…holy shit, I just had this like whole epiphany wherein with hookups when I do that when I'm so forward I'm automatically like [snaps fingers] "I have the power, this is on my terms" and then…in a relationship I share the power but I consider this person my equal and I consider this person to know a lot about me and take care of me and I trust this person not just with my body and to me when that happens my expectations or like even if it's just like I starfish[11] and he has fun and I don't, that's fine…so, anything in the relationship like I'm like, [nothing bothers] me, like whatever, if you don't make me come this one time that's totally fine because we'll do it again and we'll try next time, right. And there's this dynamic of understanding between us that is just respect and much more than a hookup which is just like you are here for one reason and one reason only and if you can't fulfill that reason GTFO [get the fuck out]. (*Scarlett, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

In discussing her sense of agency, Scarlett illustrates how hookups can offer a greater challenge to traditional sexual scripts than can relationships. Although men are often assumed to be more assertive than women in hookups (Kim et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2015; Oliver et al., 2013; Powell, 2008; Wiederman, 2005), Scarlett emphasizes that hookups allow her to take power and control, whereas she shares power in her relationships. Thus, if women have equal or less power than men in relationships, the ability to subvert traditional gender roles may be constrained.

Masturbation, brought up by Scarlett above, was only discussed by a few women throughout data collection. Alicia (*21, Female, Heterosexual*) shared that while she does not have the desire to masturbate, many of her friends do and often discuss having done so. A young woman from the first all-women focus group stated that she and her partner will masturbate individually during times of intimacy:

> I know in my relationship we masturbate individually. So, if he wants to have pleasure, I can touch myself with him and we are [being intimate] but he doesn't feel pressure to do anything or feel that he's not good enough (*Female Group 1)*

[11] "starfish" or "starfishing" refers to a sexual position where a woman lays on her back without moving much (Brickwell, 2018).

This participant uses masturbation within her relationship to reduce the pressure on her partner, but also to maintain the intimacy and get pleasure while being together. Some of the female participants are therefore challenging the assumption that women do not masturbate (Kraus, 2017). By being more familiar with one's body and pleasure through masturbation, and for advocating the behaviour as normal, women are challenging the absence of female pleasure. As we have seen from this chapter and the previous one, women enjoyed their sexual experiences more and found them to be clearly consensual when they felt empowered, listened to, and when there was focus on making sure they reached orgasm.

Discussion

Best sexual experiences were described and understood as those in which there was mutual desire, where emotions heightened pleasure, and where consent was primarily implicit. For women, best experiences were described as when they reached orgasm, had multiple orgasms, and felt very comfortable and safe. For men, their best experiences were ones they shared with emotionally committed sexual partners and where the connection enhanced overall pleasure. Often best experiences were described as flowing "naturally", with consent being implied through body language and a lack of no. Specifically for women, sex felt the most consensual when they feel able to stop at any time without negative consequences. Generally, consent was communicated non-verbally, through body language which followed a linear model of a "natural progression" from touching to kissing to sex. Many respondents discussed sex in this way as a "well you know what happened next" situation, where people are driven by their intense desire for one another. Thus, rather than a "stop and start" or needing to think too much, the natural progression of sex was generally part of sex being a more pleasurable.

Through participant discussion of how they understood consent in their best experience, the focus was generally on women's perceptions of consent, even when men were recounting their experience. Women specifically identified feeling like they were able to stop the situation at any moment without negative consequences was part of what made their best sexual experiences consensual. Men noted that it was their partner's initiation and continual body language as to how they knew, but were not as reflective of their own actions and communication of their consent. I argue this is most likely due to the issue of consent within the current climate as being mostly a concern for women. Even though I asked both men and women the same question, the understandings of consent that men discussed were from the perspective of their female partners, and not from themselves. By framing consent through the perspective of the woman, the men were performing rather than challenging the notion that they are always ready and willing to have sex. Their construction of consent thus stemmed from the unequal perspectives within a hierarchy of consent: that men's consent is not considered as important, but rather assumed due to hegemonic norms around male sexual behaviour.

Women's understandings of what made for the best sex were co-constructed with consent and equality: their male partners were going to reach orgasm no matter what, but their best experiences were those in which they also received one or multiple orgasms, they were clearly expressing desire towards that person, and they felt at ease. On the other hand, men constructed their best experiences not through notions of consent, but instead through connection and emotion. However, a commonality for both is the relational component of the experience, the significance of what the other person is equally providing them with, rather than feeling dominated or used. Generally, the notions of mutual pleasure and enjoyment (i.e., not feeling

used) and feeling the ability to stop the situation at any time (i.e., not feeling in danger or expected to have sex), promote clear feelings of consent.

Being in a healthy relationship with a good emotional connection and open communication about what they want, with partners who respect their wishes, led to participants' best sexual experiences. Scarlett emphasizes that hookups allow her to take power and control over the experiences, whereas in a relationship she shares that power. In this sense, relationships compared to hookups may offer less room to deviate from traditional gender scripts, but they seem to offer increased emotional bonding. These findings are in line with those of Kleinplatz and Ménard (2007) who found that characteristics of people's best sexual experiences include intense emotional bonds, being present in the moment, having good communication, and not relying on traditional roles around sex.

Also similar to Kleinplatz and Ménard (2007), participants, though mostly men, did not always highlight physical aspects as a marker of their best sexual experience. Both men and women discussed that having sex with their partner added to the relationship and brought them closer together. However, women more so than men stated that what made the particular experience their best one, was receiving as much physical pleasure as they did. Reflecting findings from Fahs and Plante (2017), good sex was when the women felt the attention was on them and had control over the situation, there were emotional connections, orgasm, and feelings of comfort and trust. Therefore, we can see that the connection between pleasure and consent can be co-constructed in relation to one another.

My findings demonstrate that some women were not shy about stating that their pleasure made the experience better, being very adamant that if men cannot satisfy them, then they can "get the fuck out". Participants such as Alexis and Scarlett were very forthcoming about their

expectations for pleasure, specifically within hookups. These participants challenged the assumptions that women are often expected not to talk about sexual pleasure (McCabe et al., 2010). This is also in line with Wade's (2017) findings that young women use hookups as spaces to hone their sexual skills and knowledge. As I emphasize throughout this research, challenging grey area experiences requires acknowledging the value and importance of female pleasure. Of note, however, is that while female respondents discussed advocating for their pleasure, none of the men discussed needing to make similar demands; they all assumed they would reach orgasm no matter what. Further, none of the men but some of the women noted that having the focus of pleasure being on them was what made the experience best.

This study also challenges men's stereotypical gender roles that describe men as more focused on pleasure than on emotions (Kim et al., 2007; McCabe et al., 2010; Wiederman, 2005). Some male participants emphasized emotions as increasing the overall pleasure of their experiences. However, similar to Ford (2018) who found that men feared being seen as "weird" if they objected to having sex, Shawn used the term "weird" to describe himself talking about the association of feelings and sex. Deviating from traditional masculine expectations causes some men to fear being seen as abnormal. Further, there were also some contradictions with this finding, as some of the men also emphasized that being able to focus on themselves without the pressures of performance do make for the best experiences. Thus, like Scarlett and Alexis who reject typical gendered expectations for women's sexual behaviour as passive, Daniel and Lucas reject the idea that men should always been the knowers and givers of pleasure.

Breaking down the differences between individual tolerances of pushiness demonstrates the ways that regardless of preferred models or legal components of consent, the perceptions and understandings of consent are defined through experiences and how individuals negotiate within

these experiences. Feeling as though sex was consensual is tied to each step of the experience, including the outcome. While the natural progression described by participants in their best experiences demonstrate desire and pleasure, the behaviour also reinforces the notion that silence and a lack of no conveys consent. The problem, as will be discussed in chapter 8, is that this normalization of implicit progression as an identifier of desire and consent can also be a constraining factor. Normalizing this behaviour can limit one's ability to feel able to communicate and negotiate in a sexual experience without feeling as though they are breaking a rule. However, sometimes situations work out well and people can communicate when expectations of sex are not being met. The following chapter explores findings related to participants worst experiences which felt clearly consensual but just resulted in less pleasant and enjoyable sex.

Chapter 7: Consensual but mediocre – when sex just isn't working out

Not all experiences of sex are enjoyable, go well, or are with people that have shared emotional and physical connections. How is consent identified, understood, and communicated in such situations? The focus of this chapter is on the descriptions provided by participants when asked about their worst consensual sexual experiences. Interview questions consisted of context, how they felt throughout the experience, how pleasurable the experience was, any communication with their partner, and what contributed to making the experience feel consensual. During the discussion of their worst consensual sexual experiences, participants described some encounters which were clearly consensual, and others where consent was more problematic. This chapter focuses on sexual experiences which were not overly enjoyable, but which felt clearly consensual.

Men required more time to think of a "worst" experience than did women, who were able to easily recall these events. There was a clear distinction between bad sex that was just "not good" but initially desired and consensual, as opposed to grey area sex, which were analyzed as those experiences where participants felt pressured or expected to have sex. Sexual experiences which were just not working out had fewer characteristics of unequal power dynamics, feelings of coercion, and strong expectations to have the encounter. All sexual experiences described as worst sexual experiences were heterosexual, and although the sex was consensual, typically the experience was pleasurable for just the man or for no one at all.

To analyze participants' worst sexual experiences using an iterative approach, I drew on the literature which examined unwanted sexual experiences in terms of those people consent to but may not necessarily desire (see Bay-Cheng et al., 2008; Flack et al., 2007; Kennett et al., 2013; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Taking into account the cultural and societal pressures

which support unequal power dynamics and the dichotomous expectations of sexual behaviours (Butler, 2007; Powell, 2010; Wiederman, 2005), I analyzed the ways that participants described their perceptions and understandings, drawing on their moments of reflexivity regarding their experience. A slightly greater percentage of the men's experiences compared to women were analyzed into "bad/mediocre" rather than "grey". Women were more likely to describe sexual experiences which I analyzed as falling into the "grey area". Specifically, five of the ten men's experiences would be considered as consensual but not going well rather than grey, compared to four of the ten experiences for women. Nonetheless, both men and women defined some of their worst sexual experiences in similar ways: as consensual but unsatisfying for one or both parties. However, men were far more likely to be the ones achieving orgasm if only one person were to do so.

Participants suggested that the experiences were bad due to a lack of knowledge (i.e., first-time having sex), a lack of chemistry, and a lack of pleasure for at least one, if not both people. Often the sexual activity was just not going as expected or was sloppy and awkward due to having consumed alcohol. Compared to both the best and grey area experiences, unenjoyable but consensual experiences often contained a lot more verbal consent and talking, especially when it came time to call quits on the interaction. Although these factors led to sloppier or less satisfying sexual encounters, an underlying theme that was not explicitly mentioned but became clear in my analysis of the interviews was a belief that since women are less likely to orgasm, women's sexual pleasure becomes less important than men's. As such, I argue that there is a pleasure gap within heterosexual experiences which requires a deeper examination into the social norms regarding expectations for women's and men's pleasure.

Women were able to recall worst experiences more easily than best experiences, often noting multiple negative ones to choose from. While my interview guide started by asking about their best, often the conversation ended up beginning by discussing their worst as it was most easy to recall. This process became helpful for discussing their best, as their best would emerge in contrast to just how uncomfortable and unpleasurable the bad were. While some of the men had more than one negative experience from which to choose a worst, there were fewer patterns and overlapping characteristics of negative experiences for men compared to women (e.g., women's lack of pleasure, feeling pressured and obligated, fearing for their safety).

As shown in Figure 3, below, men were more likely to discuss verbal communication of consent in their worst experiences than they were in their best. This table encompasses communication of consent for all experiences described as their worst. Those which were described as being mixed or verbal fell into the "not-so-great" category, which is the focus of this chapter. Most of the non-verbal communications were described in experiences which fit into the grey. As such, I argue that sexual experiences which are sloppy or not going well, but which are clearly consensual, are often more explicit in nature.

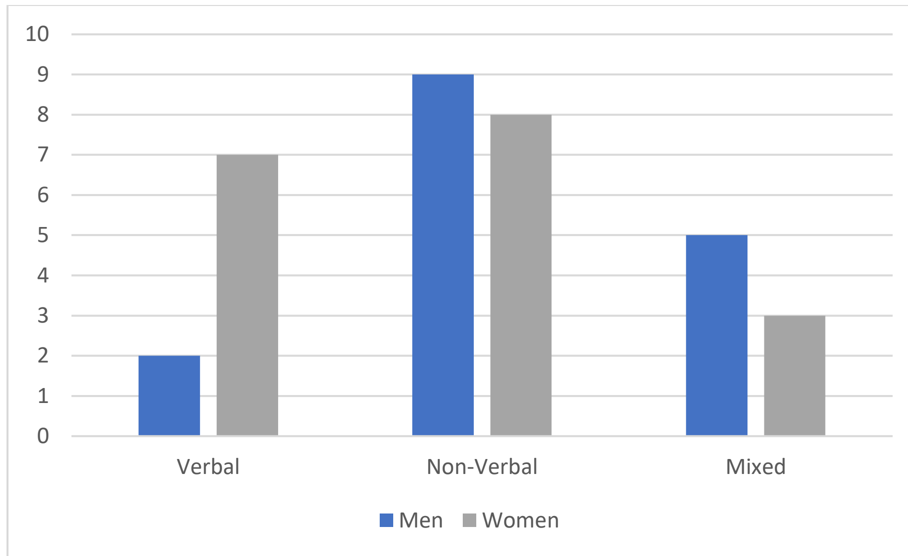

Figure 3. Gender differences in communication of consent - worst experiences

For example, Austin (*24, Male, Heterosexual*) describes a verbal agreement he made with a partner to leave a party to go have sex in a separate room:

> Well, we both talked about it beforehand and how we were going to like do it; that we were going to go fuck off somewhere where no one could find us and then come back. [We] ended up going there and then halfway through we just stopped, and we were coming back because obviously it didn't work out. (*Austin, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

Daniel also states that before his awkward and unpleasurable encounter with a female acquaintance, he had asked her if she wanted to come up to his room, which is often interpreted as a sign of consent (Muehlenhard et al, 2016). However, similarly to Austin, getting consent was not enough to make for good sex:

> And I think part of it, honestly the biggest reason why it didn't, like there's a lot of reasons, one of them was I had too much to drink, and that affects you physically, like I literally just couldn't get it up. But the other really big thing too, was that neither of us I think really, and I think that spoke to my sexual inexperience, not that I'm very sexually experienced, but it definitely spoke to my lack of sexual experience at the time. I had never been in a relationship before, and anytime I had sex before was a one-night stand or something like that, and there was just, there was very little communication, there was very little chemistry. We just kind of, it was just really sloppy. And I really don't think either of us enjoyed it as a result. (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

Consent within participants' not-so-great experiences was never in question. Rather, the experience was one of their worst because there was a lack of lack of chemistry, lack of knowledge, and, often involved alcohol consumption.

Alcohol

Alcohol was discussed in the interviews and focus groups as it relates to sex that just does not go well. This finding is in keeping with past research showing an association between alcohol and hooking up, often leading to unpleasurable sex (see Claxton et al., 2015; Gunby et al., 2012; Herbenick et al., 2018; Kramer, 1994; LaBrie et al., 2014; Orchowski et al., 2012; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Reissing, et al., 2012; Sumnall et al., 2007). A couple of the respondents pointed to alcohol as playing a part in sex feeling awkward and sloppy. Alexis described that while there was verbal consent beforehand, a lack of sexual chemistry and being drunk made the situation less than pleasant:

> Me and my friend got really black out drunk a couple years ago and we had sex on my birthday, and it was just awful. Like it was consensual, but it was just bad sex, like really bad sex. [We were] two people who were too drunk to really communicate what they like I think, and then [we] just should have used lube [laughter]. Just like, I don't know, it was just weird because obviously we were just friends, like really good friends, and then it's like oh shit, wake up the next morning and like, oh God, what have I done? (*Alexis, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

Alexis also stated that if she had not been so drunk, she perhaps would not have attempted to have sex with one of her close friends. Further, both Alexis and Daniel identified alcohol as putting a physical limitation on their ability to have pleasurable sex, as Daniel noted that he could not "get it up" and Alexis noted that they "should have used lube." Although factors other than alcohol can lead to an inability to maintain an erection or self-lubricate, alcohol in these cases did not seem to help the situation.

Participants stated that while alcohol led to "sloppy" sex that lacked chemistry, they felt

their experiences were clearly consensual. While Alexis stated that alcohol impaired her and her partner's ability to communicate their sexual preferences or what worked best for them, she made no assertions that alcohol made the experience non-consensual. In these cases, the participants negotiated their own understandings of consent, not those based within law. Harper described a situation in which alcohol led to a lack of chemistry and communication, but that was nonetheless consensual:

> We were just dancing and then he was like "hey, want to take this outside" and [I said] "sure", so then we started walking towards the river and started like making out and then we went skinny dipping and then went back up to his tent. [Laughter]. Anyways, so then, and then like one thing led to another, well it wasn't, I don't know, one thing went to another, we got into his tent and got naked and gave 'er shit[12]. But I didn't feel comfortable having penis to vagina sex with him because I was just [thinking] "I don't know this guy, I don't know where that's been", and neither of us had a condom on us so I [said] no. And uh, yeah, so it was an interesting encounter because I don't even know his last name, like there was no real like, I never, I'm not usually a one-night-stander so that was the first time I ever had a one night stand and it was kind of, uh, it was interesting because **there was none of that flow, that like ease**. There was the tiny bit in a sense there was the ease thing [because] we moved from one place to another and finally ended up together in his tent (*Harper, 25, Female, Queer*)

Harper describes consent as "an ease thing" where they move from place to place, each of which provides them with an opportunity to not end up in the tent together. Consent in this case is being constructed as implicit and "eased into". While not part of the legal definition of consent, this participant frames consent within the understandings of her own experiences. Compared to best sex, this lack of ease also seems to have contributed to making the experience less pleasurable. The description of her experience also differentiates that while they did not have a lot of chemistry and she did not achieve orgasm, that she left the experience without having felt used or pressured. However, Harper expanded on the impact of alcohol, discussing that it can provide a false confidence in the experience:

[12] Started to engage in sexual activities

> …once the buzz of the drinking wears off, I think the confidence, it's almost like it's a false confidence, right, like being drunk is a false confidence. So, you know, once the buzz kind of wears off you are less sure of what you are doing, whereas when you are sober and you are sure about what you are doing you are *really* sure of what you are doing. (*Harper, 25, Female, Queer*)

Thus, participants expressed that while they felt their experiences were consensual, they were not necessarily decisions that they may have made when sober. In these cases, alcohol acts as a lubricant to consensual yet "bad" sex, contributing to sloppier sex along with an impaired ability to communicate or to become sufficiently aroused. Through their negotiation and interaction with their partner, however, they come to understand the experience as something they still view as consensual.

While alcohol was not described as contributing to feelings of complicated consent in the participants' own worst experiences, in a focus group, alcohol was discussed as complicating the perception of consent for those outside of the encounter. One female participant in the focus groups discussed that when she was in university a few years previously, there was a culture around women who wanted to have sex but would get drunk in order to facilitate the encounter. She described that while alcohol is often perceived as complicating one's legal ability to consent, whether drunk sex was consensual or not is based on individual perceptions and levels of comfort in having drunk sex. For example, in the same focus group, a female participant who had drunken sex with a man, encountered a worrying situation when a friend labeled her encounter as rape:

> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: I had a one-night stand where I was drunk and the guy was drunk…I was telling a friend of mine about [it]… and she goes "Well you were too drunk to consent, he raped you" and I was like "whoooaaaaa, no"…I [said] "no, that's not true at all" and she [said] "no, he did, that's not okay, are you okay?" and I [said] "it was totally consensual, it was totally mutual"
>
> FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: she was also being super sexist, you [could have technically] raped him

MALE PARTICIPANT 1: I don't think it's somebody else's place to say

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: no, it was a weird…

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: if you were raped, nobody else can say you were raped except you.

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: …that word has so much behind it that for her to [say I was raped] …I was so uncomfortable with the conversation on so many levels

MALE PARTICIPANT 1: like it's definitely something that terrifies me as a man

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: right?

MALE PARTICIPANT 1: if somebody overheard that conversation and maybe missed a couple of words, all they hear is like "John, rape" and boom, the rumour mill goes into action

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: I shut it down really quick, I [said] "no, that's so inappropriate for you to say". To be in that situation for the first time in my life where it was like "whoa…we have very different ideas of what consent is". I think part of it was her upbringing and her background because she's from a very, very, conservative background. …For the first time in my life to question what I see as consent is maybe not what somebody else sees as consent.

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 2: but also, for someone else to take a really positive experience that you had and just [turn it on it's] side, it's really hurtful

FEMALE PARTICIPANT 1: …but yeah, and it just floored me, absolutely. But…since then too, [I] have been super careful about any sexual activities that I partake in to make sure to clarify consent because it scared me so much and to have that, like I never want to be a part of a situation like that ever. And so, I'm, it literally did effect kind of how I go about my business. (*Mixed Focus Group 2)*

In the participant's situation, she had a good experience and did not view the situation as assault, but it demonstrates how complicated the issue of consent is. The Canadian law exists to protect people, and alcohol impairment presents a concerning issue on being fully able to consent. As described by the participants, consent is perceived differently based on life experiences and socialization.

Although research shows a pervasive culture of alcohol and hooking up (Claxton et al., 2015; Gunby et al., 2012: 85; Kramer, 1994; Sumnall et al., 2007), whether this leads to more or fewer consensual experiences is less clear. Some respondents rejected the notion that all sexual

encounters involving alcohol should be defined as rape. As the above participant argued, the labelling of all drunken sex as rape may be sexist by relying on gendered stereotypes of women as powerless victims without agency and men as presumed aggressors. This double standard felt to be unfair to both the woman who had been in the situation for inaccurately capturing her experience, and to the male participant hearing the story. The male participant was scared by the idea that he could be called a rapist in a situation where both parties were equally drunk. Thus, there may be an element of subjectivity in deciding whether to label sex while drinking as consensual or as assault.

While I did not have enough data related to this subject, this notion of fear of being labeled a rapist due to intoxication and having a balance between assuming rape and assuming consent requires further exploration. It may be the case above that the woman did not want to consider the situation rape. Within patriarchal culture, women are involved in the protection of men (hooks, 2004; Katz, 2019), specifically protecting them from shame and guilt (Manne, 2019). The anxiety that is expressed by the male participant is perhaps a reflection that women are no longer protecting men. This fear and anxiety that younger men may be experiencing because of the #MeToo movement may be a sign that the privilege that has been afforded to them when women place the guilt on themselves is being stripped away.

Lack of connection – it's just "not good"

While best sexual experiences were enhanced by emotional connections, part of what made for worst but clearly consensual experiences was a lack of chemistry or connection between the participants and their sexual partners. Alexis noted that her experience lacked physical chemistry as she felt she and her partner were incompatible and not "on the same wavelength":

> it was like kind of one of those things where you are like "is it over yet" like you are like "this is boring", like we weren't using lube and I definitely needed to use lube and I was just like holy shit can this just be over, because I'm not in pain or anything but it's obviously just like awkward and...I think I kept on telling him to pull my hair and he wouldn't pull my hair or anything or do anything fun and I was just like kind of laying here and [laughter], this isn't fun. It wasn't, I wouldn't say it was, it was like not like bad in the sense that it was uncomfortable or forced or anything, it was just not good sex, the chemistry wasn't there
>
> INTERVIEWER: the chemistry, okay, I was going to ask-
>
> ALEXIS: yeah, not compatible sex
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, the thing you didn't like about it most was just that incompatible, no chemistry
>
> ALEXIS: yeah, like not on the same wavelength, that sort of stuff. (*Alexis, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

Alexis contributed to an important distinction between just "bad" sex and the grey area, saying that she did not feel uncomfortable or forced, but the sex was bad because they lacked chemistry and connection. Throughout participants' descriptions of their worst experience, it became clear there was a difference in feelings of consent. While there was a lack of chemistry for those which I analyzed and categorized as grey experiences, they were more predominantly lacking a sense of agency and empowerment. Comparatively, in the not-so-great experiences, such as the one described by Alexis above, she still felt choice within the experience and did not feel used.

In addition to a lack of chemistry or connection, other participants shared that "just not good sex" was often a result of lack of skill. Harper's (*25, Female, Queer*) bad experience with a male partner she had met on a trip, lacked pleasure, noting that she was unable to have an orgasm. She deduced that it was a lack of connection and felt that it could have been due to a lack of skills on his part. Her partner kept changing positions and going from one to the next, and when her partner asked why she was having a hard time reaching orgasm, she told him it was due to alcohol and dehydration. While her partner was taking some direction from her to try to

improve her experience, the actions he was taking were still not working for her so she faked her orgasm in order to get the situation over with:

> I was like this isn't working for me and then he kept saying things like "have you ever came before?" and I was like "what? Yeah", and he was like "oh because sometimes it's harder if you haven't" and I [thought] maybe you are just not good at this, like don't put this on me. It was such a weird… and I didn't know what to say, so I kept saying like "oh you know how guys can get whiskey dick, girls can get whiskey dick too, I'm just like pretty drunk and I'm dehydrated", and like just kind of put it all on that but it was just kind of a weird thing…and [we] tried to be like communicative and "try this", "try this", like, "do it this way"…[but] he was switching through things, but when we were in certain [positions] I was like "okay, this could work, but try it a little bit like this" and he was receptive to that, but like I don't know, there's just something, I don't know what it was but I couldn't come that night and I was like this is really kind of, like it just didn't work for me. Eventually I just faked it because [I thought] "this has to end, I'm so over this", but yeah, it was just a really, it wasn't like, it wasn't bad per say, I can't remember, saying it, it wasn't bad, like it wasn't creepy or anything like that, **it just wasn't good**. (*Harper, 25, Female, Queer*)

Harper felt that while the experience did not make her feel anything negative, the sex was just not good. Again, this was an important distinction that participants made of their worst sexual experiences: those that made them feel uncomfortable, and those that were described as just not good or pleasurable. While further explored in the next chapter, her experience is also an example of women avoiding telling the man something negative about his actions, instead covering it up or placing blame on themselves (i.e., that Harper had the equivalent of "whiskey dick" rather than telling him he was just not good). Further, faking orgasm was for Harper a way to end the experience. However, in this case, there was an equal focus on her pleasure during the experience, and while she was not able to reach orgasm, the experience ended based on whether she received pleasure, and not just whether he did. This distinction is quite relevant in terms of differentiating women's grey experiences from those which are just awkward or sloppy. The focus was still on Harper, rather than feeling as though she was being used or just there for his pleasure.

Hookups

Part of what contributed to a lack of connection was when sex took place in the context of a hookup. For many respondents, open communication and emotional connections were important components of good sex, which hookups did not seem to involve. Logan (*22, Male, Heterosexual*) feels that hookups are just a kind of release instead of about having pleasurable experiences with someone you are emotionally invested in. Harper (*25, Female Queer*) mirrored these statements about the importance of feeling invested in a person during sex. She states that while she would not change the bad experience she had, she would have preferred it to have been with someone with whom she shared more of an emotional connection, which would have increased the overall pleasure of the experience:

> …It's not that I wouldn't do it necessarily, but I wish … I wouldn't have been so drunk. I think…some people seem to really enjoy the one-night stands, but I feel like it was just very shallow and, like, I think part of that shallowness defeated the actual pleasure of it. So, had I not been drinking I [think I would] have gotten to know him better and then maybe the next day tried something [once] we were, you know, more connected emotionally or something. I think it could have made it better. (*Harper, 25, Female, Queer*)

Hookups or one-night stands where people do not know each other well enough to have an emotional connection can thus result in less pleasure, especially when alcohol is involved.

Similarly, Charlotte (*25, Female, Queer*) experienced less pleasure and more negative experiences, including both assault and grey-area sex, with a stranger than with her casual sexual partner. She described her experiences of sex with a stranger as "horrible" because she felt that there was an expectation for pleasure only for the stranger and not for her. When she is with her casual sexual partner, there is more emphasis placed on her needs:

> …I think [pleasure and relationships are] pretty directly linked because I think when I look back to some of the times where … I'm like "oh that was really horrible" or "I really didn't enjoy that" … it often was [with] a stranger or someone that I just met. [I] sort of jumped into the idea that I just needed to protect myself in that way or to

> sort of fulfill that expectation [that sex is for them]. So, then already the focus is not on me and my pleasure, in my own mind as well as in their mind. They very much fulfill that idea that, I guess the notion or the perspective or perception that sex is for them, [that] they are taking something, and there is not that kind of give and take that exists that I would say with [my casual sexual partner]. He definitely is not selfish in that way or he is much more aware of me and my pleasure (*Charlotte, 25, Female, Queer*)

Charlotte's analysis that there is an unstated expectation in hookups that the pleasure is for the male partner and not for her, was also reflected by men in the interviews. For example, Shawn (*24, Male, Heterosexual*) stated explicitly that one-night stands are a "get in and get out" situation. He feels there is no communication between the two partners to express their likes and dislikes to make sex better, and therefore one should expect that sex in hookups will not be very good:

> INTERVIEWER: In the situation [of hookups] do you let your partner know what you liked or what you didn't like? And how did you let them know that?
>
> SHAWN: no… they're just one-night stands, that sucks, that was it. Got out and go[13]. (*Shawn, 25, Male, Heterosexual*)

Perceptions of one-night stands are already assumed to have negative outcomes and to not go well. As Shawn puts it, by getting out after the hookup is done, the expectation is not to provide your partner with much feedback on how to make things better for next time, as there will not be a next time. Further, Shawn's outlook of having a hookup and then getting out of there also implies more focus on his own pleasure and singular goal of getting what he needs – to orgasm – and then leave. His description of hookup experiences further normalizes not-so-great hookups as primarily for men's pleasure.

Providing feedback to one's partner during hookups or bad sex do not appear to be the norm, even though communicating would improve the situation. However, two of the women, Alexis (*24, Female, Heterosexual*) and Scarlett (*24, Female, Heterosexual*), discussed that they

[13] Participant most likely meant "get in and get out".

are actually *more* vocal about how to make bad sex better in hookups than when they are in a relationship. As discussed in the last chapter, Scarlett was adamant about not needing a man for pleasure, and does not want to waste her time, so, "he better know where [the] clitoris is." Alexis takes a similar approach:

> ALEXIS: …yeah in a relationship, if I don't come but my partner comes, that's great, because it's more of a [give and take] … I care more about their pleasure too. [For a] one-night stand, obviously I want them to get off but at the end of the day they are probably going to get off. They are a guy, it's not going to be hard typically for them, yeah, because they will get there eventually, let's focus on me in the meantime...Honestly, the last one night stand I had to keep on telling him "can you be gentler with your fingers because like what are you doing, you are just stabbing down there with your fingernails, be careful", yeah, I was just like "slow it down".
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, do you try and give that kind of communication and feedback?
>
> ALEXIS: yeah, I'm pretty verbal if somebody sucks at something. I feel bad sometimes. Yeah, like in a relationship I'm much nicer but if it's a one-night stand I'm just like "nope, doesn't do anything". Like I feel if you are fucking someone for the purpose of fucking someone and just…but when I'm having sex with someone I just feel like if it's just sex then why not get what you are there for kind of thing. If you are in a relationship, yeah you can talk about it and be like "hey maybe next time [do this instead]", or you can just wait till next time and mention something during, but I don't feel the need to be as aggressive, sorry. Maybe it's just because it's a one-time thing and I'm like okay, well this is the only chance I have to tell this person that they are sucking at this or that they need to do more of this or be more gentle. Like, who didn't tell them before? Like, continue on, the next poor girl is getting stabbed [by his finger] (*Alexis, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

Like Scarlett in the previous chapter, Alexis feels that since the guy is most likely going to reach orgasm, she focuses on ensuring her own pleasure for one-night stands. Unlike in her committed relationship, she is much more verbal about guiding her hookup partner and providing criticism and advice where necessary. Alexis is not concerned about the feelings of her hookup partner compared to those of someone she is in a relationship with. Alexis is demonstrating empowerment and assertiveness, showing that hookups are not just for men's sexual needs, but women's as well.

Alexis is also acting in solidarity for future women that may have sex with her hookup partner, by telling him how to improve. While one could assume that in general, one does not actively prepare a partner in a committed relationship for future relationships, hookups as one-time events do not have this same expectation. Thus, hookups can act as spaces for seeing what is more or less pleasurable and for correcting and improving behaviour, if there is communication between parties. As reflected in the participants' experiences, men were generally guaranteed their own pleasure, however, women needed to work for, communicate, and advocate for theirs (and for future women). As such, when Alexis and others such as Scarlett were assertive about their pleasure during hookups, they were supporting other women's future experiences while also challenging expected passive roles within hookups.

Socialization of sexual pleasure

Many of the women's worst sexual experience were due to a lack of pleasure on their part, but where sex was still pleasurable for their male partners. These patterns seemed to stem from internalized expectations based on stereotypical assumptions about the primacy of men's sexual pleasure in (hetero)sexual sex. However, these assumptions about male pleasure lead to bad and unpleasurable sex for women. Camila (*23, Female, Queer*) discussed that when she was less sexually experienced, she assumed sex was primarily to make men happy. Due to these expectations of pleasing men, Camila described that her first-time having sex was not pleasurable for her, but that she had not expected anything different:

> …you hear a lot as a teenager about how it's all about pleasing the guy. I guess I didn't expect to feel that much pleasure myself so when I didn't feel it, I guess it wasn't a surprise, which is so sad. But you know, when you are young you hear a lot about how to make guys like you, how to be attractive, how to be this and that, and it's, well I don't know if this has changed you know, because I am not a teenager anymore but it was, yeah, there was so much emphasis on how to make the guy happy and you know how to please him and not so much about how to enjoy yourself, how to have a good

> time, so yeah, I guess I didn't really have good expectations…I mean at least technically [I wasn't] disappointed then (*Camila, 23, Female, Queer*)

Camila's experience reflects that when women are not given good expectations about their own sexual pleasure, this perpetuates the notion that heterosexual sex is for men's pleasure. As Camila states, she received more knowledge about how to attract men and make them happy rather than how to achieve orgasm or enjoy sexual experiences.

When Scarlett realized that sex was not going to be like the romance novels that she read when she was younger, she sought more information and received some sexual health education from her family. Her sex education was positive and provided her with the empowerment and comfort to talk about sex and her likes and dislikes. She was also given a book called *Tickle His Pickle: Your Hands-On Guide to Penis Pleasing* by Dr. Sadie Allison. As she shared:

> …growing up I read a lot of romance novels, and it's always about the guy and the guy being able to make the girl come in two seconds. I was like 14, 15, reading these and I'm like "oh my gosh this experience is going to be amazing" and it was [in reality] "oh, this is really painful, very awkward. Oh my god. You don't have a six pack, all the books said you would" [laughter]. It was such a wake-up call being able to be [ask] "how do I do this?". I was very fortunate to have an open family so [my mom sent me to my aunt]. My aunt [gave me] a four-hour sex seminar, gave me a book called "how to tickle his pickle", gave me boxes of condoms. [She] took my finger and was [asked] "does this feel nice?", and I was like "not really", and she goes one second, put some lube on her hand and [asked] "how about now?", [and I said] "it's much softer", she goes "exactly, exactly". From the very beginning of the conversation [I] assumed [sex] was like the books and I was like well that was not how that book said it was supposed to be. My aunt was like "oh no, hunny, let's have an honest real talk about it" and I did. …
>
> Information was power for the situation and even though I had gone into my relationship being a virgin I just like absorbed all of this information and was so comfortable with it because I was never condemned for having sexual feelings for my partner and [was never told] "you shouldn't be having sex". My mother and my father never shamed me, they [never said] "you shouldn't be sexually active", they were like "[if] you are doing this, go get informed". I think for me that just set the tone that sex was never a bad thing and that I had a power and I had a voice in it, and that was so vital and so important to me …Just that one conversation that my aunt did [that I then shared with my friends], that she probably doesn't even think about, changed so many sex lives for so many people and made me so sex and body positive in a lot of ways because if you are not comfortable enough to have that conversation then you are not

> ready to have sex. That [voice and comfort] to me has always been so vital and so core of who I am, being able to say "yes" and "no" and being comfortable with [sex] (*Scarlett, 24, Female, Heterosexual*)

Scarlett has a very positive ideal surrounding sex and is comfortable in her ability to have honest conversations. She argues that the ability to have a voice during sex and say what you want should be an indicator of being ready to have sex. While *Tickle his Pickle* is more reflective of men's pleasure (the book tells women to embrace their sexuality by learning to please their partner), Scarlett received advice from her aunt about how lubrication can make sex feel good, challenging the notion that sex is only for men's pleasure. Scarlett shared her sex education with her friends, potentially empowering other women to also have pleasurable sexual experiences.

Just as there is pressure placed on women to get men to orgasm, there is a perception that there is pressure on men to perform and be experts on sex (Chambers et al., 2004). Taylor (*21, Female, Heterosexual*) argued that the same assumptions women receive about men's pleasure can equally impact men:

> TAYLOR: I think knowing what I know now, especially with who I am with now, I don't think guys are told that it's okay to not know everything, it's okay if your partner tells you things, it's okay if they don't come right away and like if you have to work for it, they [women] orgasm differently. And I think guys are a lot of the time just told "this is what you do, this is black and white"
>
> INTERVIEWER: this is what works, but-
>
> TAYLOR: exactly, for sure, and it's like, your orgasm is what matters kind of thing, they don't get told, well, females do it this way, others do it that way, like whoever [else] does it this way. I think there's a lack of knowledge there for sure. Even with females and men orgasming, you think that for the only way for someone to enjoy what you are doing is they have to come, or they have to orgasm, and that's not necessarily the case, like you don't have to all the time, and I think that's like a huge lack of information that's been told to people for sure, yeah. (*Taylor, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

Taylor is challenging the notion which stems from media and pornography (see Tiefer, 2004) that sex is the same for everyone and there is only one right way to do it. Similar to statements in the previous chapter, Taylor tries to normalize that orgasm may not happen all the time but does

not mean that they did not enjoy the experience as whole. Taylor also implies that men should be told that listening to feedback from a partner is acceptable, and not be expected to already have everything figured out.

Finally, when expectations shifted away from the singular goal of orgasm, space opened up for sex to not be so bad. For example, Paige shared that times when sex was turning "bad" because she was unable to have her own orgasm, she shifted to helping her partner reach orgasm. Thus, rather than just wishing for sex to be over and for her partner to "finish already," Paige accepted that she was not going orgasm and then refocused on the satisfaction of getting her partner off:

> I think when that happens [not having an orgasm] for me anyway, it like ends up being more about the other person's pleasure than yours so you accept the fact that it's not going to happen for you, so you try to make it about them…sacrificing your own pleasure because you end up taking instead of having physical pleasure for yourself you end up getting your satisfaction through helping them reach physical satisfaction, so, that was my goal, to stop worrying about myself and try to do it for him. (*Paige, 25, Female, Heterosexual*)

Therefore, a key distinction between grey area sex and bad/mediocre sex is that bad is separated by intentional aspects of pleasure. *Waiting* for something to be over, such as a man reaching orgasm, compared to *helping* and *wanting* them to get there mark a key difference between bad and grey. Further, shifting from an expectation that sex will be good to acceptance that sex is just not going well and being able to voice this feeling, can perhaps help keep a bad experience from getting worse.

Expectations and let downs

Bad or awkward sexual experiences stemmed not only from a lack of emotional connections, but also from a disconnect between expectations that sex would be good versus their lived experiences, leading to disappointment. As such, some of the participants chose their

first-time having sex as one of their worst experiences. Often their first-time was marked by lack of knowledge leading to awkward and sometimes painful experiences. Emily's (*24, Female, Heterosexual*) bad sexual experience was her first-time having intercourse, where she was in quite a lot of pain and discomfort but waited until her partner had his orgasm. Emily's partner said "sorry" about the pain but kept proceeding anyway since she wanted him to finish. Emily wished that she had had more knowledge about how to have a positive sexual experience, as all the negative stories she heard from her friends about the first time being painful led her to be very clenched and unrelaxed before she even got to the point of intercourse. Emily felt that if she had received better sex education beforehand that did not focus on pain but rather on tips such as using lubrication and aspects of pleasure, she would have been more relaxed and had a less painful experience.

Austin's first time was also negative, noting that he and his partner did not know what they were doing:

> …it was just, maybe it was just us both being uncomfortable with not knowing what we were doing and like just yeah, we just didn't know what we were doing, it didn't feel right, halfway through we just looked at each other and like, this isn't working out you know so let's just cut it loose, let's just stop, so yeah (*Austin, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

Austin felt that he and his partner had a clear understanding that the situation was just not working out between them due to their general lack of knowledge about sex since that was their first time. Daniel's (*24, Male, Heterosexual*) worst sexual experience was also due to being inexperienced:

> I think, I don't know, we weren't, neither…we were both lousy kissers. Neither of us really knew what we were doing, as much as we probably, or at least me, I can't speak for her, but as much as we like to think "oh yeah, I'm great", it's like no, no, no, I had no idea what I was doing. And uh, I think as a result too, what ended up happening…there [was] just no taking turns of like "okay you lead for a little while

> and then I'll lead for a little while" and you develop an understanding of when you can both, I guess, like participate equally. (*Daniel, 24, Male, Heterosexual*)

One positive aspect of bad sexual experiences then, is that they can provide information about likes and dislikes to make for improved future experiences.

Participants' stories of sexual encounters that did not go as planned demonstrate that not every instance of sexual activity is successful or pleasurable, and that this in itself is normal and not necessarily problematic. Lack of knowledge led them to develop expectations for sex based on media and their peers. Many reported a belief that sex was supposed to be either amazing or painful, ultimately leading to disappointment for the former and fear for the latter, both of which leading to bad sex. Expectations which failed to capture the reality of what sex can actually entail, such as inability to maintain erections or to reach orgasm, often led to bad sex because participants struggled to know how to cope with normal problems and often interpreted them to be signs of bigger problems. For example, Paige (*25, Female, Heterosexual*) described her bad sexual experience as due to her then partner's frequent inability to orgasm as a result of his mental health problems. Paige said that while consent was always verbally given and that there was a lot of verbal discussion between them, his inability to orgasm made both of them feel poorly about themselves and the relationship. Paige took that experience as a direct insult to her femininity:

> PAIGE: …neither of us ever finished.
>
> INTERVIEWER: okay, neither of you, okay
>
> PAIGE: yeah, I think like one time he did, but it was like, that was a solitary act for him, but this time it started to feel like it was my fault like I wasn't sexy enough or I wasn't attractive…that's when I kind of got upset afterwards and I asked him …"is it me, am I not doing something to help you stay like turned on or like making your attraction and something like that" and he always was like "it's not you", which I mean I believe because I think he just had other mental issues happening, but yeah.
>
> INTERVIEWER: okay, um, so I'm asking how you felt throughout the experience so obviously you were-

> PAIGE: like not enough in a way
>
> INTERVIEWER: not enough?
>
> PAIGE: feminine, like I…
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, it was making you feel less feminine because…
>
> PAIGE: inadequate, yeah, inadequate as like a sexual partner from him because the expectation is that they want to be with you and have like intercourse and stuff and they're into you so much that they can't help themselves but finish, I guess. So, and like time after time it doesn't happen and you are like okay, it has to be me. Right? So emotionally that way and obviously like physically nothing ever happened for me. (*Paige, 25, Female, Heterosexual*)

Paige further discussed that what contributed to feeling inadequately feminine was that her friends had provided expectations that men are supposed to become so turned on with just the idea of sex:

> INTERVIEWER: because the expectations is, you're a woman, men want sex, therefore …
>
> PAIGE: yeah and especially when you have friends who are like "omg the guy that I was with like he was so turned on that he came too soon" and or like "we went all night like we went four times in one night like he couldn't get enough" and you are like wow, we had sex for [not very long] and he loses his erection or like just can't get there and you know, and it's like how does that, when everyone else is telling you something else, that that's what I should be getting and I'm not, over multiple experiences [with the same partner] like that, I'm the common denominator here. It makes you feel like shit. (*Paige, 25, Female, Heterosexual*)

Paige's experience was thus in direct conflict with the traditional sexual script that men are always eager and ready for sex. Due to these expectations, reinforced by her friends who had partners that came too soon from being so turned on or had sex all night, without an alternative script, left Paige feeling inadequate. Overall, how young people are socialized to think about sex becomes tied to their internal association with their gender and thus their views of themselves as humans.

Discussion

"Bad/mediocre" sex is defined as consensual sex that is unpleasurable, awkward, or uncomfortable for at least one party. Similar to Herbenick et al.'s (2018) findings that

individuals who have been drinking often report less sexual satisfaction than those who have not, participants' bad sexual experiences were often made sloppier and more awkward because of their consumption of alcohol. However, although alcohol facilitated bad sexual experiences, often what made the drunken sex bad had more to do with inexperience and overly optimistic expectations about what sex was supposed to be like. Bad sex was more likely to be due to experiences not lining up with traditional sexual scripts of what is considered "good sex", such as sex involving a "natural" progression and intense emotional connections. Thus, alcohol did not cause "bad sex" so much as it enabled people to get into sexual relationships that had few of the characteristics likely to lead to good sex.

Bad sex often arose among those who were inexperienced and lacked knowledge around sex. I argue that this lack of knowledge places people in situations where they may not be empowered enough to make informed choices, thus causing them to rely on stereotypes around gendered sexual norms. Sexual scripts provide meaning and direction for how sex should go (Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005), allowing people to interpret the behaviour of others (McCormick, 2010). If a person is working from a script that assumes that sex is always amazing, good, or fun, they may rely on that script, interpreting it based on stereotypes rather than previous experience or comprehensive education about sex. In other words, both men and women were often let down when there was a disconnect between their expectations and the actual outcome (see Martino et al., 2009; Zeelenberg et al., 2000). However, this disconnect was more likely to emerge when participants acted out scripts based on gendered social norms that prioritize men's sexual pleasure over women's.

Status characteristic theorists have shown that performance expectations and outcomes are based on the most salient characteristics, gender being one (Ridgeway, 2006). Thus, the

gender of the person they are engaging in sex with carries assumptions about what the outcome of sex will be. When people have no other experiences to draw on, they will rely on these assumptions. Bad sex was reported as common in the early (hetero)sexual experiences of respondents and was more likely to involve male but not female orgasm. These experiences had an impact not only on the sexual satisfaction of participants but also had larger implications for some of the respondents' sense of self. As we see from Paige, the expectations that her friends provided her with that men cannot resist sex and are always ready and wanting, led her to feelings of inadequacy when her boyfriend was unable to perform in this anticipated way. According to Butler (2007), part of performing femininity involves being desired by men. If gender is one's most salient identity and performing one's gender requires being desired by men, when male sexual performance is equated with male sexual desire, a woman's interpretation of her sense of self is unsurprisingly damaged when her boyfriend is unable to easily reach orgasm or stay erect. Similarly, if the performance of masculinity requires the expression of limitless desire for sex, a man's sense of self will be damaged when he is unable to follow through. In other words, the positioning of male sexual desire as primary – as it is through heteropatriarchy – has the potential to harm both men and women when reality deviates from expectations.

As such, having expectations based on gendered socialization and media about how sex should go, often made for upsetting, frustrating, and disappointing sex. Examples such as Paige whose friends provided her with unrealistic expectations, Tiefer (2004) argues that becoming more aware of others' experiences can lead to feeling unable to measure up. While this does not mean that we should not listen to the experiences of others, we should be aware of the consequences of only following or hearing about certain scripts. Sex is often not discussed openly, and people are not educated well enough on the realities of sex, resulting in assumptions

being made about what is considered “natural” (Tiefer, 2004). The concept of “natural” also implies heteronormative, good, healthy, and moral, especially in its comparison to homosexuality (Bem, 1995; Connell, 2009; Seidman, 2010; Tiefer, 2004). Further, how we see ourselves and our sexual behavior is also dependent on our comparison to others (e.g., comparing our sex lives to those of our friends; Tiefer, 2004). In this sense, this chapter has captured the queerness of sex – that it is sometimes awkward and never always perfect. Not everyone has the same experiences and acknowledging this helps disrupt what we understand as a normal or natural thing. More people need to voice the reality or “messiness” of sex, as this would challenge the assumptions of sex and stop the comparison to others that sex always progresses a certain way. Instead, people will come to see it as full of “incongruities and paradoxes” (Iasenza, 2010: 292).

Scarlett and Alexis were unique in terms of feeling empowered to make their sexual desires known during hookups, and Scarlett reported the most honest and open sexual education of any of the respondents. Nonetheless, Chambers et al. (2004) found that within sex education, girls are held more accountable for gaining knowledge and agency, whereas boys are framed as natural knowers and doers of sex. Framing women as in need of sex education and men as the masters of sex creates a double standard. If women are not empowered to freely express their sexual desires and men are assumed to uniquely *need* sex, then women are more likely to feel obligated to have sex when they do not want to, and mask their own natural desires. Thus, these patterns based on internalized gender role expectations lead not only to sex which is not very enjoyable, but also to grey area sex in which participants feel obligated to have sex when they really do not want to. Overall, these results suggest a need to stop thinking and teaching about

sex in terms of a uniform normal involving primarily male pleasure, in favor of more honest and open communication of what sex is and can be for all.

Chapter 8: Grey area sexual experiences

Up to this point I have described what made for participants' best and worst consensual sexual experiences. Best sex is typically characterized by a natural progression and intense emotional connections, and usually results in both parties achieving orgasm. Best sexual experiences ranged in same-sex and hetero-sex partners, whereas queer participants only drew on hetero-sex experiences for their worst. Bad sex was distinguished from good sex in that it is unpleasurable or physically uncomfortable, but was clearly felt to be consensual, even when only one partner achieved orgasm. As will be explored in this chapter, grey area sex was characterized as pleasurable for only one party, with the other person feeling obligated to have sex. This often resulted in participants feeling used. In these situations, consent was most often inferred based on non-verbal cues and few opportunities to say no. As such, participants described feeling that whether they consented to participate was questionable; in some cases, they stated explicitly that the encounter was non-consensual but still felt that the experience did not meet their criteria for sexual assault. While any type of sexual activity without consent, including consent while impaired by alcohol, obtained through coercion, or where consent is only assumed, could be lawfully defined as sexual assault (Government of Ontario, 2019), participants who described experiences that would fall into sexual assault did not label these experiences as such. The goal of this chapter is to explore and understand the underlying assumptions and behaviours that lead to these grey experiences.

Grey area sex is the result of pressure stemming from dichotomous heteropatriarchal social norms, particularly those described in the previous chapter around men being the knowers of sex and that sex should be good. The external pressure around men always wanting sex and woman wanting to be desired by men was described by participants as leading them to engage in sex

they otherwise do not want. All queer participants reflected on experiences with heterosexual partners which resulted in feelings of discomfort regarding consent. Adhering to the dichotomous heterosexual norms therefore resulted in both men and women describing feelings of being used. Sex was also mostly focused on male orgasm. Women were more likely to fake their pleasure to avoid negative consequences and were more likely than men to describe feelings of being "worn down" until they acquiesced to having sex. On the other hand, men were more likely to agree to unwanted sexual acts as a means of emotionally reassuring their partners or themselves that they were adequately desirous of the woman they were with or of women in general.

Relationships and consent

Many of the grey area experiences stemmed from feeling pressure to have sex, particularly due to an expectation that men are always ready and willing to have sex. For women, they felt an obligation towards providing men with sex and pleasure, and men felt pressure to appear as though they want to have sex regardless of their true desires. Being in a relationship often compounded these feelings due to a further expectation that being in a relationship implies ongoing consent (Lazar, 2010; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Further, men also noted a belief that one should be having sex regularly when in a committed relationship. While one might think that hookups may be more likely to cause grey area sex due to a lack of knowledge of the individual and a potential barrier in communication, participants, particularly men, experienced the grey area more so in relationships and with people they knew.

Despite significantly more attention given to women's experiences about consent, many of the men in my interviews expressed a variety of ways in which they had sex reluctantly or when they did not actually desire it for themselves. Logan and Lucas felt the need to engage in sex

because, similar to Paige above who associated her femininity with her partners' sexual desire and orgasm, the two participants felt the need to engage in sex in order to make their partner feel desired. Despite being out of love with their now ex-girlfriends, Shawn and Logan both felt pressure to have sex they did not want. Rather, Shawn described that having sex was just "what everyone does":

> SHAWN: …with my last girlfriends I mean, I don't know, like they were just girlfriends so sex was whatever, blah, blah, blah, but with the one I have now I don't know, it's just different. I like being with her, I like to have sex with her, where before it was just to have sex and you had a girlfriend because that's just what everyone does…it was all fun at first but then once I got to realize her personality then all the other, those things started coming into play
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, it makes it less enjoyable?
>
> SHAWN: yeah, you know, I wasn't looking forward to having sex sometimes because I wasn't attracted or things like that. (*Shawn, 25, Male, Heterosexual*)

Similarly, Logan began to feel that sex was becoming a chore when he started to lose his feelings of affection for his ex-girlfriend:

> I do remember when my last serious relationship was ending it was harder to get into sex and get involved and engaged and want to do it. And in my previous relationship I remember my partner was very sexually active, very high sex drive, and it became kind of like a chore. It was something that wasn't enjoyed because of the fact that I would be, I would come home and I would want to, for example, just relax and watch TV or something or play video games…and they would want to do stuff and for me there have been a couple months like that where it was [I] just didn't enjoy the experience, wasn't really as engaged to it and for me I think it kind of tied into being, becoming emotionally distant from that person. And then as that, you know, that distance and as those feelings started changing towards that person, for me, it then became harder to get engaged and to get into the, get into sex. (*Logan, 22, Male, Heterosexual*)

Feeling pressured into sex and doing it for the other person was a salient characteristic of grey area experiences for men. Even though they were not attracted to their partner and did not want to have sex with them, the men felt like they had to because it seemed like the thing to do. In this case, the men were following scripts that the women were enacting. Specifically, for women to feel like a person they need to feel desirable (Butler, 2007; Manne, 2019), ultimately enacting

patriarchal scripts themselves and placing pressure on the men. This is an example of how patriarchy not only hurts women, but men as well (hooks, 2004).

Lucas described his worst sexual experiences as the times that he has sex with his partner even though he does not want to, especially after fights. Lucas said that his girlfriend would be upset if they did not have sex, and thus emotionally supporting his girlfriend took precedence over his ability to say no. However, compared to others, Lucas explicitly labeled his experience as non-consensual:

> …we do have a weird thing sometimes that happens where we fight and then after the resolution…you know, just [once] we've decided to stop fighting but we are still feeling terrible… she'll initiate sex and 90% of the time I don't want to do it. But, refusing would obviously start another fight and it has before, so… when I'm doing it, I'm not doing it for you know pleasure [or] whatever, I'm doing it because I have to for her mental health or I feel I need to make her feel better and if I don't, or fuck up, it's going to end with her crying or whatever, so obviously I'm not going to do that. (*Lucas, 21, Male, Heterosexual*)

Lucas therefore has what he considered non-consensual sex to manage his girlfriend's emotions and to try to avoid more fighting.

Similarly, Logan commented that his girlfriend would often begin to feel bad about herself if he did not want to have sex with her. Logan elaborated on his unwanted experiences with his ex-girlfriend by discussing the challenges of consent that arise when in a relationship:

> I think, yeah, when you are in a relationship and this again, this happened when I went through this period with my ex it was about two and a half to three years into the relationship…I'm sure as it would be a challenge also for people, you know in serious relationships who are married for example, you know it becomes a more complicated question in respect to consent. Because, typically by stating that you know I'm not necessarily into it tonight, I don't really want to do it, I'm tired, especially if that starts happening frequently then your partner would start then interpreting [it as] "I'm doing something wrong, I'm not doing something right, it's my fault"…it becomes a harder thing and it would become more challenging to…to come up with ways to say that I'm not interested, you know. It became challenging because, again, you don't want to make her feel bad about herself or her body but at the same time it's just because of that growing distance it just wasn't there. And I think it was her not quite realizing that that distance was coming, and therefore rather than thinking that "oh he's not into me

> because of the fact that he doesn't love me anymore", it was "oh maybe he's not into me anymore because I'm putting on weight or because I'm not pretty" or something like that. (*Logan, 22, Male, Heterosexual)*

Logan therefore describes that consent can become complicated in a relationship if one partner does not want to have sex but also worries about making the other person feel loved and attractive. Logan said that part of the reason that he still engaged in sex was to avoid making her feel bad about herself:

> …there was a point when I did state exactly how I felt, you know that I'm not interested in doing it [for] the 5th time [that day] or whatever, and I remember she didn't take it very well and she asked "am I not pretty?" it was kind of a hit to her confidence because it was like "what do you mean you don't want to have sex?" and it was a challenging situation because then it was not wanting to instill that feeling of self-doubt and a hit to her confidence, it was not wanting to, you know, to make her feel bad about herself and her body because of the fact that I was no longer as sexually interested in her at all. It was tough because I was trying to tell her how I felt while trying to do it in a way that wasn't, wasn't going to destroy herself confidence and how she viewed herself for example. (*Logan, 22, Male, Heterosexual*)

Logan's ex-girlfriend therefore felt that his sexual desire and interest was in direct relation to her self-identity. Lucas described similar feelings to Logan in that while it would be "pretty nice" to "not be expected to" have "non-consensual sex", that when he did let his partner know his lack of desire, the situation would end in an argument.

> INTERVIEWER: during these experiences where you are engaging and you don't really want to, do you ever talk about it or let your partner know what's up or you are just kind of doing it for that person?
>
> LUCAS: I have before, which ended badly so now I don't, that's the long and short of it (*Lucas, 21, Male, Heterosexual*)

Overall, men felt like they did not have the space to voice the fact that they did not want to have sex, and that refusing would lead to an argument.

Feeling persuaded and having one's non-desire for sex ignored by one's committed sexual partner was also experienced by Charlotte, who sees the grey area as times in which one feels the need to "push through" for the sexual benefit of the other person:

> My [idea of the] grey area comes more from…being sort of tired but feeling like "oh, he wants to have sex tonight, [so] I should, I'll just push through, I don't really want to" or you know even just half way through kind of, switching and being kind like "oh, this is uncomfortable now" or it's just going on too long [so] I kind of want to stop, but then [thinking] "no, just push through, don't say anything, it's fine" because I kind of care about him or whatever (*Charlotte, 25, Female, Queer*)

Charlotte provided an example of when she felt the need to just "push through" and have sex for the other person because you care about them. When her casual sexual partner had been drinking, and she had not been, she had no interest in having sex with him at first. Charlotte said that while her partner has never made her feel uncomfortable, that he has made moves to convince her to have sex when she was showing no interest:

> [I] went over to his place and I was pretty tired…[and] sober, and I was lying on his bed and he's really, and I don't want to paint him by any stretch in a bad light because he is really respectful and he's never made me feel uncomfortable – and he was unaware of my previous experiences of assault, so it's hard for him to understand how I feel – but this night was lying on his bed facing away from him outside of the covers, I'd like taken off my jeans and I was in my t-shirt just curled up and rolled away from him. The lights were on, he was kind of getting ready for bed and then he was [being] so persistent, not in any way that was aggressive it was just that kind of…he was kissing my shoulder or had his hand on my side or whatever it was and just kind of, I could tell he was trying to get something going and I had my eyes closed, like I literally [had] my eyes closed and he was kissing me and I [just thought] "ugh, it's a holiday, okay, fine, whatever." [For the] first bit I [thought] "[I] don't really want to do this", and then you [think] "okay I can do it, it's cool, it's fine." So, in the end…I wasn't upset that we'd slept together or anything, it wasn't that I didn't want to sleep with him, I was just not showing any signs to him that I was into it at first, for sure. Yet he [had] persisted and kind [of] worn me down almost and then [I] complied. Afterwards I thought back about it the next day and just kind of [thought] "I don't really like that super much a lot"…I didn't bring it up, and then I found myself falling back into a very similar line of thought as before [when I was assaulted] when I kind of [made] excuses for their behaviour, [so I] was thinking…he was quite drunk and we often don't see each other when we are drinking or its not super common that he'll get really drunk that I'll be around and we'll do that, and I was like so maybe he just wasn't kind of, he wasn't as perceptive or he wasn't thinking as clearly. (*Charlotte, 25, Female, Queer*).

After the experience, Charlotte began to think of reasons why he did not pick up on her lack of interest in having sex and why he would continue to make a move anyway, blaming his lack of perception on his drinking. As discussed in the last chapter, alcohol was not described as always

negating or impeding consent but is rather subjective for each person. Charlotte argues that her partner being drunk provided her with an excuse for his negative behaviour. Alcohol can serve as a good excuse for women to protect men. Instead of him feeling shame or guilt over his actions, the responsibility is taken upon by the woman. Alcohol can thus be used as a tool for which someone takes blame away from someone else for aggressive behaviour that they otherwise should have known was not acceptable. Overall, Charlotte felt the need to push through the experience for him because she cared about him, regardless of how she felt. This feeling of needing to have sex even when you do not want to because the other person does and you care about them, is a general characteristic of the grey area for both men and women.

Some of the women said that they had engaged in sex just to form a relationship. Thus, the promise of a relationship can be a reason for consenting to sex against one's desires. Taylor discussed that she engaged in unwanted sex in order to establish a relationship with someone:

> INTERVIEWER: …you had kind of mentioned you wanting to be in a relationship, do you think that impacted this decision as well?
>
> TAYLOR: yeah, I think so. 100% it was the only reason I would have done that was because I wanted to be in a relationship with somebody and he was the one that was interested at the time, so it was like oh okay, alright then.
>
> INTERVIEWER: so, do you think the expectation was for you to [have sex]?
>
> TAYLOR: yeah, absolutely the expectation was that I would have sex, we'd go from there, absolutely. (*Taylor, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

While Taylor felt that her partner was not going out of his way to force her into having sex, she stated that he had used the promise of a relationship to get her to have sex: "we had kind of talked about it and then it was like okay well I'll date you if we have sex, it's like, 'oh okay, well I guess so then' [laughter]". Within this experience of being coerced, Taylor did not describe herself as being a victim, and instead described herself more as giving in. Taylor's description is in line with gender role pressure, specifically the notion that women are expected to want

relationships and that men want sex (Mehta et al, 2011; Sakaluk et al, 2014; Wiederman, 2005). Taylor's description is also an example of how "miscommunication" is applied to let such behaviours slide instead of calling it what it is, assault. Her "I guess so", which would normally be taken in conversation as someone being unsure, was ignored in favour of her partner's wish to have sex (see also Kitzinger & Frith, 1999). While most likely falling closer to sexual assault rather than a grey area, Taylor's experience demonstrates that her partner's behaviour of trying to convince her is in line with heteronormative sexual scripts. Specifically, where men think they need to be more assertive and persuasive, and that even if women say no or seem unsure, they assume the woman really does want to have sex.

Men pushing women for undesired sex to the point of a sexual assault was not unique to hookups or new relationships but happened in established relationships as well. For example, Scarlett described an experience that would otherwise be described as rape (although she did not describe it as such), when she woke up to her (now ex-) boyfriend trying to have sex with her. Knowing that it was an arrangement him and his previous girlfriend had, she forgave him. However, even though she had explained she did not want that to happen again, he attempted the same thing another time. Scarlett was very direct about her feelings of not wanting to be woken up with sex, and yet her boyfriend still attempted to have sex with her when she was asleep and unable to consent.

While female participants were more likely to share grey area experiences that occurred both inside and outside committed relationships, one young man in the study described his problematic experience with a woman he was not in a relationship with. Nate shared the experience of when a female acquaintance had come over to his apartment for what he expected to be a movie and snacks. However, once the woman had arrived, she initiated sex right away

with him. Nate describes the situation as consensual because he did not say no, however, he felt as though the women was just having sex with his body, and not the two of them having sex together; leaving him feeling less than human. Though he feels he consented through his lack of objection, he felt regret for having done so since it was not an experience he wanted to have:

> So anyway, she came around one day, just kind of grabbed my stuff and I was like okay this is happening, but I was at such a bad point in my life that I didn't value myself enough to say no, or "I don't feel like it" or anything like that, I shut down. And so, we did it, it was consensual from both sides and she didn't like, I didn't say no and I continued to do acts, so I gave my consent, just in the hindsight I should have been smarter. And the fallout from that too was probably one of the reasons I counted it as the worst sexual experiences, because I was a mess after that … I kind of felt like a piece of meat, kind of like, this person just wants sex and you are at this point the embodiment of sex, you are a just fleshy heap that they are going to use and when you're done it's over, it's fine…It literally felt like I wasn't there, like it wasn't having sex with Nate it was "X" having sex and somehow for some reason I was there just by proxy or by chance or by poor decision making. (*Nate, 22, Male, Queer*)

Compared to Nate's best experience where his partner had initiated, this experience was different when the woman initiated first because there was no previous relationship. Similar to findings from Ford (2018), Nate felt that if the woman had communicated earlier that she was interested in having sex, his experience may have been positive. Instead, the woman coming on to him was out of the blue, and he felt pressure to perform without feeling as though he wanted to have sex.

Nate's experience, while an example of unwanted sex, also parallels how popular culture hookups can guide expectations for sex. Nate's experience could be an example of inferred consent (see Muehlenhard et al., 2016) based on expected or assumed signals of initiating sex (e.g., "Netflix and chill"). Further, while Nate is the only person to make a direct statement about feeling devalued, the literature on sexual coercion and consent shows that women are more likely than men to experience situations in which they are devalued and lack agency (Ford, 2018; Powell, 2008; Powell, 2010). As women did not discuss feeling devalued the same way that Nate

does, women may view the grey area as a normal part of their sexual experiences, especially within the context of imbalanced pleasure scripts.

Silence and the grey area

Among participants, the progression that led to grey area sex was similar to the process leading to good sex. Both experiences followed the same script that assumes sex just naturally progresses or happens without verbal communication of consent. While legally, silence can be used as evidence of sexual assault, many of the respondents rejected identifying their experiences as assault when they did not verbally say no. One reason for this was an accepted heteropatriarchal assumption that men are normally "pushy" in their pursuit of sex (e.g., Alicia reflecting on her partners pushiness stemming from popular culture). Further, respondents seemed to believe that sexual assault only "counted" if violence was involved. Thus, there was a subjectively drawn line between what was considered "real" assault and what was just "normal" pushy sex, regardless of actual legal definitions of rape. This is in line with what Plante (2014) described as the "Goldilocks theory of sex". There is a perceived "just right" amount of assertiveness from men – not enough for it to become coercive.

However, the line seemed to move for Charlotte and Madeleine after they experienced what they considered a clear-cut sexual assault. Their experiences of sexual assault led them to feel more negatively about any amount of pressure to engage in sex. After their assaults, when their partners did not listen to their cues of disinterest or pressured them for sex, the experiences felt similar to the feelings of assault. Charlotte described that:

> …there are many times since [the assault] that I've felt sort of similar in the sense that I feel like I can't speak up or I feel like I can't express something or that they, I don't really want to be doing something but I'm doing it because I feel like I'm supposed to and I'm still not speaking up and I'm still not using some kind of voice to kind of actually say "stop", and I need to like obviously… like that is something I'm working

> on. But, it's interesting to me…I think about it that that is, it's not as easy to just sort of wake up one and be like "okay I'm just not going to ever do anything I don't want to do ever again" and so I think that first experience I can say in a pretty black and white way was not-consensual and I accept and agree, and will declare that. And then I think maybe as a result or just in comparison a lot of things after that have become quite grey (*Charlotte, 25, Female, Queer*)

Madeleine reflected that after her assault, when she engaged in sex that she felt pressured to have, she would become very emotional afterwards. Experiencing grey area sex for women who have been previously assaulted allowed them to compare the two feelings. They felt that times when they have been pressured were not quite assault as they did not match the severity of their other experiences, but still led to negative feelings. Thus, there appears to be a subjectively shifting and fine line between the respondents' conceptions of the grey area and assault, distinguished by some as acquiescence and some negative feelings, versus outright resistance and extreme negative feelings.

Reflecting on Charlotte's experience with her male partner, described just above, she emphasized that her partner was very respectful and had not ever made her feel uncomfortable. However, her experience offers an example where implied non-consent through silence was inferred to be an opening to try to convince her to have sex. Charlotte expands on her thought process after the event, discussing that a "grey area comes from the idea that… I wasn't vocalizing a no, but I really wasn't showing interest or on the flip side. The grey area comes when my internal dialogue is very much [saying] 'I don't want to be doing this, yet I am doing it anyway'". Charlotte's discussion offers a key point to distinguish how a grey area experience differs from "bad" sex or assault—sex engaged in for which one's inner dialogue and desires do not match the actions that we are taking or are allowing others to impose on us. An absence of saying "no" was a common reason my participants gave for why they categorized an encounter as not assault:

> …it was consensual because I didn't say no, my body language was off, but I did go through the motions. I think it was consensual, for the assault it wasn't consensual because I wasn't awake to consent, for this I was there and I could have said no but I didn't and that's, I feel like that's on me more than anything, I could have put a stop to it at any point, even with all those cards stacked against me I could have, and that's why I feel it was consensual. Because she said, "we are having sex", and I could have said "no", but I was in a bad space that I just didn't say anything (*Nate, 22, Male, Queer*)

The reason that Nate says that his experience is consensual is because he could have said no but did not. Lucas also described that during his unwanted experiences with his girlfriend that he did not make any sounds that he may normally make during their sexual experiences:

> INTERVIEWER: I do want to come back [to what you were saying about] the ways that you feel it's not consensual… I just want to make sure that I am clear with what you are saying in terms of the non-verbal stuff, so you being silent is indicating that you are not wanting to but…
>
> LUCAS: well in the case where I'm literally making no sounds, no grunts, no moans, no dirty talk, no nothing, it's usually indicative that I'm not into it at all because I'm not participating, I'm not trying to do anything, because it's a contrast to how I usually am where I'm [saying] "do you like that?"…kind of, at the very least engaging [somewhat] verbally... I'm not going to say that all the times where I've not consented that I've been completely silent and "oh it should be really obvious by now" [*changed voice*], sometimes I have because, you know, I've been questioned on my silence during the act and I'll just be like "oh I just couldn't think of anything" you know and then make some shit up later on. But yeah, the silence is, I don't know if it's such a great indicator of non-consensual stuff but I mean in my personal history that's kind of just like a, it's just one of those things that's an indicator for my behaviour, not other people's behaviour, you know, if I saw someone who was being silent I could just be like "well they are a quiet person like me" but for me personally, complete verbal silence is my, is one of my things when I'm not into something (*Lucas, 21, Male, Heterosexual*)

Although Lucas insists that the experience is non-consensual, he also wanted to make clear that he is neither a victim nor survivor of assault, because he *could* have come across as consenting in his silence or when he makes noises to avoid having his girlfriend question his interest. Thus, to him, he sees his experience as importantly distinct from sexual assault even if there was no consent and if at least one person clearly did not want to be having sex. As he goes on to say:

> … I mean as an example of how it could be consensual or come across as consensual is because I don't say anything because I don't want to risk offending the other person

> or make them feel bad, so it can come across especially if I initiated as something that I want to do. Um, how it can be non-consensual is I'm completely fucking quiet during the act, I'm like, I would hope that the person would pay attention and notice I am basically emotionless while I'm doing it, like a robot and also, I've told them periods of times that… I do not like doing that and the person seems to not either forget or not care. (*Lucas, 21, Male, Heterosexual*)

Often the reason for continuing or engaging in the first place has to do with wanting to avoid offending one's partner by directly stating no. However, Lucas identifies that being completely emotionless and unengaging should be an obvious marker to the other person that there is a lack of consent. The grey area thus sits at an intersection where one partner lacks interest, and the other should notice or is expected to take notice but doesn't, resulting in continued sexual activity.

Lucas' description of not wanting to risk offending someone is along similar lines to the female participants who shared that sometimes they felt safer going along with unwanted sex, fearing negative consequences if they said no. Female participants felt that men should not feel owed sex or expect it to happen just because they put in some effort. The problem of saying no to men who are expecting sex means that there is a potential for confrontation. In this sense, women are placed in vulnerable positions for saying no. Female participants discussed often feeling the need to say yes to having sex because of the potential danger of saying no to someone they are not familiar with:

> … I think it's probably more for women, it's sort of like we are obligated or we're…I feel like we set… we are sort of taught that we have to tread carefully, not to piss off men if they're trying to, you know, just even if you are not, if you haven't started having sex, but you are just at the stage of talking and you don't want to be like "no I don't want you because…". You don't want to piss them off because they can get aggressive, they can become violent. So, at least to me that's something that I always have in mind, especially if it's a guy that I don't really know very well, like I have to be careful you know, with how I say no, kind of have to be polite about it because you don't want to piss them off because you don't know what they are capable of. So, you kind of say "oh, not right now, maybe another time" you know, "I don't feel like doing this right now" just so you don't just say "no" very harshly, because you never know

> how they are going to act, which is really sad and very unfortunate, but it's how it goes. (*Female Group 1)*

Needing to tread carefully prior to anything sexual happening is quite daunting and presents a question of whether women are ever freely and honestly consenting if they are fearful of physical harm. This feeling reflects MacKinnon's (1989ab) argument that whether sex is consensual or against ones will is difficult to distinguish within male domination. Comparatively, the young men in my study never made comments about being placed in dangerous situations or needing to voice their opinions in certain ways as to avoid confrontation.

Part of what made confrontation difficult was the assumption that men know more about sex. Alicia described that for her worst sexual encounter, her partner took a "teaching role":

> he spoke about it more in terms of like "oh I'm going to teach you all these amazing things" like he kind of almost took on this like teacher type stance to the whole thing, not like a negotiation, more of a like a… there was a power dynamic for sure where it was like because he knew I was kind of on the end of less knowledge than he was, he found that it was his duty to teach me (*Alicia, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

Alicia joked that he did not teach her anything. However, because her partner felt that he knew more, he did not really ask questions or talk. This led Alicia to feel a need to pretend she was fine:

> Like we didn't even talk about it that much but he kind of assumed he was kind of like the guru of all things sexual and just went about what he did, like he didn't do it uncomfortably but I was like, he didn't even listen. So, I felt like he, like I was forced to even in times where it didn't feel comfortable to kind of pretend that it felt comfortable (*Alicia, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

This lack of negotiation and communication which followed an assumption that he knew more about sex than her resulted in her feeling the need to pretend to enjoy sex or at least appear comfortable. This experience of Alicia's demonstrates that women often do not have the space in the moment to challenge norms and behaviour. Like Grace's story with Ansari, it is not until after the encounter that one may have the voice to be able to communicate what was wrong.

Being aware of these dynamics has important implications for what consent means and how it is attributed, especially in cases where women are simply assumed to have regretted the experience (see Lisak et al., 2010; Spohn et al., 2014).

While women shared that some of the ways they make it clear that they are not interested in sex are outright statements of “no”, emotional stagnancy, “laying there”, and saying “ouch that hurts”, some women felt a need to take even less direct approaches in order to avoid potential confrontation. For example, some women used avoidance techniques such as telling a potential partner that they needed to go home, they were tired, or were on their period, in order to find tactful ways to shrug someone off and to make their needs heard without becoming confrontational. The perceived consequence of saying no was a clear and significant difference between the men and women I interviewed. Whereas men felt the need to say yes in order to not make their girlfriends feel bad or to risk appearing gay, women felt the need to say yes or to come up with an excuse in order to avoid a potentially physical confrontation. None of the men reported a fear of physical harm if they said no.

Pleasure and feeling used

Another salient characteristic of the grey area experience was that sex was only for the pleasure of the initiator, thus there was a lack of mutual desire. By not receiving any pleasure for themselves, participants reported that sex left them feeling used, which contributed to feeling as though the experience was not completely consensual. Both male and female participants discussed feeling as though they were only there for the other person’s pleasure. While none of the young women said they experienced an orgasm during their worst sexual experience, all the men did reach orgasm but reported that the experience was still not pleasurable. As Nate

described his experience, he was left feeling like his body was being used for someone else's pleasure, instead of a having a mutually satisfying experience with the person.

> [I] felt disgusting and wrong and used, and then afterwards even more so because you know, when you are done your mind starts racing, what am I doing, am I okay, what's going on, like stuff like that. …[I] just I didn't expect it, [and it was] not pleasurable other[wise] for the fact that the physical response was still there (*Nate, 22, Male, Queer*)

Regardless of his physical response to having sex, there was no actual pleasure due to his feelings of disgust and wrongness. Emily Nagoski (2015) describes this as arousal non-concordance. That is, when someone experiences a bodily function without actually experiencing pleasure. There is a myth that because men maintain an erection that it somehow means it was enjoyable and consensual, when this is not the case at all (Nagoski, 2015; Sleath & Bull, 2009). Overall, grey area experiences are those which left participants feeling sex had been one sided, resulting in discomfort. However, a potential gender difference is that men such as Nate and Lucas describe being able to mark the end of the event through their own orgasm, whereas women, as we will see below, described needing to wait until the man finished.

Pressure to make sure their girlfriends have an orgasm was not described by the men, instead they felt pressure to demonstrate desire and affection. Comparatively, for women, consenting to sex seemed to be regarded as consenting to participate in an act that will lead to men's orgasm but not necessarily to women's. As one woman in a focus group shared:

> you kind of are in the middle of it [PVI sex], and you feel obligated towards the person, or there is an expectation so you kind of finish it out till the end even though you are, kind of, just want this to be over…which doesn't make you feel very awesome. And the whole thing with sex would ideally be that everyone leaves somewhat satisfied or leaves feeling like they have a positive experience (*Female Focus Group 1*)

This notion of just needing to "fight through it" and feeling the need to just "get it over with" was shared by at least half of the women. Taylor described that while her worst experience was not completely uncomfortable, she just wanted the experience to be finished:

> at first it wasn't like not pleasurable but after a while it kept going and it was just like okay can we be finished with this? Yeah, like, I don't want to do this anymore, but I'll just keep quiet and kind of wait it out and see when he is finished. (*Taylor, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

For the female participants then, sexual experiences shift from bad sex to grey area sex when the sex goes from not only being unsatisfying, but to waiting for a man to finish and feeling like an object rather than a person. Whereas bad sex would end at the point that either party was no longer into it, grey area sex keeps going, usually until the man reaches orgasm.

Given heteronormative assumptions based on the coital imperative that the end of sex is marked by men's orgasm (Bogart et al., 2000; McPhillips et al., 2001), there may be an implicit assumption that consent to sex inherently implies consent to participate up to this final point. Camila, who discussed her experiences with both her current female partner and past experiences with men, felt that there is a sense of entitlement from men, or more generally, that there is a culture which centers on men's pleasure. Comparing her current relationship with her girlfriend (with whom she described her best sexual experience), the perception of her past sexual experiences with men was that all that mattered was that the man was enjoying sex. Camila acknowledges that she is not sure if the men just did not care or if they genuinely did not know any better:

> I think we are so used to as a culture, male pleasure being more important and being … I guess what you base everything off of, like if the guy is enjoying it and then after the guy has an orgasm it's over, it doesn't matter if you as a woman had an orgasm or not, so I don't know if it's just that they don't care or if it's just that they don't know any better (*Camila, 23, Female, Queer*)

When being used for someone else's pleasure and satisfaction, respondents shared that they started to question whether they had really consented, which felt quite different from their experiences that had involved mutual pleasure. Nate described that "…it wasn't [Nate] having sex with X, it was X having sex and [Nate] was just a platform to achieve sex". Being used for

pleasure, and thus not feeling treated like a person is a relevant characteristic of grey area sex. However, only women referenced waiting for their partners to climax, indicating that men's, but not women's, orgasm was a necessary condition for sex to conclude.

Similar to Alicia's statement above about needing to appear comfortable, participants felt like they were expected to pretend they were enjoying it, even when they were not. To avoid confrontation, women felt that it would be easier to give in and pretend rather than risk a confrontation. For example, Camila shared:

> CAMILA: I don't think there was that much [communicating] verbally…I don't think we talked a bunch; I think, you know every once in a while, he would [say] "does that feel good?", but I think that was about it
>
> INTERVIEWER: and would you just [say] "yeah?"
>
> CAMILA: "yeah sure, feels great" …[thinking] let's just get this over with. That's awful [laughter] (*Camila, 23, Female, Queer)*

This need to pretend was not unique to women. Men also felt a need to fake their feelings, often to avoid hurting the feelings of their partner. Stemming from expectations that men are supposed to always be turned on by women, Lucas described that when guys might not be into sex, or if they are just not in the mood and their penis is not erect, it can be seen as a "slap in the face" to women:

> I think for everyone it's a mental thing but for guys I know I can literally like [makes deflating sound] if I'm not in the mood, which is pretty [much], [it] can be a slap in the face to my partner.
>
> INTERVIEWER: and by a slap in the face to your partner what do you mean?
>
> LUCAS: well it wouldn't be exactly flattering if the person you were fucking just went limp mid act, you know? You'd be like "wow, am I that bad?" you know or something like that, like that's the natural immediate response to that. So, it puts the pressure on us even if we are not really into it to be into it or to try and make sure that we're capable. (*Lucas, 21, Male, Heterosexual*)

Comparing the responses of Camila and Lucas, we can see gender differences in the assumptions of how faking is to be performed. These norms and dichotomies are part of what queering

sexuality entails – challenging the norms and demonstrating that not everything fits into our expectation boxes. Heteropatriarchal norms perpetuate the expectation that men need to have an erection to prove their sexual attraction to a woman. Women, in turn, are expected to demonstrate that a man is good in bed by at least faking their pleasure through vocalizing it.

While I do not have findings that men can experience the same pressure, women felt a need to not bruise men's egos and to pretend they were enjoying themselves:

> ALICIA: [I felt like] I was forced to even in times where it didn't feel comfortable to kind of pretend that it felt comfortable.
>
> INTERVIEWER: and your reasoning for doing that was for his benefit or for your benefit?
>
> ALICIA: I didn't know how to communicate in terms of that. I guess it was more because of him, I didn't want his ego to be bruised kind of thing and I didn't necessarily know how to vocalize what I was feeling which was like "oh this doesn't work" without like you know… you are with a stranger and basically a stranger in their home and you are like "I'm in a very vulnerable position, let me just keep my mouth shut because I don't want to, I don't want to catalyze anything, I don't want to start any trouble that is unnecessary" because …I don't want to put myself at risk. This time I didn't have Uber or anything, I was in [city near university], and I don't live there [laughter] and I don't know how to get from [city near university] to [the university] and I needed him as a ride home so I was just like, I'm not in a favourable position to kind of speak up about certain things because I don't want a violent outcome so I'm just going to keep my cards on my side and just not say anything. (*Alicia, 21, Female, Heterosexual*)

In order to stay safe and not potentially hurt the man's feelings which may cause him to have a negative reaction when she still needs him to take her home, Alicia felt vulnerable and not safe to voice her true feelings about the experience or to end it. A female focus group participant discussed similar feelings about not feeling safe to provide honest feedback to someone about his sexual competencies:

> I think that, specifically in heterosexual experiences, being the woman in a heterosexual experience, if you've gotten to the point where you are, and even if you are kind of totally in, and yeah, I am having a really good time, but it's just maybe not quite working for you, I guess as well as it could, I do think that there is still a certain level of, you're expected to give some feedback without actually [saying] "do this this

> way"; not that kind of feedback. In the sense that you want to reassure them that you are having a good time, because I do think that there is this expectation, or this understanding, that the guy is going to be so good at giving it to you, that you are going to like, really like it. And then if you don't show some kind of, um, I guess affirmation or if you don't show some kind of signal, whether it's being loud or moaning or whatever, that that is the case, that he is making you feel great, I think that that again comes back to this sort of, like, tricky situation where people can get hurt. They can get, people can be embarrassed. People can maybe, I guess, get angry with you as a result of feeling like maybe if they are hurt or they are embarrassed about their own performance or whatever it is that they want to refer to it as, then they could take that out on you.
>
> So, I do think that there is a certain level of play and acting that comes in on, at least for me in my heterosexual experiences. On my part there's definitely a lot of times where I'm like, I should probably, like, make a bit more of a show right now that it's good even though it's not that good. And it's pretty much usually almost always exclusively, I don't do it for myself, I do it for the other person. I do it for them. I guess, to a certain extent I do it for myself. There is a nugget of fear that, I don't know, maybe they are going to be mad, so I should probably put on a show for them, right, and kind of protecting yourself by pretending in some ways. (*Female Focus Group 1*)

Women therefore, expressed a sense that part of their role in heterosexual sex is to reassure their male partner that he knows what he is doing sexually and is "so good at giving it to them," sometimes feeling like their safety depends on it.

Also frequently cited was faking pleasure out of the fear of hurting someone's feelings. During the same female focus group, a participant pointed out that this can be the result of heteronormative gender socialization where men's egos are tied to their sexual performance and need to be protected:

> Peoples' egos, when it comes to their sexual abilities, well regardless of, I mean, I'm sure there's probably studies that would prove that one gender is socialized to be more [sensitive] on that subject [than] others, I don't know, I haven't read them, so I'm not going to generalize. But people can get very touchy about their sexual performance I think, and I think that that then makes people involved in a situation wary about the way that they communicate with each other instead of being "oh, don't do that it hurts" or "I don't like that". You have to find a way to like be sexy about it and tell them to stop doing something without being like "stop doing that" so there is still this expectation that we are going to tiptoe around it and not just going to come out and say "I don't want you to do that" or "I do want you to do that" and like equally bring

> that agency in when you are a person in a sexual encounter. You also want to be able to ask for what you want not necessarily like a negative thing, you don't necessarily want to be like "don't do that", maybe you want [say] "do this", but that is also difficult to do for some of the same reasons (*Female Focus Group 1*)

Women felt the need to tiptoe around the topic and find coy ways of telling someone to stop doing something, instead of being more direct. Examples of turning down a man more easily than an outright no was saying things such as "slow down". However, not wanting to hurt a man's ego is still part of women's need to protect themselves:

> Saying "wait" or "slow down" or things like that are often times, in my experience, I've talked about it with friends, and, yeah, feeling like I don't want this to continue, I'll try and, instead of hurting that person's ego or kind of like rejecting them, a tactic that we've all sort of shared that we realized that we all sort of do, is "oh like slow down a bit" or like "whoa let's just wait for a minute" and making it not necessarily like you are kind of rejecting the other person, cause not only can that just be awkward in general but it can also at times, I've felt threatened when I've tried to sort of end it…that's a whole other thing, but that is something I find really difficult to. Because if you have one experience, that sort of shapes the rest of your experiences, you try to say no to someone and right after that, you are going to be less likely to come right out and say no, so you have to come up with these ways to come at this sort of, this like "no slow down" or "stop" or whatever, without being like "nooo" (*Female Group 1)*

Of note are the women feeling a need to protect men's egos by not telling them what they would like, in order to reinforce the notion that the man knows what he is doing and needs no instruction (similar to Alicia's "guru"). While Lucas noted his need to pretend at times that he was at least enjoying himself, the young men did not generally discuss this same need to feel safe and avoid conflict. Men also did not discuss feelings of obligation towards women's pleasure, or the need to have their girlfriend "hurry up and finish" so sex would be over. However, in an effort to not dichotomize experiences of men and women, it is possible that male participants happened to not share these experiences with me.

Discussion

A grey area of consent arises when there is pressure to engage in sex, particularly stemming from heteropatriarchal gender norms. Pleasure was often only experienced by one person, leaving the other to feel used and uncomfortable. These gender norms and sexual scripts may be more salient when it comes to the grey area for heterosexual sex, as all queer and bisexual participants discussed negative experiences when in a hetero relationship or hookup. Importantly, this should not be used to suggest that queer sex is always consensual or positive, however, it does highlight that queer sex may provide space for diverting or challenging traditional gender norms (see also Beres et al., 2004; Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994).

Generally, the grey area is similar to consensual behaviour for best sexual experiences, where consent is assumed implicitly via silence and a lack of a verbal statement of no, but overall lacking mutuality of desire and pleasure. Many of the characteristics of the grey area can be associated with sexual assault, except for the fact that participants do not see it as such. Participants do not feel it was assault because they were acquiescing/giving in versus objecting but being ignored. It is also possible that participants chose not to label it as sexual assault due to patriarchal socialization which leads women to protect men and men to protect their own image (hooks, 2004; Katz, 2019; Manne, 2019). Grey area experiences for both men and women stemmed from the need to meet internalized gender roles, whether those roles were for themselves (e.g., needing to feel feminine and desired, not wanting to appear gay), or for their partners (e.g. wanting to know their partner still desired them, not wanting their partner to feel bad or feel like they were not performing adequately). The grey area becomes normalized and confusing due to the heteronormative and gendered assumptions implicit in sexual scripts, though particularly maintained by patriarchy.

We can see the ways in which assumptions about gender roles guide expectations of sexual behaviour in the differences – and similarities – of how men and women experience grey area sex. Men were more likely to be pressured into sex within a relationship to demonstrate to their female partners that they desire and love them. The young women associated their boyfriend's desire as directly tied to their identity and value. This is reflective of Butler's (2007) theory that there is a cultural assumption that men will always be in a state of desire and women feel validated by being desired by men. Women did not describe the pressure for sex as stemming from a need to show their partner they desired them, rather, pressure stemmed from being expected to say yes, and out of a need to avoid potential confrontation. Therefore, staying silent and having consent be assumed, happened both inside and outside of a relationship. Regardless, the outcome of feeling used was the same for both men and women.

For both women and men, best and bad/mediocre sexual experiences are those in which they feel they have the most control and space to stop the interaction at any time. Men, however, were more likely than women to feel able to stop sexual encounters, which explains in part why women were more likely to report grey area sexual encounters and to have had more than one of such experiences. Additionally, women in this study experienced the grey area in a variety of contexts, whereas male participants were more likely to describe similar experiences within relationships. Further, only women reported feeling at risk of physical danger, particularly during casual sex, if they declined or stopped sex. Men were more likely to agree to unwanted sex in order to show their girlfriends that they are desired or, in the case of Nate, to avoid being perceived as gay, which is in line with the findings from Ford (2018). Thus, while men do experience the grey area, the rules of compulsory heterosexuality that men are to dominate and

women are to be submissive means that women are far more likely to be pressured for sex than are men (see Powell, 2010; Rich, 1980).

However, as was reflected in Nate's unwanted experience, women are taking on what is more traditionally men's sexual scripts of initiating and being aggressive in their pursuit of sex. Similar to the findings of Fagen and Anderson (2012) and Krahé et al. (2003), men's unwanted experiences often involve being put into what is considered the "female" position of the sexual script during sexual encounters. In the case of the male participants' grey area experiences, they felt pressure from their partners to engage in sex, a behavior assumed to be reserved for men in mainstream sexual scripts. Nate, for instance, felt that if the expectation of them hooking up would have been clearer beforehand, then he would not have felt so used, indicating men's discomfort when they feel they are not in control of the encounter. However, this discomfort with delineating sexual scripts may just be especially true for hookups and instances which lack mutuality considering that Nate was comfortable with his partner initiating sex in the description of his best experience. Further, while Akre (2013), Bay Cheng et al. (2008), and Flack et al. (2007) demonstrate that there is clear evidence that women consent to undesired sex in order to keep their male partner happy, my findings show that men do this as well. However, one key difference is that women in heterosexual contexts felt pressured to have sex for men's pleasure, whereas men felt pressure to have sex for their partner to feel desired.

Pressure to have sex and feeling "worn down" to the point of acquiescing to having sex is reflective of the similarities between seduction and coercion as discussed by Vandervort (2013) and Littleton and Axsom (2005). The common occurrence of women feeling pressured to acquiesce to sex demonstrates the normalization of coercion is less about fear and intimidation, and more about a broader acceptance of more subtle forms of coercion of women for sex (Kim et

al., 2007; Powell, 2010). Further, because there is general agreement that forced sex is normatively bad, part of the process of acquiescing and being worn down required faking pleasure and comfort for both men and women. However, again, this performance of mutual desire and pleasure was required of women more often than men. Performances themselves and the reasons for their performances differed. Both men and women engaging in heterosexual contexts would feign enjoyment to avoid hurting their partner's feelings. While this is not generalizable to all identities, men may be more likely to perform sex to not appear gay, while women need to perform for their sense of physical safety.

Dismissing an experience as not assault but as not consensual was most likely due to accepted norms around male behaviour. Excuses that female participants provided to men included not knowing any better, not being good listeners, or being intoxicated, especially when in a relationship with them. Kahn, Jackson, Kully, Badger, and Halvorsen (2003) found women most likely to label a situation as rape were women who have been assaulted by someone they were not in a relationship with, experienced high negative affect afterwards, where the perpetrator was not intoxicated, and where the man was forceful and aggressive. Therefore, in line with my own findings, experiences that fell outside of these characteristics presented less likelihood that a woman would label the situation as rape. As such, more subtle coercive actions from men (such as those in line with traditional sexual scripts), where alcohol was involved, and in situations of relationships, are those in which women would be less likely to see a situation as assault (see also Cowling & Reynolds, 2004). For example, Scarlett's story of being woken up to her boyfriend trying to have sex with her demonstrates the problematic assumptions around assumed consent in relationships, but more importantly that individuals can feel uncomfortable labelling the situation as assault. Her experience is also an example of misguided sexual script

behaviour that presents women as able to be convinced to have sex regardless of their stated wishes. As demonstrated by young women participants, the use of alcohol does not automatically mean assault, and having a boyfriend try and pressure you into sex is often not interpreted as assault either. This finding is similar to Vandervort (2013) who argued that manipulation is normalized as seduction if there is a mutual attraction. Being manipulated into sex can become normalized and accepted behaviour if it is understood that both partners are attracted to each other or are in a relationship.

In line with sexual scripts (Gray, 2015; Kramer, 1994; Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2005) which help structure the ways people interpret and act out experiences, men expect that women will consent to sex in order to go along with their sexual interests (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999). Women are expected to act as though they are enjoying their experience, even if they may not be (Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014). Because participants assumed that men enjoy sex more than women, there were also differences in the pattern of behaviour that men and women use to end bad sexual interactions (Fahs, 2014; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). Women were more likely than men to fake orgasms or to give up on their own pleasure and wait until men reached orgasm. On the other hand, when sex was not going well for men, they discussed their ability to end the experience, even though it was not related to pleasure (i.e., arousal non-concordance; Nagoski, 2015). This often led to participants feeling used. Alternative to faking pleasure, women stayed silent instead of letting their partner know they were not having a good time, so as not to disrupt the social norms of how sex is supposed to play out.

I argue that sexual scripts (see also Fahs, 2014; Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014), reflect a hierarchy in which men's sexual needs and fulfillment are placed above women's needs. The male participants' experiences demonstrate that women, by using patriarchal scripts, can coerce

men to have sex with them not for their own physical pleasure but to be reassured that their partner still loves them. This is reflective of theories on femininity where women (should) want to be desired by men (Butler, 2007), ultimately perpetuating patriarchy and heteropatriarchal norms. In this way, many of the problems surrounding unequal pleasure and sexual scripts are due to the devaluing of women, which at times they can themselves enact. As reflected in this findings chapter on grey sex and the previous chapter on bad sex, by the time young people start having sex they have already been socialized within this gender order hierarchy maintained through compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 2007; Rich, 1980; Thorne, 1993). The rhetorical use of grey area experiences can lead to the normalizing of sexual assault by suggesting that coercive behaviour is acceptable.

Though men can coerce women, and women can evidently also coerce men, drawing on Powell (2010) and Bourdieu (2002), it is the indirect subtle cultural and societal pressure stemming from patriarchy that leads to the normalization of heterosexual coercive behavior. Perceptions of women as sex objects and as passive, along with their sexual desire missing from discourses of sexuality (Connell, 2005; Oliver, van der Meulen, Larkin, & Flicker, 2013; Powell, 2010), allows for women's experiences of sexual events which are less than consensual to become normalized and excused. However, the construction of men's heterosexuality through patriarchy silences and normalizes less than consensual experiences for men too. By challenging these norms, we can aim to have sexual *freedom to* and *freedom from* for both men and women.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Prior to the sexual revolution, sex for women was seen as a wife's duty to her husband and where unenjoyable sex was something to keep quiet about. The sexual revolution was a means to give voice to what was previously silenced (Ehrenreich et al., 1986). But did it? Starting in the 1980s this newfound freedom began to be chipped away by a variety of complex social movements and events that spread fear into the notion of sex, constraining and constructing women's sexuality as dangerous. Social mores about sex shifted from free love to a sanitization of sex as a moral and public health concern. While women began to ask for pleasurable sex and demonstrate that they desire and enjoy sex (Ehrenreich et al, 1986), the ideologies of patriarchy have never fully been eliminated in order to do so (Allen, 2013; Baudrillard, 1990; Ehrenreich et al, 1986; Hakim, 2010; Hakim, 2015; Lamb et al., 2013).

Research on hookups, college party culture, and sexual assault has highlighted the need to have clear boundaries of consent. Feminist movements like Take Back the Night, No Means No, and the more current move to enthusiastic consent all raise awareness of sexual assault and place emphasis on consent. However, there continue to be women and men who experience unwanted sex yet fail to identify or report it. This research has demonstrated that some of these experiences happen in a space where young adults feel unable to say something without breaking some unlabeled social norm. This norm appears to be most salient in relationships where individuals feel more like they owe something to their partner. Hookups, while perhaps not resulting in the most pleasurable sex, may offer more room to change and challenge traditional scripts. While Wade (2017) argues that there may not be enough hookups happening to really challenge patriarchal assumptions of sex, she does argue that young women felt it was a space to hone their sexual skills.

We often hear talk of the grey area as though it marks a line between black and white – what is okay and not okay has become confusing instead of straightforward. When it comes to consent, the assumption is that there should be no discomfort, no confusion, no unsurety. Based on the findings, the grey area highlights the nuances of consent in heterosexual sexual interactions and negotiations that go beyond yes and no but point to a more fluid process of mutuality and wantedness that can come and go.

To this day, sexual health awareness continues to focus on sexual safety and fear rather than on pleasure and healthy communication (Hunter, 2004; Hunter & LaCroix, 2016). Double standards for women set up expectations for them to be both sexually inviting, yet prudish, yet pleasure seeking (Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Humphreys & Brousseau, 2010; Mottier, 2008; Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991; Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Sakaluk et al., 2014). In situations where both people were equally drunk, participants described that the double standard of drunken sex implies that women are powerless victims and men are all powerful perpetrators of assault. These double standards are negative for women, but also create a view of men as always at fault for issues of consent. At the same time, men are provided messages which place pressure on them to be sexually experienced (Fagen & Anderson, 2012; Ford, 2018; Sweeney, 2014ab). Where does it leave both men and women if there seems to never be a right answer, especially in the face of the #MeToo movement and the push for enthusiastic consent? Expectations for young men and women, along with double standards, leave little room for consent to be easy to talk about or equally accessible in regard to desire and pleasure. This research has demonstrated that there may be no easy answer as to how we can reliably measure or define consent.

The statement, and title of this dissertation, "just finish already" represents concisely how many participants experienced the grey area: something they did not quite want, but that the

quickest way to avoid negative consequences was to just get it over with. For both men and women, getting it over with in heterosexual encounters meant sex culminated in male orgasm, highlighting the salience of heterosexual and patriarchal norms in shaping sexual expectations. The notion of getting the other person to finish quicker also highlights the experience as not mutual, rather, they are just enduring for the sake of the other person. This captures the pressure, the awkwardness, the lack of space for disrupting and talking about sex, and the lack of pleasure reflective of grey area sex. Most importantly, this expression demonstrates that consent is not a straightforward yes or no decision, but rather a complex and ongoing process of negotiation.

The experiences of these young adults between the ages of 18 to 25 highlight the many nuances of sexual consent. Analysis of their experiences demonstrate the ways that gender roles and the normalization of heterosexuality are internalized, guiding how young adults understand and interpret sexual situations. Not all participants and those they interact with interpret and understand consent and sex the same way. Education played a role in how participants reflected on and defined consent. Participants shared high levels of agreement on the importance of consent being addressed before people start engaging in sexual experiences. However, sexual consent education and/or awareness was not reported as being provided until university (although a more recent sexual education curriculum in the province of Ontario will be including discussions of consent). Although, discussions of consent at an earlier age would address the fact that not all people attend university and that university can come long after some have started having sex, the university education that participants noted as most helpful were those courses which helped highlight the inequalities of gender and sexuality. In other words, understanding consent is about much more than learning how to say no to unwanted sex or enthusiastically consenting to wanted sex.

Participant descriptions of best experiences were based on expectations that sex follows an implicit path from kissing to sex, with consent characterized as a lack of objection and the presence of mutual desire. Participants interpreted consent for their best sex as implicit; no talking was required between sexual partners, and mutual desire was felt as clearly evident by body language and actions. Women's best sexual experiences were characterized by the presence of one or multiple orgasms, while men's best experiences were characterized by heightened emotional connections. Comparatively, sex which was just bad or mediocre were those experiences where sex had become sloppy or awkward. Often these situations were interpreted as not going well because one or both partners were unsure of what to do, or alcohol was involved. Alcohol in these situations was not associated with a lack of consent, but rather a lack of connection and skill. The mediocre experiences were described as more explicitly consensual than best sex, at times resulting in both partners verbally calling it quits. These statements were thus consistent with the notion that consent, or rather, not-consenting to continue, becomes a verbal conversation. However, most importantly, this verbal conversation is only possible when participants felt comfortable and safe enough to do so.

This distinction is where mediocre or bad sex is differentiated from the grey area. Whereas best and just bad or mediocre sex reflected feelings of agency, power, and comfort on the part of the participants, experiences which fell into the grey area were ones in which participants did not feel able to stop the situation without a negative consequence. These negative consequences are in line with what hooks (2015) describes as patriarchal violence – the ways that people are controlled through coercive force. This coercion does not necessarily need to stem from some*one*, but can stem from society overall (Powell, 2010). Through Foucault (1978), we can see how power within a patriarchal culture guides expectations and sexual scripts by producing,

or more often, restricting knowledge related to sex. Through heteropatriarchal norms, we can see the ways in which both women's and men's sexuality is shaped to the benefit of those most privileged within the norms of patriarchal culture. This helps explain why both male and female participants described having unwanted sex, not simply from coercive pressures from their partners, but also from unspoken expectations for how they were to behave as men and women.

The descriptions of these experiences were marked by unequal experiences of pleasure and feeling unable to fully consent. Once in the actual act of having sex, if the expectations were not being met (i.e., expectations that sex will be good, sex will be safe), men and women felt pressure to continue to engage in sex and felt an inability to speak up, leading to them completing the social interaction. Grey area sex is often guided by the socialized assumption that sex is primarily for men's pleasure, which placed pressure on both men and women. While men experience grey area sex, within patriarchal culture women are still most likely to be in an unequal position relative to men, with less power and agency throughout their sexual experiences. Although the men in this study experienced pressure to have sex, women were far more likely to experience this along with a general sense that they were expected to engage in submissive sexual behaviour.

Across the description of both best and grey experiences was the notion of implicit consent. As shown in Table 3, best sexual experiences and grey area sex are similar in that they follow a pattern in which the flow of communication leading to sex should not be interrupted, meaning that consent is implicit, non-verbal, and assumptive.

Table 3. Similarities in consent between best experiences and the grey area

	Description	Communication style
Best experiences	▪ Sex follows a natural progression script toward PVI with emotional and physical connection. ▪ Both parties feel comfortable and want to be there ▪ Shared physical or emotional connection (mutual desire), and goal of physical or emotional pleasure for at least one partner, usually achieved for both partners ▪ Partners feel positively about the experience after the situation	▪ Consent is implicit, non-verbal, assumptive, often presumed based on absence of "no" ▪ Clear ability to stop the sexual encounter without negative consequences at any time
Grey	▪ Sex follows a natural progression script toward PVI but lacks a shared physical or emotional connection (mutual desire). ▪ One party feels uncomfortable because they do not want sex or are unsure whether they want sex ▪ One sided pleasure - only one partner experiences physical pleasure while the other waits for sex to be over ▪ Individual feels expected to have sex ▪ Feel the need to fake pleasure or comfort ▪ Partners feel used and may experience trauma symptoms after the situation	▪ Consent is implicit, non-verbal, assumptive, often presumed based on absence of "no" ▪ Perceived inability or opportunity to voice disinterest or desire to stop having sex.

The grey area follows a similar behavioral pattern to best sex in terms of assumptive implicit consent, but where consent feels ambivalent or coerced rather than mutual. Because sex, based on compulsory heterosexuality, is assumed to follow a natural progression, silence or lack of objection is taken as consent rather than as a sign of discomfort. This discomfort coupled with feeling unable to stop out of fearing for one's safety or not wanting to hurt someone's feelings is what crosses the line from bad sex to grey area sex. Whereas bad or mediocre experiences were more likely to stop prior to people becoming overly uncomfortable, grey area sex keeps going against one's internal wishes for the encounter to end. Thus, grey area sex is characterized by

feeling pressure, generally related to an expectation to engage in sex despite one's loss of interest in sex and when pleasure becomes the goal for only one partner.

Theoretical contribution

In this research, I asked, how do gender roles, expectations, and experiences of pleasure contribute to making sex consensual or not? How do expectations impact the subjective understandings and negotiations of sexual consent in young adults' experiences of sex? Applying expectation states theory within an interpretivist paradigm highlights the internalization of assumptions around normalized heterosexual behaviour of men and women. My findings suggest that regardless of a push for gender equality and women's sexual liberation at a cultural level, many, but not all, women and men still feel an inability to be able to speak up without causing potential arguments, unsafe situations, or feeling they are violating a gender and sex norm. Therefore, consent does not become problematic due to miscommunication, but rather out of internalized gender role expectations constructed and maintained within patriarchy that vilifies women's desire and pleasure.

Women are socialized with the understanding that to feel like a human being they must be desired by men (Butler, 2007). Thus, specific issues that arise out of this are that if men indicate they do not want sex, a woman may infer that there is something wrong with herself, and will feel hurt or confused by a man's lack of interest. Further, if sex for women is expected *not* to be enjoyable, unsatisfying sex for women will be interpreted as normal. These expectations and assumptions are guided by heteropatriarchal norms of dichotomous constructions of male and female heterosexuality, often going unchallenged by peers, parents, the media, and the educational system. As a result, sex which lacks mutual desire becomes normalized for men and women. Due to the social movements currently surrounding consent

(#MeToo, No Means No), consent has become framed as mostly a women's issue. The assumption that consent is valued and important for women but not men was also evident in the ways that the young men in the study based their perceptions and understandings of consent through their female partner's behaviour and not necessarily their own actions. Queering consent means challenging the generalization that it is not only a women's issue, as was evidenced in the findings. Based on expectation states theory (Ridgeway, 2006), sexual behaviours are guided by assumptions about each person's gender, the most salient status characteristic in a sexual encounter. For example, if men are expected to always want and need sex, when women want sex, men feel obligated to fulfill that role regardless if they actually want to. To violate this expectation means running the risk of being seen as "weird or gay" (Ford, 2018). Although there is a common assumption that all men like sex regardless of the emotions involved (Kim et al., 2007; Wiederman, 2005), this was found to be more of a stereotype than reality. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, men's best sexual experiences were those in relationships where their physical pleasure was matched with emotional pleasure. Men described that caring and loving a person makes sex better. While Shawn described that talking about love making sex better was something he perceived might be "weird", many of the men felt that emotions contributed to their best sexual experiences. Male respondents were quite critical about hooking up now that they were in committed relationships and having better sex. Thus, there is a disconnect between stereotypes of what men want, and the reality of what they actually desire.

Although the men tended to share a preference for emotionally attached sex, one respondent, Lucas, stressed that the stereotype that men are always ready for sex is pervasive and has implications for dating. He was quite adamant that men do not always want to have sex as often as people think and that women are assumed to have an easier time picking up men in a bar

based on this assumption. He noted that men often hear comments such as “she is out of your league” in a way that women do not, since men are assumed to say yes to any woman that initiates contact. What Lucas is describing contributes to an assumption that women who show any interest in a man must be very interested if she could have had any other man at the bar. Especially within a patriarchal culture, this suggests that men may be given license to assume greater consent than what the woman is thinking. If women are assumed to have all the power in these hookups by being able to “choose” which guy she takes home, this may partly explain men’s sense of entitlement to women’s bodies. Men may incorrectly interpret any interest by a woman as a sort of prize won for all their efforts.

The assumption that men always want sex and women do not is also a contributing factor that leads to grey area experiences. This notion takes away power and agency from both women and men, and contributes to consent being framed as more relevant and important to women than to men. Men in this study reported that they had or continue to have unwanted sex with their girlfriends out of a feeling of obligation toward her feelings that were in fact based on men’s perceived desire to have sex all the time. There is a lack of attention in both popular culture and in the research literature to men consenting to unwanted sex. The limited literature on men’s perspectives of consent indicate that there are negative consequences for men when they say no to sex, such as being seen as “weird” or “gay” (Ford, 2018), leaving no room for men to address these feelings. By ignoring the possibility that men can experience unwanted sexual encounters on the assumption that men are always ready to have sex, both drives and is driven by compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 2007; Connell, 2009; Seidman, 2010). This fear of being perceived as gay preserves heterosexual privilege by positioning homosexuality as bad and heterosexuality as the norm (Bem, 1995), which has negative repercussions for heterosexual men

as well. These assumptions made about men's sexuality, that all men automatically want to have sex, needs to be addressed earlier on in young people's education and socialization. Further, acknowledging these normalized assumptions would afford men less excuses about pushing women too far due to their "uncontrollable desire", would place less pressure on women to acquiesce to men's purportedly "strong sexual needs", and would also place equal importance on men's consent.

The experience of physical pleasure was tightly connected to women's feelings of whether an experience felt more consensual or not. In all three sexual experiences described, women were more likely than men to have had sexual experiences in which their pleasure was not a priority. Nonetheless, women's best sexual experiences were those in which they had reached orgasm with their partners. This physical pleasure was a result of feeling comfortable, trusting their partner, and having an emotional connection. Women felt that their partners were actually paying attention to their needs. Comparatively, unpleasurable experiences were ones in which there had been consumption of alcohol, lack of connection, or when neither partner did not know what they are doing sexually. Emily, Taylor, Paige, and Camila described that having more realistic information about sex beforehand would have led to fewer negative experiences.

In part, women's lack of pleasure derives from young women being generally less likely to be knowledgeable of their bodies and how to pleasure themselves. While one female focus group participant was told in Grade 8 that her homework was to go home and masturbate, this was not the norm. Many of the young women felt that they lacked knowledge about what felt good before their first sexual experiences. Because masturbation is still seen as more acceptable for boys and men than it is for girls and women (Dodson, 2004; Friedman, 2017; Hogarth & Ingham, 2009; Nagoski, 2015; Parrish, 2019; Wiederman, 2005), this likely explains, at least in

part, why women are less likely than men to experience pleasure during sex and more likely to experience and tolerate sexual pain (Hite, 1979; Fahs, 2014). While there are many women today with agency who are critiquing how sex is presented in popular culture for its sexism, objectification, and lack of consent (Phipps & Young 2015), those who have the least sexual experience and knowledge, primarily young people who have less agency, are thus most at risk of negative encounters. The examples of my participants such as Alexis and Scarlett requesting their pleasure is a good example of the rejection of traditional roles and passive ideals of women's sexuality.

Within grey area sex we see examples where women's worth is seen as stemming from their ability to fulfil men's desires and to be desired by men (Butler, 2007; Connell, 1986), leading women to agree to unwanted sex in order to feel desired by men. Thus, compulsory heterosexuality (see Bem, 1995) impacts both men and women's experiences of unwanted sex by framing a normal expectation that women should want men to want them, and that men should want women. The normalization and association of sex for men's pleasure, along with women wanting men to desire them, only perpetuates a heterosexist gender order hierarchy (Weeks, 2010). To challenge heteropatriarchal norms, we must focus on pleasure and desire in a more wholistic, ever-changing, and dynamic approach. However, there are many barriers to achieving this.

Some criticize school-based sexual education for focusing on how girls can protect themselves from assault rather than providing young women with subjective understandings of sex and desire (Bay-Cheng, 2012; Connell, 2005; Lamb, 2010). Allen (2004) found that within sexual health education, women's pleasure is either lacking or shown in a negative light. If women do not associate pleasure, or their body belonging to themselves (Parrish, 2019), as part

of their expectation for sex, accepting pleasureless sex and their body being used for someone else becomes normal. Thus, when people assume that men enjoy sex more than women or that sex is supposed to be uncomfortable or painful for women, they are more likely to endure such negative encounters (Friedman, 2017). Rather, sexual education that encourages discourses of women's pleasure and desire would allow women to feel more empowered (brown, 2019; Fine, 1988; Parrish, 2019). This would free women from more passive or dominated roles to experience sex as something that feels good instead of something to be feared (Mumbi, 2011). As sexologist Leonore Tiefer (2004) argues, women need power, not protection.

Further, we see that consent is a nuanced process and not a simple or static yes or no decision. What distinguishes grey area sexual experiences from simple good or bad sexual experiences, is not the lack of a clear yes or no, but rather are marked by an inequality in power dynamics; enacted between individuals but constructed and maintained within society. When people feel empowered and experience mutual desire and pleasure, questions about consent do not arise. However, absent of such feelings, participants can experience discomfort to a degree similar to sexual assault. This is an important contribution to expectations states theory, particular the insight that negotiations for consent can occur far in advance of sex itself.

For example, some of the young women in the study felt that before even going on a date with a man, they had to decide what degree of sexual activity they were interested in pursuing. There was a sense that even just talking to a man or saying yes to a date could lead to an expectation that a woman will sleep with them. Thus, for women, the first step to maintaining power and not imply consent is to not even talk to the interested party. This example provides insight into the complex dynamics of giving and getting consent, and the ways in which these processes are tied to cultural assumptions about gender and imbalances in power. These findings

demonstrate that power and agency can be found far in advance of sex itself, which means that power in the process of negotiating consent can diminish or expand as parties come closer to the moment of having sex. Expectations for sex attached to one's gender (e.g. that men will always want or are entitled to sex and that women need to act as gatekeepers) occur before, during, and after sex. Future research should further examine this dynamic process, particularly as it relates to expectation states theory.

Research impacts

While the sexual revolution opened the door for women's liberation, the anti-abortion movement, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and feminist movement to "Take Back the Night" or establish that "No Means No," have led to a current cultural moment that situates sexual norms in between fear and liberation. Despite feminist advances, patriarchy remains a consistent barrier to dismantling the regulation and disciplining of both women's and men's sexuality through compulsory heterosexuality. Sexual norms continue to be understood through constructions of men's sexuality (i.e., male pleasure as central, men's uncontrollable desire), guiding expected behaviours for both men and women. Regardless of pop culture movements and icons that showed women could be both desirable and powerful, sex continues to be performed in ways that reinforce power differentials, while constraining both men's and women's abilities to be fully agentic. Unable to say yes or no without judgement or feelings of insecurities about the performance of their gender roles and how others interpret their behaviour, the grey area occurs when people are unsure how to act and unsure how the other will react, and thus follow through with expected behaviour. As Fahs (2014) argues, moving towards sexual liberation and empowerment means unpacking, reflecting on, and reassessing practices and social norms.

Williams (2019) discusses consent in a way that challenges how we apply it's meaning, specifically placing focus on cultural assumptions rather than on legal definitions. Consent should never be part of the discussion when it comes to experiences of sexual assault and rape. "The culture that defines us grabs onto the question of consent so that all other abuses of power are still at play" (Williams, 2019: 284). The concept of consent provided a tool to reclaim power over our bodies, but many times the concept is applied without the related concepts such as mutual desire and pleasure. Even at their most awkward and unenjoyable sexual experiences, mutual desire and the goal of mutual pleasure was still apparent at the outset of the encounter. What delineated consent, but which as a society we are still trying to grasp how to deal with, is what happens when sex lacks desire and pleasure, yet we said yes (or at least, did not say no). Weiss (2018) questioned whether we can criminalize gross, entitled, and awkward sex; however, criminalizing such interactions is beside the point, if we can address the power structures and expectations that lead to gross, entitled, and awkward sex in the first place.

The laws regarding consent, especially within Canada, from the perspective of my findings, do not require change. The Canadian law reflects affirmative consent. Rather, the subjective nature of consent and the unequal power dynamics present within heteropatriarchal sexual norms are what need to be addressed. Thus, considerations need to be made at lower levels than the law, where negative and toxic assumptions around gender roles are disrupted in order to change the perceptions at the cultural level around what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. Changing the culture around unwanted sex requires de-naturalizing the concept that sex always follows an implicit natural progression, instead, queering sex to demonstrate that sex happens in range of ways that cannot always be generalized. Key aspects, however, are

promoting mutual desire and challenging a one-size-fits-all mentally attached to men and women's sexualities (Patel, 2006; Seidman, 2010; Tiefer, 2004).

Heteropatriarchal messages inherent in media and culture which support the continued messages of fear and risk of sex for women need to be disrupted. The interruption of the cultural shift towards sexual equalities by the safe sex and sex-negative movements led to a continued puritanical view of sex which continues to complicate and prevent comprehensive sexual education to emphasize desire and pleasure. Instead, young adults are provided with dichotomous and constraining views of sexual behaviour which reinforce the notion of consent without also presenting aspects of mutual desire and pleasure. Consent is about more than just saying yes or not saying no.

Messages also intersect with race, class, and gender in a way that was evident in the research particularly in the absence of much diversity in my sample. There is something interesting about the fact that my participants, were mostly white and heterosexual; this perhaps suggests that the ability to share about one's sexual experiences without fear of shame or persecution is itself a reflection of privilege. For example, Black men are more likely than white men to be assumed to be sexual predators (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2003; Maynard, 2017), making them less free to discuss experiences of being accused of not getting consent, something one of my white male participants shared. Class was touched upon related to the differences in highlighting understandings of consent at college versus university and was evident in the ways that some of the working-class men attending college discussed consent compared to participants at the university level. While analyzing the intersection of race, class, and gender in any meaningful depth was not heavily nuanced, this does not imply that race and class are absent in issues related to consent and sexual behaviour. Understandings of unwanted sex and how women

experience and define sexual harassment in Canada are all interlocked with identities such as race, citizenship, class, and gender (Welsh et al., 2006). Further research is therefore required in this area.

Drawing from participants experiences, sex should not be constructed or acted out due to a fear of consequences, but rather should be acted *on* based on mutual desire and want. The grey area is a direct result of someone not knowing other ways to interpret or act out behaviour. If we do not promote desire and pleasure in society, it is no surprise that it is absent from sex and consent. This absence results in feeling constrained in one's ability to call out the ways that their experience was problematic. The meaning that people make about sex, the lack of positive framework that they have to interpret or to act out more positive behaviours, is what makes the grey area – the feeling of unsureness and uneasiness – possible. By challenging the gender order hierarchy and supporting women's pleasure and men's actual desire for emotions, the grey area will become less normalized and situations which are actually assault will be called what they are.

Looking at research developed in the 80s and 90s on consent to unwanted sexual activity, Walker (1997) insists on prevention, education, and communication which addresses and disrupts the discourse surrounding traditional male sexual drives. Walker (1997: 164) also argues that interventions should focus on challenging "traditional norms regarding gender and sexuality in order to promote girls' and women's sense of ownership of their bodies and mutuality in sexual negotiations". Lonsway (1996) also argues that female desire needs to be considered through disrupting traditional gender norms and should be addressed before young people start having sex. These recommendations made in the late 1990s have yet to be realized. Women's pleasure in sexual health education should be acknowledged, especially that women are least

likely to experience orgasm through PVI. Many of the participants noted that education would make a big difference in the lives of young people, specifically related to the realities or "messiness of sex" referred to in Chapter 5. Queering sex needs to happen in more formal sexual health education curriculums. As seen from a couple of my female participants, such as Alexis, Harper, and Scarlett, knowledge of their bodies, what they like and what they do not like, led them to be more agentic and assertive during hookups. Participants noted that a lot of the general expectations and ideas around sex stem from popular culture but do not accurately capture the reality of sex or challenge gender stereotypes. As such, I have outlined recommendations below based on my own analysis as well as respondent's suggestions for change.

Participants felt that education and popular culture were areas still in need of improvement for challenging some of the issues surrounding consent. Sources of information such as education and popular culture should not dismiss women's pleasure, nor should they exclude the reality and messiness of sex, or how important communication is. One participant in a focus group acknowledged that people are diverse in terms of how they communicate. This means that schools need to teach in a way that is informative for all, so that, for example, someone who is shy to speak up about his or her needs or desires, is not made disproportionately vulnerable by social norms. While some women demonstrate their agency and critique what is going on within popular culture in terms of sexism, objectification, and lack of consent (Phipps & Young, 2015), it is primarily young women that are either not given the skills yet, or have no experience sexually, who are most affected. "Real sex education" (Kulwicki, 2008), both within structured curriculum and within popular culture needs to promote active communication (Powell, 2010; Powell, 2007) not only for women, but for men as well. More importantly, they need to emphasize mutuality. There should be no excuses of "different language use" (Cameron,

2008) to justify unwanted sexual experiences and lack of consent as men and women should be similarly informed about the issues surrounding sex and consent. The findings of this research demonstrate that we cannot talk about consent without the associated concepts – mutuality, power, desire, and pleasure.

While some of the focus group participants recommended more mandatory introductory courses at the university level, such as feminism and philosophy courses that address issues of consent and power dynamics, this would still leave a gap for the many people who do not attend university. This type of education would therefore need to be at a primary or secondary level of education to be more accessible to most of the youth population. Further, this education would hopefully be coming at a time before they have already begun engaging in sexual behaviour. Or, ideally, occurring throughout their socialization. If sexual health education is improved by challenging the absence of women's desire and addressing assumptions of men's sexuality, women would not need to "learn" how not to become a victim; nor would it be their sole responsibility to control sex. Additionally, some men were also seen as entitled regardless of their own perceived "efforts". As participant Nate suggested, sex education needs to address the assumptions made by men who feel entitled to women's bodies based on the way that women are dressed. There is a clear need for education to clarify that sex is not a sort of exchange in which men are entitled to sex, regardless of what efforts they put in or of what they think the women are suggesting by their outfits.

In Canada, the sexual health education curricular are created at the provincial level. In 2015, the Ontario sexual health curriculum made headlines when the curriculum was updated, introducing consent as early as grade 2. Prior to the update, the curriculum had not changed since 1998, before sexting and social media platforms were a significant component of young people's

lives (Canadian Press, 2015). However, the sex education curriculum made headlines once again in 2018 when the newly elected PC government of Ontario came into power on a platform promising to eliminate the updated curriculum. The PC provincial government then adopted an "interim" version for the 2018/2019 year. While the previous 2015 version included comprehensive LGBTQ2 information, the "interim" version had not highlighted any of this important information (Hauen, 2018). The "interim" Ontario sexual health curriculum did not introduce consent until Grade 6 (Ontario, 2019). However, despite all the back and forth with the curriculum, the PC government finally adopted a sexual health curriculum which is much the same as the 2015 version. A large caveat of this return to the comprehensive 2015 version is that parents can opt their children out of some portions of the new curriculum (CBC, 2019). Further, once students reach grade 10, they no longer need to take sexual health education (Ontario, 2019). Thus, while young people may still yet be discovering their bodies and their identities, their sexual health education has come to an end unless they opt to take a physical education course, in which case those courses have a small sexual health education component. A recommendation based on participant statements is that the same messages given to students during frosh week at university need to be given much earlier, within their high school education.

Only one participant was provided knowledge about her own sexual pleasure by her family, all other respondents tended to learn about sexual pleasure from peers, pornography, and trial-and-error. While there are books and internet resources promoting male and female pleasure, such material, especially regarding women's pleasure, has always been absent within sexual health education curricula (Bay-Cheng, 2012; Connell, 2005; Kulwicki, 2008). Connell's 2005 study found that Ontario's sexual health education curriculum presents women as victims,

and how to avoid becoming a victim of rape or sexual assault. An updated version of Connell's study should explore the extent to which female pleasure and desire is being presented today. Further, while the government is responsible for providing this education, parents are now able to opt their children out of the Ontario sex education classes (Posluns, 2019). So, while the government can try to provide young people with education on sex, parents still have the last say in what their children do or do not learn. If parents do not teach their children about the reality of sex, that sex can and should be pleasurable for women, and that it is okay for men to say no too, young people may not learn this anywhere.

Many of my participants stated that they had not thought about a lot of the topics that were discussed in the interviews and focus groups. While the issue of consent impacts both men and women, it does not seem that it is something discussed or thought about too critically in our education or day-to-day lives. My participants enjoyed the fact that they had a space where they could discuss these issues. As I have argued, within patriarchal culture where our expectations of sex and sexual behaviour are confined to dichotomous and unequal pleasure scripts, I hope that this dissertation and any publications which follow help open the eyes of educators, parents, and our government. We need to start addressing that sex, consent, and sexual behaviour is not one-size-fits-all. As Foucault (1978) noted, sexuality is everywhere yet nowhere; sex and sexuality appear to be in the open, yet the actual real conversations that need to be had about sex are absent.

Limitations and future research

As with any research, there are limitations that I acknowledge and spaces which I feel should be further explored. My sample included respondents who identified as heterosexual, bisexual, and queer, but there was a lack of lesbian and gay respondents in the research. Further,

those who identified as bisexual and queer respondents tended to share most about heterosexual experiences. Thus, while LGBQ persons are not exempt from grey area sex, the findings may not apply to all. Further, while the sample was diverse and representative of the Canadian population with regards to ratio of designated group minorities, there were not enough participants of colour to make generalizations. As such, there continues to be a need for future research examining issues of consent in the LGBTQ2+ communities and among people of colour. Further, my academic and gender position may have limited how much detail men provided me with. Though I felt answers were honest, due the topic, men may have felt under scrutiny. I would suggest having a male interviewer for future research exploring men's heterosexual activity.

Another limitation is that this research does not encompass every area of sexual consent. For example, there are issues of consent related to HIV/AIDS, condom use, BDSM and kinks, STIs, transgender persons, or use of sex toys. There are also issues related to age. For example, how might older couples approach consent, is it different from how young people approach it? Each of these aspects represent their own experiences and impacts of sexual experiences, but have not been explored here. While this research has contributed broadly to the grey area of consent and how consent can be understood, introducing other aspects of sexuality and sexual practices is key to further disrupting the norms and assumptions around sex and consent.

As participant Nate argued, university may be too late to undo previous assumptions about implicit consent, and by this point many people are already having sex. Participants who stated they had received healthy and comprehensive education were far more likely to be able to express complex understandings of consent and sexual communication than participants who had not attended university and had little sex education. Notably, the men who attended a trade college saw fewer distinctions between types of consent and were less likely to identify grey area

sex as problematic compared to the participants attending university. While Charest, Kleinplatz, and Lund (2016) found no differences between young adults in undergraduate university and those not in post-secondary in terms of sources of sexual health information, the type and quality of information received at university may be different. This is in keeping with the findings from the recent Summary Report of the Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey conducted by CCI Research, Inc., on behalf of the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (2019). This survey included a "Perceptions of Consent" index to measure agreement with false conceptions of consent, including the following statements:

> a) Consent does not need to be given at each step in a sexual encounter.
> b) If a person initiates sex, but during foreplay says they no longer want to, the person has not withdrawn consent to continue.
> c) If a person doesn't physically resist sex, they have given consent.
> d) Consent for sex one time is consent for future sex.
> e) If you and your sexual partner are both drunk, you don't have to worry about consent.
> f) Mixed signals can sometimes mean consent.
> g) If someone invites you to their place, they are giving consent for sex. (CCI Research, Inc., 2019, p. 5)

They found that individuals in college were slightly more likely than those in university to agree with these false beliefs about consent. Specifically, 5.4% of college student respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with these statements, compared with 3.1% of university students. Further, an even higher percentage (7%) of students at private colleges "strongly agreed" or "agreed" (CCI Research, Inc., 2019)[14].

Considering the consistency in my findings and in the CCI Research report, there is evidence that university may provide students with more guidance and education on consent and what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable sexual behaviour. Further, while the perception of consent was more negative at the college and private career college level, the survey showed that

[14] The survey results did not distinguish findings by gender or other characteristics.

individuals in university were still more likely than those at the college or career college level to have disclosed a non-consensual sexual experience since the beginning of the school year (CCI Research, Inc., 2019). While the research does not make clear whether university women are actually more likely to be assaulted than college women, as there could be differences in drinking culture and campus environments, the difference may be due to perceptions of consent. As the study noted that university students have better perceptions of consent, this difference in assaults could be due to university students being more likely to identify a situation as sexual assault, whereas college women may be more likely to dismiss the situation. These differences could also be class related. There is evidence from Wardle and Steptoe (2003) that social class has an impact on healthy lifestyle choices and attitudes. Socioeconomic differences associated with education and childhood background impact determinants of attitudes and beliefs. As such, there should be more research to examine possible differences in class and education as it relates to our perceptions of consent.

This qualitative study has applied an iterative analysis to ensure rigour through the considerations of previous literature, however, qualitative research can pose a challenge to generalizability. Resolving this limitation of qualitative work requires the development of operationalizable concepts for ideas like "grey area" and consent. Capturing the fluid and dynamic process of consent may pose a particular challenge for the creation of quantitative measures for large random-sample surveys, but if successful could provide important insights into the extent of these issues across populations. While this research shares depth of experiences, it would be ideal to show the breadth of how many people experience the grey area. Would we get varying responses about consent if we not only ask respondents if they said yes or no, and instead ask them to think about mutual desire and pleasure? The issue of consent,

coercion, and the grey area should not be taken for granted and should continue to be explored and addressed.

This research suggests that the points of contention which happen to both men and women if they were to say no to sex need to be highlighted. Experiences described by the young women in this study demonstrate the societal pressure to have sex, either from their internalized gender role beliefs and what it means to be desirable to men, and the risks of saying no without potential consequences. Similar for the young men, pressure stemmed from the risks of saying no, which included being perceived as gay, having a fight with their partner, or hurting their partner's feelings. Thus, this differentiation between agency and feelings of domination based on the subtle coercive nature of the expectations around male and female heterosexuality highlight an inability to call out or confront partners about issues of consent. The grey area becomes about a lack of challenge to traditional norms of male sexual behaviour and perpetuates the feelings of confusion about what is seen as okay or not okay when it comes to sex. These feelings of confusion result in confinement of one's ability to freely express what it is we really want or do not want, instead relying on social structures such as sexual scripts which perpetuate patriarchal culture.

Overall, this research makes a major contribution to the problematizing of consent as a dichotomous concept. This research has highlighted the social constructions of sex and sexual pleasure which maintain unequal norms around sexual consent. While focused on description and not generalizability, this research provides a comprehensive starting point for continuing the research on sexual consent and the related concepts and constructions of gender and sexuality that perpetuate the inequalities surrounding consent. The more people are aware of the grey area and the assumptions and expectations which normalize these experiences, which range from

discomfort to assault, the more it is recognized as a disruption of mutual desire and as a space where silence and feelings of fear exist. It is my hope that by acknowledging and understanding the grey area, we begin to challenge these norms and move towards equal, desirable, and pleasurable experiences.

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Appendix A: Focus group questions

Focus Group Questions and Opening Statement

Opening statement:

Hello everyone. Thank you for participating in this focus group on consensual sex. I would like to remind everyone that it is being audio and visually recorded. If at any time you would like to leave please feel free to do so. I would also like to remind everyone to keep what is said in this room confidential. Please do not interrupt individuals as they speak, my best efforts will be made for everyone will get their chance to say what they would like. I would ask that people turn their cell phones completely off so that we are not interrupted. I would also like to remind everyone, and emphasize, that if you are uncomfortable in any way, you are not obligated to answer questions or participate. You may leave the room at any time without any consequences, judgement, or questions asked. If you have any questions after the focus group has been completed, please feel free to ask them. Are there any questions before we begin?

Questions:

1) Could we go around and have everyone say their first names and one thing on your bucket list, i.e. skydiving, mountain climbing, etc. As well, provide a number between 1 and 10 of how comfortable you are talking about sex, 1 being "it does not bother me at all" and 10 being "it makes me extremely uncomfortable."
    a. The questions I am asking pertain only to definitions and understandings of sexual consent, and am not asking you to share personal stories. If you are interested in sharing your personal stories, I'm looking for those in the optional one-on-one interviews. Let's begin.
2) How do you define sex?
    a. What doesn't count as sex?
    b. How did you come to learn this definition?
3) What are the ways that someone would signal that they want to have sex, regardless of whether you would do this or think it okay?
    a. What are the pros and cons of these?
4) What are the ways that someone would signal that they do not want to have sex, regardless of whether you would do this or think it okay?
    a. What are the pros and cons of these?
5) When is it appropriate, if ever, for someone to convince someone else to have sex with them?
6) If people are having sex, how do they signal if they are having a good or a bad time?
    a. What if they still want to do it but they aren't having a good time? What should happen?
    b. What if they do not want to do it at all anymore, what should happen then?
    c. Is there a point of no return where someone can't change their mind?
7) Are there any other insights anyone would like to share?

Appendix B: Interview questions

Interview questions and opening statement:

Opening statement:

I would like to start off my once again thanking you for wanting to participate in this interview. As the consent form states, you may leave the interview at any time without any negative consequences. If you do not wish to answer a question there is no need to do so. I would like to remind you that this interview is being audio recorded. Any questions before we begin?

Interview questions:

1) Tell me a little bit about yourself, career, relationship, goals in life.
2) Think about your best and your worst sexual experiences
3) Let's start with your best sexual experience: take me back to what happened.
    a. How did you feel throughout the experience?
    b. What were you expecting before it happened?
    c. How was it different from what you were expecting?
    d. How pleasurable was it for you?
        i. Why or why not? What made it that way?
    e. What didn't you like about it?
    f. Did you let your partner know what you liked and what you did not like? How did you let them know that?
    g. In what ways do you feel it was consensual? In what ways do you feel it was not consensual?
4) Now let's talk about your worst sexual experience: take me back to what happened.
    a. How did you feel throughout the experience?
    b. What were you expecting before it happened?
    c. How was it different from what you were expecting?
    d. How pleasurable was it for you?
        i. Why or why not? What made it that way?
    e. What didn't you like about it?
    f. Did you let your partner know what you liked and what you did not like? How did you let them know that?
    g. In what ways do you feel it was consensual? In what ways do you feel it was not consensual?

5) What would you identify as the differences in each of these experiences?
6) If you could change something about either one, what would it be?
7) Looking forward to future sexual experiences,
    a. What do you expect to happen
    b. What do you expect to get out of it

8) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix C: Demographic survey

Focus Group Participant Information Sheet

Age: _________

Self-identified gender: ____

Occupation: ____

Relationship status: ____

Religious affiliation: ____

Immigration status:____

Ethnicity:____

Sexual orientation:____

Age at first romantic or sexual experience:____

Age at first sexual intercourse:____

Number of sexual partners:____

Number of male sexual partners:____

Number of female sexual partners:____

Number of other gendered partners:____

Would you be interested in participating in a one-one-one interview to discuss your experiences of consensual sex? Please **circle** one:

YES NO

Not all who answer yes will be drawn for the interview sample. If your name is drawn, I will contact you with potential interviews dates within the next month. All interviews will be conducted in the [location]. By leaving your email you are under no obligation to participate. If you say you are not interested but change your mind later, you can feel free to email the researcher for more information.

Please provide an email address that I may contact you at to set up an interview time:

____

Appendix D: Codebook

Code	Description
Alcohol	Any comment related to the impact alcohol has had on their sexual experiences
Best sexual experience	Experiences described by participants as their best
Consent	Actual experiences of consent, differs from higher level node as this one is about actual direct experiences of consent and not a broad understanding. Will be used to compare to the consent node in the worst sexual experience node
Both	Comments pertaining to both verbal and non-verbal communication, confirmation, or rejection of consent
Non-verbal	Comments pertaining to non-verbal communication, confirmation, or rejection of consent
Verbal	Comments pertaining to verbal communication, confirmation, or rejection of consent
Relationship	Comments pertaining to a relationship as implying consent
Context	The story behind their experience, how it happened, who it was with, etc.
Men's Experiences	
Women's Experiences	
Dislikes	Comments pertaining to what a participant disliked about their best sexual experience
Pleasure	Comments pertaining to how pleasurable the experience was for them
Communication	How pleasure was communicated
Differ from Expectations	Whether pleasure differed from their expectations prior to having the actual sexual experience
Prior Expectation	Comments pertaining to the expectation about how the experience would go
Emotional	Comments pertaining to pleasure as more of an emotional feeling rather than a physical feeling
Emotional and physical	Comments pertaining to pleasure as both an emotional feeling and a physical feeling
Physical	Comments pertaining to pleasure as only a physical feeling
Worst Sexual Experience	
Consent/Non Consent	Actual experiences of consent, differs from higher level node as this one is about actual direct experiences of consent and not a broad understanding. Will be used to compare to the consent node in the best sexual experience node.
Both	Comments pertaining to both verbal and non-verbal communication, confirmation, or rejection of consent
Non-verbal	Comments pertaining to non-verbal communication, confirmation, or rejection of consent

Verbal	Comments pertaining to verbal communication, confirmation, or rejection of consent
Relationship	Comments pertaining to a relationship as implying consent
Context	The story behind their experience, how it happened, who it was with, etc.
Men's experiences	
Women's experiences	
Dislikes	Comments pertaining to what a participant disliked about their worst sexual experience
Pleasure	This theme is part of the chapter concerning pleasure
Communication	How pleasure was communicated
Differ from Expectation	Whether pleasure differed from their expectations prior to having the actual sexual experience
Prior Expectation	Comments pertaining to the expectation about how the experience would go
Lack of chemistry	Comments pertaining to the sexual experience being bad or unpleasurable due to a lack of chemistry between partners
Other person	Comments pertaining to pleasure being for the other person and not mutual
Consent	The below nodes are from focus group questions
Communication	General comments about how consent is communicated
Relationships	The specific ways in which relationships make the communication of consent different than in non-relationships
Consenting to sex	The ways that someone communicates that they do want to have sex with someone. Further subnodes include verbal, non-verbal, a mixture of the two, and the pros and cons of each type of communication
Not consenting to sex	The ways that someone communicated that they do not want to have sex with someone. Further subnodes include verbal, non-verbal, a mixture of the two, and the pros and cons of each type of communication.
Convincing	Comments related to aspects of seduction, coercion, convincing.
Coercion	Comments specifically related to being coerced into sex, both generalized and specific individual experiences
Negotiation	General statements of negotiating consent, how it discussed by individuals before or during a sexual experience
Not okay	General comments stating that convincing someone to have sex is never okay.
Relationship Context	How relationships can make it okay to try and convince our partner to have sex
Seduction	Comments specifically related to seduction
Culture	General comments about the current cultural climate around sexual consent and assault. Also includes comments pertaining to popular culture and media, their influence on our perceptions of sex

Movements and media	Discussion of aspects such as the MeToo movement, Aziz Ansari, etc.
Definitions of Sex	Comments only related to focus groups, asked what they would define as sex
Does not count	Comments related to what does not count as sex
pleasure	Comments related to how pleasure has an impact on the definition of sex; pleasure as part of what sex is.
subjective	Comments related to the subjectivity of sex, that different people may define and label it differently.
Differences between best and worst	Comments related to what the general differences were between their best and worst consensual sexual experiences
Changes	Comments related to the question I posed to participants, if they could go back, what would they change about either experience.
Education	Comments pertaining to how we can improve sexual health education and consent
Improvements to	Comments specifying components of education that need to be improved and expanded on
Learned	Comments pertaining to what respondents learned from their experiences and wish would be communicated better before individuals actually engage in sex.
Gender	
Femininity	Comments pertaining specifically to women and aspects of femininity
Masculinity	Comments pertaining specifically to men and aspects of masculinity
Hookups	Any comment pertaining specifically to experiences of hooking up
Pleasure	Comments about the ways that we communicate we are having a good or a bad time, the relationship context of pleasure, and the ways that it impacts experiences of consent.
Pleasure – Relationships	Comments pertaining directly to pleasure within a relationship and how that changes the dynamics and communication of pleasure
Communication of	Comments pertaining to aspects of pleasure and arousal responses
Bad time	How individuals describe communicating that someone is not enjoying themselves. This is specifically a focus group question.
Good time	How individuals describe communicating that someone is enjoying themselves. This is specifically a focus group question.
Non-verbal	The non-verbal ways that someone would use to express that they are having a good or bad time. This is specifically a focus group question.
Verbal	The verbal ways that someone would use to express that they are having a good or bad time. This is specifically a focus group question.

verbal and non	The mixture of verbal and non-verbal ways that someone would express that they are having a good or bad time. This is specifically a focus group question.
Gender	Gender differences within the communication of pleasure
Sexual Assault	Comments pertaining to previous experiences of sexual assault. These experiences impacted future decisions and feelings regarding sex and consent
Sexual Expectations	Comments pertaining to what expectations individuals have going into their future experiences of sex
Getting out of it	Comments pertaining to what individuals expect to get out of sex (i.e., pleasure, relationship). Essentially examining why people would consent to sex
Happen	Comments pertaining to what individuals think will happen in their future experiences, how they might go about them differently
Useful Quotes	Quotes that I really want to include