

*LINGUISTIC NEGOTIATIONS OF SEXUAL AGENCY*  
*IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION*

*By*  
*Brian W. King*

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## Abstract

The investigative aim of this thesis is to explore the role of language in the construction of sexuality agency during a classroom-based sexuality education programme for adolescents.

The thesis begins with an examination of the motivations behind the study of agency in relation to sexuality. Overlapping research gaps in the fields of *language and gender/sexuality* and *sexuality education* are identified. Scholars from both fields have pinpointed difficulties with the accessing of agentive sexual subject positions by young people (particularly young women) during conversation. Investigations into sexuality education in New Zealand have suggested that ‘Discourses’ of sexuality in classrooms and broader school communities position students as ‘sexual’ while simultaneously constructing them as innocent and child-like (and thus non-sexual). These ‘large-D’ Discourses have been identified as possible reasons for a lack of decline in the rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease amongst young people despite an overt focus on such topics in sexuality education. The theory is that because they have not developed a sense of agency in relation to sexuality, young people are ill-equipped to navigate the risks of sexual activity. A question which remains is exactly how sexual agency is negotiated through ‘small-d’ discourse (e.g. ‘talk’), by young people in classrooms.

This study focuses on language usage during classroom discussions of sexuality in order to shed light on linguistic strategies that young people employ in order to position themselves (or not) as sexual agents during sexuality education, and how they respond to being similarly positioned, both by others and by their classroom resources. In order to gain an understanding of the working dynamics of the school and classroom, an ethnographic approach was employed. The researcher

participated in classes for a period of time before the sexuality programme began in order to observe relations between the participants, including the distribution of power amongst teacher and students. These observations were essential to comprehending the understandings that participants bring to the processes and activities under study. This approach also permitted the tracing of the emergence of a community of practice in this classroom.

Through close attention to language via poststructuralist discourse analysis, it has been possible to demonstrate how interactants performatively lay claim to (or avoid) sexual agency in this community of practice. By actively participating in discussions of sexuality, the students, both boys and girls, experience being placed in sexually agentive subject positions. They respond in various ways; sometimes aligning, sometimes resisting, other times resignifying those positions in complex interactions of masculinity, femininity, desire, and sexual identity.

Finally, the findings of this thesis are assembled in order to consider implications for the study of language and sexuality as well as considering the importance of discursive positionings (by teachers and classroom resources) for future student possibilities in terms of sexual agency development.

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# Table of Contents

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Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of figures and tables.....	xii
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction: An investigation of sexual agency in language.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1</b> Aims of this thesis.....	2
<b>1.2</b> Academic study of sexuality education.....	3
<b>1.2.1</b> This thesis and sexuality education.....	5
<b>1.3</b> Thesis overview.....	5
<b>Chapter 2 - Literature review.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1</b> Introduction.....	7
<b>2.2</b> Sexual agency and its role in sexuality education.....	7
<b>2.3</b> Discourse.....	9
<b>2.4</b> Sexuality, 'the sexual', and sexual agency.....	10
<b>2.5</b> Gender, biological sex, and the connection with language.....	12
<b>2.5.1</b> Masculinities and femininities.....	13
<b>2.5.2</b> Hegemonic masculinity.....	13
<b>2.5.3</b> Women, hegemonic femininity, and the 'slut' stigma.....	14
<b>2.5.4</b> Body dimorphism – a genealogy.....	16
<b>2.5.5</b> Gender and language.....	18
<b>2.6</b> Performativity theory – context.....	19
<b>2.6.1</b> How did Butler develop this theory?.....	19
<b>2.6.2</b> What is her focus?.....	20
<b>2.7</b> Performativity theory – explanation.....	20
<b>2.7.1</b> What assumptions arise from an anti-ontological position?.....	22
<b>2.7.2</b> Performativity and agency.....	23
<b>2.7.3</b> Critiques of performative agency.....	23
<b>2.8</b> Language and agency.....	27
<b>2.8.1</b> Introduction – Sexually agentive subject positions..	27
<b>2.8.2</b> Agency as performance.....	28
<b>2.8.3</b> Collective agency performance.....	30
<b>2.9</b> Summary.....	32

<b>Chapter 3 - Research design and methodology.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.1</b> Introduction.....	35
<b>3.1.1</b> An ethnographic perspective.....	35
<b>3.1.2</b> Aims of an ethnographic approach.....	36
<b>3.1.3</b> Strengths & weaknesses of an ethnographic approach.....	37
<b>3.1.4</b> Internal validity and reliability in qualitative research.....	39
<b>3.1.5</b> Discourse analysis – a poststructuralist approach...	41
<b>3.1.6</b> Discourse analysis – queer inquiry.....	42
<b>3.2</b> Research aim, purpose, and questions.....	44
<b>3.3</b> Overall research design.....	44
<b>3.3.1</b> Process of selecting setting & participants.....	44
<b>3.3.2</b> Why a school?.....	45
<b>3.3.3</b> Why this particular school?.....	45
<b>3.3.4</b> Observation schedule and why it was chosen.....	46
<b>3.3.5</b> The ethnographer in the field – decision and compromise.....	47
<b>3.3.6</b> Methodology and the classroom programme.....	50
<b>3.3.7</b> How was sexuality education implemented?.....	53
<b>3.3.8</b> Why/how did I choose my data focus?.....	55
<b>3.3.9</b> Ethnicity and the research site.....	57
<b>3.4</b> Summary.....	57
 <b>Chapter 4 - Setting and participants.....</b>	 <b>59</b>
<b>4.1</b> Introduction.....	59
<b>4.2</b> Research site – Matangi College.....	59
<b>4.2.1</b> School communities – statistics and interpretation..	60
<b>4.2.2</b> School communities – lived realities.....	62
<b>4.2.3</b> School description.....	62
<b>4.3</b> Participants and participation.....	64
<b>4.3.1</b> Researcher as participant.....	66
<b>4.3.2</b> Teacher as participant.....	69
<b>4.3.3</b> Students as participants.....	70
<b>4.4</b> Summary.....	89
 <b>Chapter 5 - Tracing the emergence of a community of practice.....</b>	 <b>91</b>
<b>5.1</b> Introduction.....	91
<b>5.1.1</b> Putting sexual agency in its place.....	92
<b>5.1.2</b> Communities of practice.....	92



<b>5.2</b>	A ‘classroom-sexuality-education-research’ CoP: From alignment to engagement to shared practices.....	97
<b>5.2.1</b>	Nascent phase of CoP – Emergence of localised practice.....	98
<b>5.2.2</b>	Focus group interviews – inclusion in things that matter.....	104
<b>5.2.3</b>	Shoring up membership – addressing marginalisation.....	108
<b>5.2.4</b>	Development of shared discourses.....	111
<b>5.3</b>	Conclusion.....	118

## **Chapter 6 - *Small group recordings: Gender performance and sexual***

	<i>agency</i> .....	119
<b>6.1</b>	Introduction.....	119
<b>6.1.1</b>	Classroom activity: Answering questions about heterosexuality.....	120
<b>6.1.2</b>	Preparing the students for the task.....	122
<b>6.2</b>	Findings.....	123
<b>6.2.1</b>	Following Luana.....	125
<b>6.2.2</b>	Paige and femininity.....	136
<b>6.2.3</b>	Hearing it from the boys - masculinities and sexual agency.....	137
<b>6.3</b>	Discussion.....	140
<b>6.4</b>	Summary.....	141

## **Chapter 7 - *Guest facilitator recordings: Intersex awareness and sexual***

	<i>agency</i> .....	145
<b>7.1</b>	Introduction.....	145
<b>7.1.1</b>	Intersex awareness and the curriculum/unit.....	146
<b>7.1.2</b>	Mani Bruce Mitchell (Who is Mani? What was Mani told?).....	146
<b>7.1.3</b>	How did the students and teacher prepare for meeting and working with Mani?.....	149
<b>7.1.4</b>	Classroom activities (intersex awareness)....	153
<b>7.2</b>	Narratives and positioning.....	157
<b>7.2.1</b>	Narratives vs. small stories.....	158
<b>7.2.2</b>	Narrative proclivity and identity.....	158
<b>7.3</b>	Findings.....	159
<b>7.3.1</b>	Sexual agency by way of taleworld and telling: Exploiting the distinction.....	160

7.3.2	Sexual agency in the gaps: Tacit alignment and ‘calm’ analysis.....	171
7.4	Summary.....	173
<b>Chapter 8 - <i>Online chat recordings: Anonymity, 'undercover' gender &amp; sexual agency</i>.....</b>		
8.1	Introduction.....	175
8.1.1	Why anonymity and gender neutrality?.....	176
8.1.2	CMC and sexuality education.....	178
8.1.3	Class activity online – adapting community practice.....	179
8.2	Lesson commencement.....	181
8.3	Findings.....	184
8.3.1	Eliciting hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality.....	185
8.3.2	Agency in disinterest.....	188
8.3.3	'Young people' as sexually agentive.....	191
8.4	Summary.....	194
<b>Chapter 9 - <i>Unsupervised recordings: Young women, heteronormativity, and sexual agency</i>.....</b>		
9.1	Introduction.....	197
9.1.1	Young women and heteronormative subjectivity.....	198
9.1.2	Virginity.....	200
9.1.3	Classroom activity - dilemmas of love and desire.....	202
9.2	Findings.....	203
9.2.1	Being asked and going for it.....	203
9.2.2	The happy virgin.....	209
9.2.3	Virgin as a boy.....	213
9.3	Summary.....	216
<b>Chapter 10 - <i>Conclusion</i>.....</b>		
10.1	Summary of thesis.....	219
10.2	Implications and limitations.....	221
10.2.1	Methodological implications.....	222
10.2.2	Implications for Sociocultural Linguistics of gender/sexuality.....	223
10.2.3	Theoretical implications.....	224

<b>10.2.4</b> Classroom implications.....	227
<b>10.3</b> Concluding remarks.....	228
<b>References</b> .....	229
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	245
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	247
<b>Appendix C</b> .....	251
<b>Appendix D</b> .....	259
<b>Appendix E</b> .....	265
<b>Appendix F</b> .....	277

# List of Figures and Tables

---

<b>Figure 2.1</b>	Agency Performance and Analysis.....	32
<b>Figure 3.1</b>	Classroom topics and recordings.....	51
<b>Table 3.1</b>	Sample of 'critical' learning outcomes from the Beacon Schools Guide.....	53
<b>Table 4.1</b>	Median income and ethnic groups by suburb.....	61
<b>Table 4.2</b>	Ethnic demographics of the local region.....	62
<b>Figure 5.1</b>	The class korowai.....	99
<b>Figure 5.2</b>	Interview questions.....	107
<b>Table 6.1</b>	Questions from the 'querying heterosexuality' activity.....	122
<b>Figure 7.1</b>	E-mail from Brian to Mani, 18 <sup>th</sup> of June, 2009.....	148
<b>Figure 8.1</b>	Student instruction sheet (online chatting).....	181

# Chapter 1

## *Introduction:*

### *An investigation of sexual agency in language*

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Reflecting on the findings of WRAP (the Women, Risk and AIDS Project), Cameron and Kulick (2003) identify a research priority for those working in the field of language and sexuality. It arises from the findings of Holland et al. (1998); findings which indicate that young women in the WRAP study were reluctant to initiate conversations about condom use with male partners because they feared being labelled as sluts (Cameron and Kulick 2003). This reluctance to initiate can be traced to a lack of a sense of agency in relation to sex on the part of these young women. This problematic relationship between young women, sexuality, and agency indicates that improving the sexual health of young people requires changes to be effected in the norms for communicating about sex (i.e. who can say what to whom, and with what meaning). If conversation is indeed where safe-sex messages get sidelined, then it is language which must be granted central importance; not merely as a medium for sexuality education instruction, but rather, “language must be discussed explicitly as part of the process [of sexuality education]” (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 154). This identification of the central importance of language to sexuality education also identifies a need for research, by linguists, into language use in that setting.

Such research can apply the tools of linguistics to the problem of exactly how sexual agency is negotiated through talk by young people in schools. What precisely happens during interaction in sexuality education classrooms, which enables and constrains sexual agency? As Cameron and Kulick (2003: 154) have stated, “[how] people express their desires to one another – what they do and do not (or can and cannot) say – are crucially important matters in struggles around not only sexual identity or preference but also rape and sexual assault, reproductive rights, and HIV/AIDS.” It is with a corresponding sense of magnitude and

consequence that this study has been conceived, planned, conducted, and presented.

## **1.1 Aims of this thesis**

The identification of sexual agency as an important developmental concept in the socio-sexual literacy of young people brings with it a need to investigate exactly how young people do (or do not) construct themselves as agentive (i.e. having a capacity to act - see section 2.8.1) in relation to sexuality. How does language carry this process? What is taking place lexically, pragmatically, and discursively, both in terms of subject positions and constructions of desire, which allows young people to, and/or prevents them from building agency in relation to sexuality? This is a research gap which I aim to fill from a sociolinguistic/discourse analytic perspective. The findings of this study in relation to how sexual agency is discursively done and undone are likely to have pedagogical implications. Additionally, the goal of this thesis is neither to prove that learning has or has not taken place nor to explain how. Rather the purpose is to identify what sexual agency performance looks or sounds like in this classroom setting, under what circumstances it arises or disappears, and how it is negotiated. By taking such a focus, I aim to fill a research gap which overlaps the fields of *language and sexuality* and *sexuality education*.

To the best of my knowledge, my research will be the first to focus empirically on sexual agency and the sociolinguistic features of its discursive, social construction by adolescents, thus filling a research gap in language and gender/sexuality. Considering the frequency with which agency is referred to in the literature of sociocultural linguistics and applied linguistics, detailed empirical research into its constitution via language use is rather sparse. There are some important studies which address agency construction in the context of interview-elicited narratives (e.g. de Fina 2003; McKendy 2006; and Miller 2010), but analysis of its constitution during conversation is rare (noteworthy exceptions are Al Zidjaly 2009 and Tainio 2002). Also to the best of my knowledge, my research will be the

first to focus empirically on sexual agency and its discursive construction by applying an ethnographic approach in a classroom setting, hence filling a research gap in the study of sexuality education.

## **1.2 Academic study of sexuality education**

Investigations into sexuality education in New Zealand which have focused on a poststructuralist discursive approach to inquiry (Allen 2002, 2003a, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a) have suggested that ‘discourses’ of sexuality in classrooms and broader school communities position students as ‘sexual’ while simultaneously constructing them as innocent and child-like (and thus non-sexual). This double-bind is closely related to what Eckert (2003: 383) outlines as a dominant societal view in which adolescents are positioned as an “unfinished” population whose judgment lags behind their desires (sexual or otherwise). An overriding discourse of heteronormativity has also been observed, in which all students are presumed to feel sexual desire for the opposite sex (Allen 2006c; Quinlivan 2002; Quinlivan and Town 1999). Because of the contradictory and confusing messages of these discourses, young people are barred from developing a sense of sexual agency (i.e. active, knowing sexuality) and thus it is a non sequitur to suggest that they might walk out of the classroom and apply what they have learned about sexuality to their own lives. Indeed this lack of development of sexual agency has been identified as a possible reason for a lack of decline in the rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease amongst young people in New Zealand despite an overt focus on such topics in sexuality education (see section 2.3). It has been suggested (by Education researchers both in New Zealand and abroad) that school-based sexuality education programs which are organized around providing a discursive space for the construction of a positive and legitimate sexuality by young people might allow students to develop sexual agency, and therefore to incorporate sexuality into a healthy way of life (Allen 2005b; Fine and McClelland 2006). Via extensive discussion of issues around sexuality, students might begin to sort through the information that they receive and apply it to their own lives.

Working within the academic study of education, Allen (2002, 2003a, 2005b, 2005a, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a) has taken a discourse analytic approach to the investigation of sexual subjectivities (and to some extent sexual agency) in the New Zealand educational context via interviews with secondary school students. Adopting a poststructuralist perspective, Allen (2005b) explores the talk of young people in researcher-initiated focus group discussions and interviews, identifying moments when young men and women position themselves as “active and desiring sexual subjects”, or in other words, sexually desiring subjects who have access to agency in relation to sexuality. These performances reveal that constructions of a sexual self emerge in interaction, and it is language which plays a central role in this process. For example, girls in all-female groups often spoke about attraction to boys in a way that suggested taking action around sexual desire (e.g. they ‘go for’ certain types of guys). They are seen to place themselves (or be placed by others) in what I refer to in this paper as ‘sexually agentic subject positions’ (see section 2.8). The same is true for boys, but their performances look quite different as they do masculinity with their peers, drawing on normative discourses of ‘studliness’ in order to manage vulnerability in discussions of sexual activity. In this way it can be seen that sexual agency performance cannot be separated from performances of gender and other social constructs.

Allen’s research has been influential in the field of Education in establishing the idea that young people perform sexual subjecthood through language and that this is done in ways that both match and diverge from the dominant discourses of society and schools. Gathered in focus groups and interviews, the data and Allen’s analysis generate questions of what these performances might look like in classrooms, places which bring with them the roles of teacher and student and norms of behaviour which differ considerably from those of a researcher-managed focus group or interview environment. Also, although Allen has explored the interactively achieved performance of youth sexual subjectivities in some detail, performances of *sexual agency* during interaction have shared only a partial focus. Thus there is a need for a sustained, ethnographically enriched focus on what



precisely happens during spoken interaction in sexuality education classrooms, which enables and constrains sexually agentive discursive positioning and performances.

### **1.2.1 This thesis and sexuality education**

This study aims to fill this research gap through the micro-analysis of language use, relating it to ethnographic observations of the school and classroom. The hope is that such detailed analysis of one learning community will bring to light some sociocultural and socio-sexual processes which are influencing young people's experiences with agency in sexuality education classrooms. For if it is true that problematic subject positionings are curtailing the development of agency in relation to sexuality for young people in New Zealand, then gaining a more nuanced sense of how sexual agency is negotiated in classrooms is paramount. It is most often in classrooms where young people's sexuality education is experienced; therefore, the ways in which teaching resources and classroom social relationships interact with sexual agency are key aspects of knowledge about how to proceed. The investigation of language usage is important for improving our understanding of sexuality education practice. Although pedagogy is not within the scope of this project (see above), perhaps its findings can be taken up by educators and adapted to classroom practice. The hope here is that broader awareness of the importance of discourse can be supplemented by awareness of concrete linguistic processes, thus providing educators with some useful tools with which to facilitate the development of socio-sexual literacy by young people.

### **1.3 Thesis overview**

This first chapter has served as an introduction to the motivations behind the initiation of this research. Chapter 2 provides a survey of literature related to key concepts and terms used during discourse analysis such as agency, discourse, sexuality, gender, masculinity, femininity, body dimorphism, performativity, and performance. It also positions this study in relation to the study of sexuality education in New Zealand.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology for this study, offering an explanation of the approaches to research which have influenced research site selection, interaction with participants, data collection and data analysis. In addition to outlining the decisions made in these areas, chapter 3 begins the task of 'thick description' and contextualisation of the research setting and participants. This task continues throughout chapters 4 and 5, with Chapter 5 offering a detailed analysis of the emergence of a Community of Practice (hereafter CoP) in this classroom. Chapter 5 also explains the communities of practice concept in some detail.

Chapters 6 to 9 comprise the data analysis portion of the study. Audio recorded data and Internet chat-room data have been transcribed and analysed with the purpose of examining the ways in which language is used (both in classroom resources and in people's spoken interaction) to elicit sexually agentive subject positions, and how young people use language to align to these positionings or avoid them during interaction. Finally, Chapter 10 offers conclusions and discusses implications of the findings for the study of language and gender and the study of sexuality education as well as implications for the classroom teaching of sexuality education.

# Chapter 2

## *Literature review*

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### **2.1 Introduction**

The main purpose of this literature review is to explain key concepts and terms used during discourse analysis whilst also positioning this linguistic study in relation to the inter-disciplinary studies of (a) language and gender/sexuality and (b) sexuality education. I will start by providing background to the identification of sexual agency as a topic of inquiry in sexuality education. Then in sections 2.3-2.5, I will describe terms applied in this study which relate to discourse, gender, sexuality, and sexual agency. I will then outline the theories of agency which have influenced this empirical investigation, starting with an explanation of Butler's theory of performativity.

### **2.2 Sexual agency and its role in sexuality education**

Schools are social institutions – spaces in which contradictory discourses of sexuality compete (Allen 2007b). There are discourses which arise from the sexuality education curriculum documents, and (as part of administrative and classroom practice) these become localised interpretations of that curriculum. These curriculum-based discourses interact with (and at times compete with) discourses of sexuality that arise from official and unofficial interactions within a school. Official school discourses tend to position students as sexually innocent and therefore in need of protection whereas informal school discourses assume that peer-peer and pupil-teacher relations are imbued with active, knowing sexuality (Kehily 2002: 37). The consequence of these competing discourses is that students are constructed as 'ideally' non-sexual, a positioning which is disempowering because it is divorced from the lived experience of students (Allen 2007c). This kind of disempowerment can take place either in agreement with or in contrast with the tone of the curriculum. Students therefore find it difficult to construct an identity as legitimate sexual agents; agency being an important factor in the ability to feel in

control of their sexual identities and to explore their sexual desires (see below). In terms of sexuality, research demonstrates that young people in secondary schools rarely see themselves as 'childlike' and 'non-sexual' (Allen 2003a; Holland et al. 1998; Kehily 2002). Such positionings are non-agentive and thus preclude the view that they are able to act upon sexual knowledge they possess or which they acquire by whatever means (Allen 2007c). This study will focus on language usage during discussions of sexuality in order to shed light on linguistic strategies that young people employ in order to position themselves (or not) as sexual agents during classroom-based sexuality education.

A recent national evaluation (by students) of sexuality-education programmes in New Zealand demonstrates that students are critical of the predominant focus (in sexuality education programmes) on the potential dangers of sexuality (Allen 2005a, 2005b). Although they agree that disease and pregnancy prevention are important, to focus entirely upon such topics is to exclude access to knowledge of pleasurable sexual experiences (Allen 2005a). This focus on sexual risk can be traced to risk anxiety (Giddens 1991), a late modern state of thinking in which everything in life is subject to risk assessment. As part of risk anxiety, young people are seen as vulnerable due to their age and lack of experience, and this positioning is particularly problematic in terms of sexual activity because sex is a boundary marker between childhood and adulthood (Jones 2001). As a result, to teach about the dangers of sexuality becomes a prerogative, and stepping outside the 'sexual risk' box becomes difficult because it can be framed as inciting sexual danger (Allen 2007b). In other words, our risk-focussed society creates the impression that a risk approach to sexuality education is common sense. Ironically this kind of approach fails to allow young people to develop the sense of sexual agency they need in order to avoid the 'dangers' of sexuality (Allen 2007c). The problem with the placing of a young person's sexuality in an 'at-risk' mould is that it constitutes that person as "someone who, overwhelmed by hormonal urges, is incapable of 'rational' sexual decision making and is out of control" (Allen 2005b: 64). Thus agency in relation to sexuality is precluded in this positioning of youth

subjectivity and creates challenges for young people who may not wish to align with that particular sexual subject positioning. The challenge lies in finding other ways to perform 'in control' agentive youth sexuality despite the problematic discursive field available.

## **2.3 Discourse**

Discourse is a term which evokes a variety of meanings, particularly in academic circles (Mills 2004). There is the 'large-D' sense, based on Foucault's notions of 'Discourse(s)' as circulating histories of talk which shape meaning. The other meaning is more of a linguistic-oriented definition, one which frames discourse as 'language in use', focusing on the way meaning is generated by the use of language in specific contexts for specific purposes (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 16). These two definitions are different but connected because the study of socially situated language use requires the analyst to consider the influences of circulating histories of talk, for it is this 'discursive field' which enables and limits what is 'say-able' if one hopes to be understood (see section 2.7).

As an example of how the two meanings of discourse come together, when analysts working on language and gender in a social constructionist framework refer to discourses of masculinity or femininity, they refer to the "...workings of a particular set of ideas about gender in some segment or segments of society" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 42). Thus the circulating histories of talk (i.e. 'sets of ideas' about masculinity or femininity) do specific 'work' (i.e. generation of meaning) in relation to gender in localised situations. It is this notion of discourse which is applied in the analyses of this study, one which acknowledges the circulation of sets of ideas while also allowing for their localised application/resistance/reworking by real people in day-to-day interactive talk.

## 2.4 Sexuality, 'the sexual', and sexual agency

This investigation is based on social constructionist notions of sex and sexuality, accounts of which frame sexuality as an historical construct. As Weeks (1986: 15) has put it:

What we define as 'sexuality' is an historical construction, which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities - gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires and fantasies - which need not be linked together, and in other cultures have not been.

Within this social perspective, the biological dimensions of sexuality are not denied their existence. Rather the various capacities for pleasure and bodily sensations, practices, and activities which represent these biological dimensions are not presumed to *determine* the expression and meaning of sexuality; rather they only turn into 'sexuality' within specific social contexts (Amuchastegui 1999: 80). As with all social constructs, this quality of 'inventedness' does not make sexuality artificial or illusory. On the contrary, as a result of processes of normalisation, sexuality has become normative in various ways across global societies and had great impact on 'reality'.

Problems arise with the use of the term sexuality because it is defined in diverse ways between people and across contexts. The definition provided in the previous paragraph is an academic one and is therefore appropriate and useful in a document such as this. For the purposes of the present study, the term sexuality refers to ways of being sexual, and here the term sexual refers to sundry interconnections of genders, bodies, erotic desires, and erotic fantasies. In other words, 'being sexual' is about the body one has, what one has culturally learned about having such a body, and what one does and/or wants to do with that body erotically (or even conceivably what one prohibits oneself from doing). It is equally about the bodies of others, what one has culturally learned about 'others' who have those bodies, and what one does and/or wants to do (or prohibits oneself from doing) with those bodies and the people who possess them. Finally, it must be

emphasised that 'the sexual' is centrally about 'the erotic'. Despite being closely connected to the social and biological in many cultural contexts, in the end what makes the sexual 'sexual' is eroticism.

However as Cameron & Kulick (2003) point out and Morrish & Sauntson (2007) concur, the term sexuality has come to be conflated with sexual orientation (i.e. primarily whether one is heterosexual or homosexual) or sexual identities (such as gay, bi or straight), and this is largely because body characteristics (sex), ways of existing socially (gender), and erotic desires (sexuality) do tend to be interconnected for most people (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 5). This is despite the fact that, as Weeks has observed above, they need not be interconnected, and often have not been so.

This conflation of sexuality with sexual orientations and identities is one that I am at pains to avoid during this study. There are indeed moments when it is clear that the language choices of participants have great bearing on their performances of particular, and highly salient, sexual identities. However there are numerous other times when it is not at all clear which orientations or identities they might be claiming via their language choices, if any at all. For example, I find it highly problematic to presume that a research participant has been positioned as heterosexual or straight simply because she is placed during conversation in a subject position in which she is framed as having sexual desire for men, or as participating in sexual activity with men. Claiming or ascribing a straight identity might be neither the intention of those utterances nor the effect. Rather a bisexual orientation might be intended, or, alternatively, sexual orientation and identity might be pushed to the background and not considered relevant at that moment. Therefore the conversational effect might be that it never becomes clear which social category she is meant to fit into; rather, she is simply positioned as a subject who desires men sexually (whether exclusively or not). It is for this reason that I have chosen, when describing these subject positions, to use terms (e.g. men-desiring women and women-desiring men) which emphasise sexual desires and/or activities and which background social categories such as heterosexual unless there

is convincing evidence that such categories are being indexed. Far from being an exercise in the production of esoteric academic vocabulary, my motivation for this terminological choice has arisen primarily from my observations of the ways in which the students and teacher approach sexual diversity as part of this community of practice. During my time as participant observer, I had a continuous sense that the sexual diversity of society was considered normative in this CoP (see section 5.1.2), and so these young people took sexual diversity for granted. This is despite the periodic intrusion of heteronormativity and its hegemony, in which certain utterances (regardless of elusive intention) derailed inclusivity by positioning everyone in the room as unproblematically heterosexual. Outside of these moments, assumptions about sexual identities and orientations were generally avoided in discussion.

Sexual agency is also centrally tied to the description of sexuality given above. Agency is the sense that a subject is active and knowing in a situation as opposed to passive and unknowing (i.e. the subject is the 'doer' rather than the 'done to' or the disconnected observer). This sense of 'active knowingness' articulates with the term sexual to represent the degree to which a subject is seen to know what she or he wants erotically, and actively seek it out, or at least have the potential to do so.

## **2.5 Gender, biological sex, and the connection with language**

It has been a commonly held view (either tacitly or explicitly) that womanhood and manhood are, on some level and in some way, innate. This way of thinking is predicated on the 'ideology of essentialism' (Bucholtz and Hall 2004), which says that a given aspect of identity is something one 'is', suggesting that a category such as 'woman' has a core essence which is biological and/or spiritual in basis. However, feminist scholarship has engaged extensively with the idea that womanhood and manhood are social constructs rather than innate characteristics, shifting focus to masculinity and femininity as crucial elements in that social construction (McElhinney 2003). In this way of thinking, to speak of gender is to



speak of socially constructed identity categories as distinct from biological maleness and femaleness. However if gender is merely viewed as social understandings imposed upon binary-perceived body differences, then body dimorphism (i.e. the idea that there are only males and females) still holds sway over interpretation. In other words, masculinity and femininity merely come back to representing man and woman. However, by focusing on the study of masculinity and femininity as opposed to men and women, a useful emancipation of these two constructs can take place, with the result being that one can study feminine behaviour of men, the masculine behaviour of women, or the masculinity/femininity of institutions (Kiesling 2004).

### **2.5.1 - Masculinities and femininities**

Anti-essentialist understandings of gender have led to the pluralisation of the terms masculinity and femininity, and this change has emphasised the fluid, variable and highly contextualised nature of the masculine and the feminine (Johnson 1997). This shift in terminology reflects a more fundamental shift in the study of gender towards a focus on the diversity of ways in which people experience being male or female (or both/neither - see section 2.5.3). Attention has turned to the ways in which gendered power manifests itself in relation to other social constructs such as class, race, and sexual identity and thus to the gendered politics that exist *within* femininity and *within* masculinity (Johnson 1997). Importantly, the pluralisation referred to above has provided a key to a paradox in which many men do not *feel* very powerful (e.g. working class men, gay men) yet have access to the privileges and advantages of being a man in society because they belong to a favoured/powerful 'category' of people (Kiesling 2004). Addressing this paradox has led Connell (1995) to the insight that different versions of masculinity relate to one another via alliance and subordination and are measured against the most honoured form within a culture – hegemonic masculinity.

### **2.5.2 - Hegemonic masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity is normative but not particularly normal, in the sense that only a minority of men are likely to enact it. In fact as a theoretical

construct, it refers to a normative representation of the most honoured way of being a man (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and is distinguished from other forms of masculinity. This representation is composed of qualities which, defined as 'manly' as part of the hegemonic masculine ideal, "...establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Schippers 2007: 94). In other words, when indexed (i.e. called forth via language use) these traits are associated with masculinity as positioned hierarchically above femininity. The most powerful way in which hegemonic masculinity maintains its power is via complicity on the part of two groups: (1) men who do not enact masculine dominance, and (2) heterosexual women. Thus hegemonic masculinity does not only subordinate femininity; rather it also has dominance over what Connell (1995) has called 'subordinated masculinities'; that is, forms of masculinity which are censured in juxtaposition with hegemonic masculinity.

If one is to fruitfully apply hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical construct during empirical investigation, it becomes necessary to identify its traits within the culture(s) of one's participants. For the purposes of the present study, New Zealand is an industrialised society which has been heavily influenced by Western thought as a legacy of nineteenth century British imperialism. Therefore a definition of hegemonic masculinity in industrialised societies, offered by Talbot (2010: 160), is useful. It lists heterosexuality as a key element of hegemonic masculinity, along with rationality, hierarchy, dominance, violence, and being the bread winner. These traits will serve as possible indexical clues during analysis that hegemonic masculinity is being drawn upon during performance of gender and sexual agency (regardless of the sex of the speaker).

### **2.5.3 – Women, hegemonic femininity, and the 'slut' stigma**

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely applied and has taken a central place in gender theory due to its explanatory power; however, a corresponding theorisation of femininities has been slow to develop (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In response to this gap, Schippers (2007) has theorised the

concept of hegemonic femininity whilst theorising its subordination to hegemonic masculinity. As with hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity represents normalised qualities which femininity is measured against, but these are subordinate to the masculine ideal. Thus 'subordinated' femininities endure under the ascendancy of both hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity.

Subordinated femininities are viewed as 'contaminating' to the relationship between masculinity and femininity because they draw upon hegemonically masculine traits which might exist in a society (e.g. physical strength, sexual potency), traits which must remain unavailable to women if they are to serve as idealised masculine constructs (Schippers 2007: 94). Viewed as such, rather than being merely subordinate, femininities which draw upon traits of hegemonic masculinity are what Schippers (2007: 95) terms *pariah femininities*:

The possession of any one of these characteristics is assumed to contaminate the individual, so by having the one characteristic, an individual becomes a kind of person – a lesbian, a 'slut', a shrew or 'cock-teaser', a bitch.

Thus displaying enthusiasm for (hetero)sex, for example, poses a problem for femininity performance because it lays a girl or woman open to being 'branded' with the label 'slut' and thus becoming a victim of its stigma (i.e. a sexual pariah). Extensive discourse-analytical studies have borne witness to the magnitude of importance attached (by girls) to the avoidance of being labelled a slut (see Cameron and Kulick 2003; Eckert 2000; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Jackson and Cram 2003; Lees 1986; Skapoulli 2009; Sutton 1995). This does not mean that women completely avoid all association with ways of speaking that, within the immediate context, evoke qualities of hegemonic masculinity, for to do so would be to abandon the use of linguistic resources which have multiple meanings attached to them (Johnson 1997). However it does mean that accessing them for whatever social purpose might require careful mitigation via

the indexing of hegemonically feminine qualities, whether this is done previously, concurrently or subsequently.

#### **2.5.4 – Body dimorphism – a genealogy**

Biological sex, even more than gender, forms an unyielding binary in western societies (i.e. male/female) despite the fact that 1 in 2000 babies is born with what are often referred to as ‘indeterminate’ genitalia (Fausto-Sterling 2000). In other words, they have genitalia which fail to match the strict binary cultural script which dictates that there are only two sexes – male and female – a script (or belief system) which also drives modern science despite the undeniable existence of genital and sex-chromosomal variation (see Bergvall 1999). Our ‘bifocal lenses’ find this divergence unacceptable, and these intersex babies often undergo sexual assignment surgery in order to stamp out difference and make ‘nature’ fit the binary model.

The scalpel is also metaphorical, with intersex bodies and identities rendered invisible by the limitations of language. As Butler (2004: 30) has asserted, to have “access to the human” language must first grant you intelligibility in society; the laws of culture and language must find you to be a possibility. The terms male, female, and indeterminate “mandate the visible” (Ramanathan 2010) in relation to sexed bodies. Intersex bodies are masked and unintelligible.

Shilling (1997) points out that what is presented in modern science as factual male/female difference is in fact a construction we have inherited from the Enlightenment era. The categories of male and female existed before that time, but rather than representing two sexes, they represented one sex with two different arrangements of body parts (with the male a superior configuration). Once the Enlightenment arrived, along with its notions of human equality, scientists began to ‘flesh out’ the categories of male and female and base them on biological differences in order to explain the differing societal status of men and women. So in a European context, it wasn’t actually until the late nineteenth century that the male/female body binary gained the traction it enjoys today.

This brief genealogy of modern European notions of bodies lends support to Butler's poststructuralist assertion that it is our ideas about gender which have been imposed on bodies rather than the reverse. Cameron (1997a: 24) explicates the position taken by Butler (amongst others) as the suggestion that:

[W]ere it not for our gendered *social* arrangements, 'sex' as we know it – a strict bipartite classification of people on the basis, usually, of their genitals – would not have its present significance. That is not to deny human sexual dimorphism; the point is rather (as it also is with race) that human biological variations assume importance for us when for social, economic and political reasons they become a basis for classifying people and ordering them into hierarchies. No society is ordered on the basis of variations in blood group, and therefore we do not regard 'people with group O blood' as a natural kind – though in purely biological terms it would be easier to identify this 'kind' than it is to identify classes or races. Sex may be more straightforward to identify, but arguably the significance we attach to the identification follows from the significance of gender divisions in the organisation of our societies.

In other words, as Schilling's genealogy above demonstrates, it is because we place such significance on the *idea* that everyone should be clearly identifiable as a *man* or a *woman* (gendered constructs) that we care a great deal about the physical sexual characteristics of our fellow humans (whereas we fail to attach the same significance to other clear biological differences such as blood type or eye colour). The reason that our society places such significance on the identification of men and women is because manhood and womanhood are closely linked to power relations in our society. The idea that genitalia matter whereas blood type does not matter is just that – an idea. However it is an idea which leads us to view males and females as natural "kinds" rather than merely naturally occurring variations like blood type. Status as a 'kind' is thus denied to bodies which fail to fit into male/female dimorphism, explaining the invisibility of these body types (and the wielding of scalpels to enforce that invisibility). The insight Butler provides is that the process is driven by our *social beliefs* about men and women, thus rendering

untenable the argument which maintains that men and women behave in certain ways because it is 'natural' for them to do so.

### 2.5.5 - Gender and language

The origins of the linguistic subfield of language and gender study are frequently traced to Robin Lakoff's seminal work *Language and Woman's Place* (Bucholtz 2004). In this pioneering text, Lakoff posited that women and men in America spoke differently. She relied mostly on intuition in her work rather than empirical observation or qualitative analysis. Later work refuted some of her concepts, but many of the issues remain (Bucholtz 2004). Overall, Lakoff proposed that American women in 1975 spoke tentatively, avoiding commitment and appearing not to have strong opinions. This form of communication brought about powerlessness in the interaction of language and gender (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). This 'women's talk' proposed by Lakoff has often been labelled a 'genderlect,' or a kind of dialect for women. At that time sexual identities were also seen to have dialects (e.g. gayspeak, queerspeak). Since that time, these concepts have been problematised by both gender and sexuality researchers (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003).

One shift since Lakoff's foundational work has been called the 'discourse turn.' In this sea change, researchers moved away from the search for a correlation between social categories (e.g. man, woman, lesbian, black) and linguistic units (like words or speech sounds) and moved towards a focus on the gendering of ongoing discourse (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 4). Words and sounds are not ignored, but *interaction* now shares the stage, and social categories are looked upon with a measure of suspicion. Prominent in this discursive trend is performativity, which has been developed from theories of Judith Butler (1999) (see section 2.6).

Performativity has led to another large shift – the 'performance turn.' The performance turn has caused linguists to view language and gender (indeed all social categories) as part of social practice, getting their meaning from what people do (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 5). That means instead of looking at social

categories, like gender, as something one 'has' (essentialism), analysts now view gender as something one 'does' (constructionism) (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 4). This shift has also profoundly influenced the language and sexuality subfield, with a shift in focus from identities as the source of particular language forms, to the idea that they are the effect of language (among other symbolising practices) (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 76). This stance leads to questions of agency. What active role do subjects play in this discursive field? The following section addresses this important question while explicating performativity theory, a key element behind the discourse analysis conducted in this study.

## **2.6 Performativity theory – context**

The purpose of this section is to outline the background to Butler's poststructuralist theorising of gender and the development of performativity theory. First, the origins of her thinking and her original focus will be delineated. Finally the application of her theory in Sociolinguistics will be outlined in order to demonstrate that her theories have been given specific interpretations in the field.

### **2.6.1 How did Butler develop this theory?**

Judith Butler's concept of performativity is grounded in psychoanalysis and feminist poststructuralism as well as the philosophy of language through Austin (1975) and deconstructionism via Derrida (1988). It builds upon Austin's insight that certain ways of speaking are performative, or in other words, they 'do' something as well as saying something. An example of a performative (in the sense of Austin) is the utterance "You're hired." By uttering it, the speaker accomplishes an act as well as saying something. However, in response to Austin, Derrida pointed out that the intention of doing something is insufficient to explain the success of a performative utterance, for such utterances work not because of speaker intention but rather because they reiterate past utterances which have been successful. Butler applied this idea of reiteration (i.e. repeatability) to gender, asserting that gender is performative in that performances of gender take their meaning by "drawing on discourse histories of similar performances" (Eckert and McConnell-

Ginet 2003: 131). In other words, in order to come off as masculine or feminine, we repeat stylised behaviours (including language) which draw on past successful performances of masculinity or femininity.

### **2.6.2 What is her focus?**

Butler's theorising of performativity arose from her focus on the problematisation of heterosexuality and the binary foundations upon which it rests: man/woman and male/female. Working from feminist poststructuralist influences, Butler aims to work against the notion that there are only two sexes, insisting that this notion is a reified construction. In other words, it is not a biological fact, but a social (mis)understanding which has "gained the status of natural fact" (Motschenbacher 2010: 13). By problematising this oversimplification of bodies, she hopes to destabilise the taken for granted nature of heterosexuality as the only natural form of sexuality.

The following section provides an explanation of what performativity is, as well as exploring the ontology and assumptions which sit behind the theory. Importantly, the notion of performative agency will be explicated and critiques of this notion of agency will be outlined and addressed.

## **2.7 Performativity theory – explanation**

In the preface to *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (Butler 1990: xiv) states that it is difficult to say exactly what performativity is; therefore it is a term which requires some definition. In part, this is because many others have begun to use performativity and give it their own formulations. Performativity theory focuses attention on the words and phrases that form the basis of particular *performances*, and so challenges the widespread perception that our verbal (and other) behaviour is merely a "natural" expression of our essential selves. By performance she means that we construct gender by repeating certain acts in a certain style, and these acts are aimed at performing certain ideals of gender. Language is one of these acts. What we do when we talk is materialise (evoke) gender ideals by performatively indexing (pointing to) them. All signification in this context (whereby symbols such



as words signify other things) is to some extent controlled by the compulsion to repeat, or reproduce, conventional forms of which we may or may not be aware.

A key point is that we don't choose our gendered identity; our gender gets produced as we "repeat ourselves" (Jackson 2004: 683). Repetition (or failure to repeat) constitutes the "I". Roles are not merely performed, rather 'becoming' takes place through performative acts. Heterosexuality, for example, imitates an ideal of itself but fails to achieve that ideal in every man or woman. It is an effect not an origin. However, one is not 'fixed' and thus performativity can become a site for "linguistic disobedience" (Jackson 2004: 683) by uses of language which create 'slippage' in subject formation, and this is where speakers access agency in the process. Agency lies in variations crafted during reproduction. In other words, utterances carry (as a kind of baggage) conventional meanings of language that exist before the speaker utters them; however, speakers can end up using those conventional forms in their own way. Those conventional forms (and their baggage) evoke meanings in listeners that can match, exceed, or contradict the speaker's intentions (Kulick 2000: 269). This means that utterances are either felicitous (successful) or infelicitous as part of a performance. The intention of the speaker does not govern success or failure of an utterance as part of a performance, rather iterability, or repeatability of the meanings attached to it, is the condition for both success and failure (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 128). That is, because certain utterances call to mind certain things for certain people, I might either *succeed* in my intended performance of identity by basically *matching* the meaning evoked in the listener by the language itself *or fail* by *differing* too much from that meaning evoked in the listener. Verbal *as well as other* performances come off as something (regardless of intent), mean something, and do their work because they draw on similar performances, reiterating what has worked in the past (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 131). We both use language and are used by language (Lakoff 2004: 39). This reiteration and resignification of meanings is directly related to the social performance of categories of gender, sexuality, and other social constructs as part of our ongoing identity construction.

To 'say' (using linguistic resources) is to do ongoing identity construction. Performances do not suggest fabrication, which supposes a core self to be lied about; rather many of our stylistic acts are aimed more at our hopes concerning future selves than our current concepts of what we are (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 320). It is through these stylistic acts that we might become what we hope to be, and these acts may be conscious or unconscious to a varying degree. It is the reiteration of social scripts, and so their accompanying regimes of power, that forms certain entities such as gender. These entities are subsequently given an erroneous pre-existing (or ontological) status (Butler 1990).

### **2.7.1 What assumptions arise from an anti-ontological position?**

As with much poststructuralist theorising, Butler's thinking is anti-ontological in the sense that 'thing-ness' is placed under suspicion (Butler 1993). No 'thing' is presumed to pre-exist its linguistic interpellation (i.e. calling forth through discourse), and in fact the problematisation of 'ontological essentialism' is a guiding imperative in her work. In other words, Butler suspends ontology and eschews the idea that it is a necessary element of sustained reflection (White 1999: 155). If one is to engage in ontology it should be austere minimal at most.

Avoiding ontology leads Butler to assume that nothing pre-exists its construction via language and that this constructive work must be done repeatedly. For Butler, gendered and sexual identities are the effect of certain practices of representing the self in words, not the cause (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 150). In other words, speaking style is not a façade behind which the 'real' self stands; rather, it is the manifestation of a self we present to the world (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 306). According to Butler (1993), this process places language in the position of forming, but not fully determining, the subject.

Another assumption that Butler makes is that human agency must therefore be found in the act of resignifying meanings. For Butler, context is refigured through reiteration, along with action and subject. The performative subject who speaks exercises agency in the manner in which the speech is repeated. That subject reinvigorates that speech and re-establishes the contexts of usage. Agency

is enabled by those original contexts yet breaks away from them because performativity is "a renewable action without clear origin or end" (Butler 1997: 40). In other words, the speaker's agency is aided by the past contexts of usage, but the speaker also refigures those contexts whilst negotiating the baggage of past meanings (both enabling and constraining), which come with that speech (McIlvenny 2002).

### **2.7.2 Performativity and agency**

Doing, acting and agency need to be taken into account as vital parts of the process of identity construction (Roberts and Sarangi 1999). Definitions of agency are still contested, with an overriding question being "Who acts? People or discourses?" (Gardiner 1995: 10). Summarising Judith Butler's notions of agency, Jackson (2004: 675) states that "agency lies in the work of performativity", which means that we perform agency by aligning with, reworking, or resisting subject positions. The value of performativity, says Jackson, seems to be in the choice between acting and not acting. We choose to enact certain subject positions and refuse certain other ones and herein lies agency. Identity categories have performative distinctiveness, with countless reiterations. To have agency, one must "articulate those [reiterations] in many contexts so as to resignify categories, open them up, and offer different possibilities for living." (Jackson 2004: 686). Thus although subject positions (or categories) like 'woman' or 'student' are restrictive, we still need the categories because it is only from within categories that we can work to resist them by subversively repeating them so that they don't become fixed (i.e. essentialised) (Jackson 2004: 682). Through close attention to language via discourse analysis, it is possible to demonstrate how interactants align with, resist and rework characteristics of social categories (Tainio 2002). It is in these linguistic and interactive manipulations that subjects can perform sexual agency whilst negotiating large-D discourses.

### **2.7.3 Critiques of performative agency**

There have been numerous critiques of poststructuralist notions of agency (for a useful survey, see Vitanova 2010). However, these critiques have largely

focused on a reductive reading of poststructuralist notions of agency, a reduction captured in a summary statement from Vitanova (2010: 132) in which she rejects poststructuralist notions of agency, asserting that they frame agency as "...the ambiguous effect of power relations external to the subject and other social forces". One reason that the aforementioned readings (captured in this statement) are reductive is because they are based upon early versions of poststructuralist theorising in which 'discourse' and its influences took centre stage and the agency of the subject remained bracketed until later stages of theoretical engagement (e.g. Butler, see below, this section). Critics frequently fail to take account of recent developments in poststructuralist theorisation of agency; developments which address some earlier oversights in relation to the capacity of the subject to act (see following).

One critique of performative agency which is not based on a reductive reading is that of McNay (2004). She has levelled criticism against the concept of performative agency, and her critique is based on two main points:

Performative agency is 'unsituated'

Performative agency is 'blind' to complex identifications of subjects

McNay insists that gender is a "lived social relation" as opposed to a location within discursive structures (as with Butler) or material structures (as with other theories). She says the problem with Butler's account of agency is that Butler positions agency as a property of abstract language rather than as a *situated* type of action or interaction (i.e. embedded in a social environment). As a result, aspects of agency such as intention and reflexivity are neglected and discursive power relations are not differentiated from other types of power relation. McNay (2004: 185) asserts that this situated aspect of discourse has been lost in the "linguistic monism" of constructionist work on gender identity. However, as McIlvenny (2002) points out, Butler's stance is constructionist but she cannot be accused of linguistic determinism. Butler clearly argues that language constructs the subject, but this does not mean that language fully determines the subject. Although agency is an effect of discursive conditions, these conditions do not control the *use* of agency.

Construction is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and leading to a set of fixed effects.

To address this criticism related to 'situatedness', it is important to observe that Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 316) seem comfortable with the notion that Butler's performativity is a situated phenomenon: "Butler emphasises the laying down of performances over time, and at the heart of this history is the combined history of individual speakers' performances". They explain this reiterative process as the building of a discursive style over time through perceived strategies. "Note that these perceived strategies are *situated*. So if someone engages regularly in complimenting they may be seen as polite or as suck-ups depending on the *situated* nature of their compliments" (my emphases). Thus it seems that McNay's assertion that 'linguistic monism' has killed the idea of situated discourse in constructionist work on gender identity is an overwrought argument.

In relation to the second critique, that of blindness to complex identifications of subjects, McNay suggests that Butler's construal of gender identity in terms of an imposition of gender norms erases the fact that gender involves the negotiation of conflict and tension (McNay 2004: 185). For example, class is seen to play a large role in shaping the agency of working class women (they have complex identifications that pull them between middle-class notions of femininity and non-betrayal of their working class origins). McNay (2004: 185) asserts that these complex identifications are invisible to discursive models of identity formation because these models do not help us to understand how the lived realities of gender "connect to abstract social structures of oppression." The assertion that performativity is blind to complex identifications of subjects is one that fails to stand up to closer scrutiny. In fact, Cameron and Kulick (2003) point to performativity as an ideal theoretical foundation for exploring the complex identifications of subjects. The intersection of gender with other structures of power can be accessed in discourse analysis that is grounded in Butler's ideas of reiteration and resignification, for it is via these forces that the restrictions of

normative concepts of gender can be manipulated, and thus brought into accord with the complexities of one's identifications.

Critiques of performativity have brought about clearer theorising by Butler in relation to agency. Magnus (2006) aims to demonstrate that although Butler's theorising on agency and the subject has been problematic, she has recently addressed a number of issues; therefore, performative agency is now a much more positive, empowering, and workable concept. The revelations come from lectures that Butler made in Germany in 2003 (in German), which the author calls the *Adorno Lectures*. The key change is that Butler no longer implies that discourse is separate from the subject it produces. Subjects may now (as part of performativity) stage their communicative interaction in a discursively formulated space rather than submitting to discourse. In other words, Butler now understands subjects to participate in the discursive processes that define their existence. This means that agency is not *purely* located in linguistic performativity and resignification, and therefore agency is no longer reduced simply to resistance and reaction (i.e. subjects reworking the terms they are given). Under Butler's new reasoning, as Magnus states, "...discursive structures are produced by the collective action of concrete subjective agents" (Magnus 2006: 101). Butler continues to give precedence to social discourse as part of subject formation. However it is now clear that the creative power of resignification does not simply belong to language. Importantly, the linguistic subject is the *agent* of resignifications. To counter interpellation (i.e. being called forth as a subject of a certain form) by the other, subjects can "capitalize upon the space between word and effect" (Magnus 2006: 84) like in Butler's earlier theorising, but they can do it as agents who creatively and at times collectively manipulate discursive fields.

This shift in the theorising of 'performative agency' by Butler allows it to be applied and used in tandem with other sociocultural theories of agency in plausible and fruitful ways. The following section outlines the concept of agency that has been applied in this study, one in which performative agency provides a key

orientation to language and agency, to which other useful and compatible theories of agency are aligned.

## **2.8 Language and agency**

### **2.8.1 Introduction – Sexually agentive subject positions**

In line with a poststructuralist view of discourse and action (see section 2.2), this research posits that people do act, but through subject positions which are constructed in discourse. Thus it follows that the concept of agency deployed in this study is a poststructuralist notion of agency. The version of agency used here parallels a formulation used by Miller (2010: 465), who defines it as “a discursively mobilised capacity to act”. In the present study the discursive mobilisation of the capacity to act is given a performative reading, drawing heavily on the theorising of Butler (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997, 2004). As outlined in section 2.7.2 and 2.7.3, with ‘performative agency’ the capacity to act is located in the calling forth of idealised subject positions, specifically in acts of ‘resignification’ of those subject positions; that is, agency is located in the linguistic crafting during interaction of variations on those oft-repeated versions of subjecthood. Sometimes the capacity to act is collectively constructed rather than being constructed by an individual alone, and so in order to allow for this possibility I draw upon ‘mediated agency’ (Wertsch, Tulviste, and Hagstrom 1993), a sociocultural concept of agency (based on the theories of Vygotsky) which is compatible with performative agency. Finally, Duranti (2004) theorises agency as *performance*, incorporating a useful heuristic division between ‘agency recognition’ and ‘act-constituting agency’ allowing for a dual focus on the subject and ‘the other’ in a way that is more socially grounded than it is in Butler’s theorising. In summary, a ‘sexually agentive subject position’, as I refer to it during analysis, represents the subject *as constituted for action* in relation to sexuality. Resignification of that constitution can be performed, whether individually or collectively, in order to align with, rework, or avoid positionings as ‘action-enabled’ sexual beings.

Thus it is, that as the participants in this study take up various 'identity categories' during discussions of sexuality (such as student, teacher, man, woman, boy, and girl), they make use of certain sexual subject positions whilst simultaneously resignifying those categories. Agency lies in the participants' collective *use* of these subject positions, and the crafting of variations in performance, in order to, amongst other things, produce a capacity to act in relation to sexuality which suits their social needs at the time. This does not, of course, mean that we have control over the *effects* of this use of subject positions; agency implies action, not success (see section 2.7). Thus an important point is that we choose *ways to constitute ourselves* rather than choosing a specific identity category. This is a subtle but crucial distinction. If sexuality education hopes to help young people to access sexual agency, a programme needs to provide them with opportunities to reiterate and manipulate sexual subject positions in various contexts so that they can resignify social categories. In this way they can use the agency of resignification to begin (re)constituting themselves as people in control of their own sex lives.

### **2.8.2 Agency as performance**

Ahearn (2001) asserts that scholars should look closely at language (including linguistic form) in order to better understand agency. Duranti (2004) has taken this call a step further, breaking agency into two dimensions:

- encoding of agency
- performance of agency

In terms of encoding, agency might be achieved at the level of word-choice or syntax. The construction of the roles of Subject, Agent, and Object differs between languages, hence analysis is enhanced through close attention to how people assign responsibility, credit, or blame for an event (Ahearn 2001). Tainio (2002) has applied this type of approach to sexual agency, focusing on transitivity in Finnish grammar during conversation analysis, as a clue to agency in relation to sexuality. However, this 'encoding' level will not be the focus of analysis during this study, for a recent comparative examination of the syntactic renderings of agency across



language varieties demonstrates that this a complicated endeavour; one which has, up until recently, largely been based on assumptions about the centrality of transitivity to agency (Donzelli 2010). Rather, in a manner more consistent with a poststructuralist view of language, the *performance* of agency via discourse will provide insight into the sexual agency construction of the young people involved in conversation.

Analysts investigating the performance of agency are generally preoccupied with the notion that language is action, so agency is constructed in the 'doing of language' by subjects in performance. Duranti (2004) further divides performances of agency into two sub-types:

- ego-affirming agency (rendered as 'agency recognition' in Figure 2.1 below)
- act-constituting agency ( rendered as 'agency constitution' in Figure 2.1 below)

To gain any agency at all, we are dependent on the ways in which we are addressed, and this is what Duranti is referring to with ego-affirming (i.e. 'self'-affirming) agency, which I have termed 'agency recognition'. Duranti illustrates this notion of agency recognition by comparing ways in which children are greeted (or not) in different cultures. In 'western' societies we tend to begin greeting children before they have the capacity to respond, whereas in Samoa, children (and perhaps even unmarried adults) are not greeted when one enters a house. This absence of greeting ascribes a weak (or derived) agency to children because they are not positioned as being 'present', restricting their access to the potential agency of language. This is a "stance vis-à-vis agency that plays a major role in the type of participation that is expected and allowed" (Duranti 2004: 457). This conception is compatible with Butler's poststructuralist notion that we are 'interpellated' by 'the other' and thus dependent for subjecthood (to some extent) on their initial positioning of us. However, although this idea of dependency on 'the addresser' (i.e. the other) is thus clearly built into performative theory, it is framed there in terms of general subject formation rather than in terms of agency itself, or the formation of an 'agentive subject'. Duranti's concept of agency recognition is useful

because (although not framed as specifically poststructuralist) it brings out the idea that being constituted as 'a subject with a capacity for sexual action' (to use the terms of this study) can be enabled or foreclosed upon depending on how we are addressed. Certain 'expectations and allowances' (i.e. positionings) create different starting points in relation to sexual agency and this cannot be separated from the formation of the subject.

Positionings provide an existential starting point for the analysis of the sexual agency of young people, but speakers can (and do) use language to align with, resist, or rework the positionings others ascribe to them. Therefore Duranti's 'act-constituting agency' incorporates the idea that language is action, and that agency is partly constructed in the 'doing of language'. He frames act-constituting agency as performative (Duranti 2004: 468), aligning with the idea that saying is doing and thus by using language in certain ways, we can "act upon the world" (see Bucholtz and Hall 2005). From the point of view of being constituted as a subject with the capacity for action, subjects can 'act upon' positionings via language, aligning with or undoing agency recognition (or its lack). So in this sense, the use of language is, fundamentally, an agentive act (Duranti 2004).

### **2.8.3 Collective agency performance**

The concept of agency used in this study also makes room for collective (or intersubjective) agency during interaction, a notion that has had some currency in sociocultural studies of language use, but usually referred to as 'joint activity' or 'co-construction' (see Bucholtz and Hall 2005). By drawing on a sociocultural model of agency called 'mediated agency' (Wertsch et al. 1993), this possibility of shared agency construction can be integrated into the model of agency used on this study.

The notion of 'mediated agency' is one of agency "beyond the skin" (Bateson 1972) and builds upon Vygotsky's hypothesis that cognition is often not performed by an isolated individual; rather, it can be "socially distributed" (Wertsch et al. 1993: 338). This position challenges basic assumptions about agency amongst psychologists, that is, about who it is who carries out mental processes. Hutchins (1991) demonstrates the distribution of cognition in a study of the collective

operation of naval vessels coming into port. Hutchins shows that in this case, agency must be attributed to the group. In addition to groups functioning as a unit, agency can also extend beyond the skin through what Vygotsky has called "semiotic mediation" (quoted in Wertsch et al. 1993). To illustrate this idea, Wertsch et al. (1993) highlight the use of computers as an example, saying that the fundamental question (in terms of agency) is whether an individual or a computer is responsible for carrying out a specific task. However, to assume that these two options exhaust the alternatives for a solution to that question is to fall into a trap. Rather, the computer mediates the paths of action of its user, but the individual involved still bears the major responsibility for initiating and carrying out an action on the computer whilst appropriating its means. Wertsch et al. (1993: 342) insist that attempts to understand processes involved with agency are doomed to miss the point if they start with "atomistic agency" (i.e. focused on the individual). Instead, the unit of analysis for agency is "individual(s)-operating-with-mediational-means", or the individual(s) functioning together with mediational means.

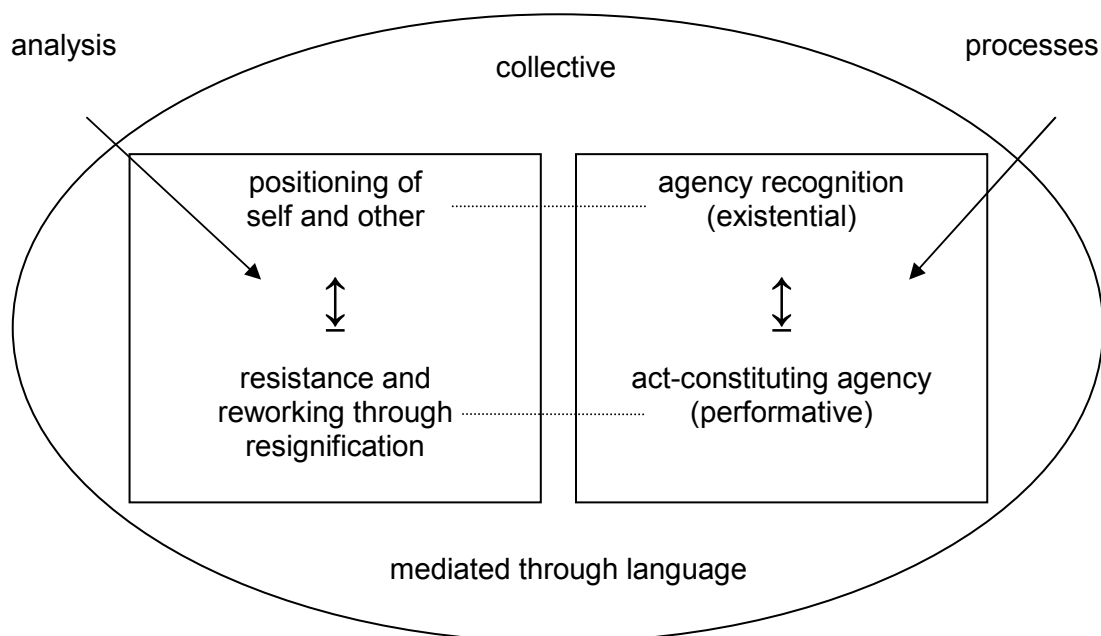
Language is one example of such mediational means, and similar to the computer example above, the language deployed by a speaker mediates paths of action because of the discursive baggage that comes along with it (see section 2.7). So, agency, which is co-constructed in interaction, is mediated by discourses. Resignification can be part of the "appropriation" of the means of discourse. The agent(s) is/are constructed whilst being limited and enabled by the baggage that comes with certain discourses and linguistic practices. These same discursive effects are being manipulated by agentive actors. In this way, resignification is a useful construct because it reveals how agency cannot be reduced to either the individual or discourse in isolation.

The idea of mediated agency is entirely compatible with performative agency. In fact it could be argued that Butler's concept of agency is embedded within mediated agency because of its grounding in one form of semiotic mediation (language). However, by keeping an heuristic division between mediated agency and performative agency, analysis is enhanced. The agentive properties of

resignification can be focussed upon in order to demonstrate the details of how language shapes paths of action. By also taking a step back and focussing on how participants initiate and *interactively carry out actions*, we can see how these agentive resignifications are either fortified or dismantled as part of power relations.

In Figure 2.1 (below) the diagram demonstrates the collective, linguistically-mediated foundations of agency as described in this study along with ‘access points’ for analysis (left-hand box). These existential and performative ‘processes’ (right hand box) can be analysed through a focus on positioning (by self and other) and resignification. Through the analysis of participant talk during sexuality education activities, this study will shed light on the linguistic construction and manipulation of sexual and gendered subject positions as part of sexual agency performance by young people.

**Figure 2.1 - Agency Performance and Analysis**



## 2.9 Summary

This literature review has broadly explained key concepts and terms used in this thesis as part of analysis and discussion. As this investigation takes place in a

sexuality education classroom, literature which explores the connection between sexual agency and sexuality education was surveyed in order to warrant a focus on this topic in the context of a classroom. Sexuality, gender, and their relationship to language were outlined and an explanation given of the model of gender used in this study, one in which masculinities and femininities are seen to be 'plural' with multiple versions of these constructs in discursive circulation. As part of this explication, hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity were described in some detail, as they are key concepts for the analyses in this study. As background to the treatment of agency in this study, Butler's performativity theory was delineated in order to illustrate the particular poststructuralist understandings which sit behind analysis, and the concept of performative agency formed the foundation for a description of the meaning of agency as applied in this study. Agency was described as "the discursively mobilised capacity to act" (following Miller 2010) and framed as being located in language because language mediates human activity. Agency recognition by others is a catalyst for agency performance or avoidance, a process in which performative resignification (or reworking) of sexual subject positions governs the constitution of subjects as sexually active. The following chapter introduces the research approach adopted for this study, one which is compatible with the poststructuralist foundations laid out in this literature survey.



# Chapter 3

## *Research design & methodology*

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### **3.1 Introduction**

This study assumes a qualitative perspective on inquiry, with an integration of three complementary approaches to research: linguistic ethnography, poststructuralist discourse analysis, and queer inquiry. The term 'approach' refers to a principled choice made by the researcher; a choice which manifests itself in both research theory and practice (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2008). Commenting on research which incorporates various approaches in a carefully considered manner, Phillips and Jørgensen assert that such work must be differentiated from a 'mixed bag' of incongruent approaches whose relations with each other have not been set down (2002: 4). Thus it is necessary to justify the inclusion of an approach by identifying what it can do and to justify its use in tandem with other approaches by identifying what it cannot do and what the combination achieves.

#### **3.1.1 An ethnographic perspective**

The application of the term 'ethnographic' in this study refers to a commitment during research to prolonged participant observation and the establishment of insider meanings and interpretations (Swann and Maybin 2008: 24). Addressing this notion of insider meanings, Johnstone (2000) frames ethnography as a way to describe how people make sense of their own ways of being, acting, and talking, a commitment which arises from a desire to ground social theory in particular situations rather than assume that everyone's behaviours can be explained in the same terms. In order to accomplish this descriptive goal, a participant observer tries to "...uncover and record the unspoken common sense of the group they are studying" (Johnstone 2000: 82). Linguistic analysis is enhanced by its integration with an ethnographic approach. This is because the researcher can look at the mutually constitutive relationship between language and the social world, yet do so in a manner that is culturally and socially sensitive in its analysis of local discursive practices (Swann and Maybin 2008: 25). In other words, discourse

analysis is enhanced by the insider perspective the researcher gains on the local setting and the people there. Considering the poststructuralist theorising which sits behind the analytical focus of this study, qualitative inquiry of this nature is a highly appropriate choice.

### **3.1.2 Aims of an ethnographic approach**

Rather than being a method or a list of methods, ethnography is more aptly viewed as a “theoretical outlook” or a “fundamental methodological position” on research (Blommaert 2007: 682). The particular ethnographic perspective adopted for this study is *linguistic ethnography*, which is a ‘bringing together’ and cross-fertilisation of a number of established “lines of research” (Rampton 2007: 585). Amongst these ‘lines’ or ‘programmes’ is interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982), a field which combines well with an ethnographic approach (Swann and Maybin 2008: 21) because it also draws on the ethnography of communication (see Hymes 1974). Linguistic ethnography also uses a topic-oriented approach (cf Hymes 1996) which focuses on ethnographies of specific types of interaction rather than the comprehensive description of a speech community.

A commonly cited aim of ethnographic approaches is to allow the researcher to ‘become familiar with the strange’, or gain insight into a setting which is ‘exotic’ and ‘foreign’. As part of this process, Hymes (1996) identifies three ingredients of ethnographic inquiry - a contrastive insight, a seeking of specific information, and a general interpretation. It is also “of the essence” of ethnography that it is a dialectical approach (or interactive-adaptive). Initial questions may change during the course of inquiry; however, this does not mean that ignorance or naiveté is desirable. Rather, it is essential that the ethnographer has a systematic knowledge of what is already known about the subject under research (i.e. what others have found and how they have interpreted those findings). Thus, the well equipped ethnographer enters the field with a knowledge framework about the topic under investigation (referred to by Pike 1967 as the etic 1 perspective), and the analysis of a given situation (the emic perspective - Pike 1967) can lead to reconsideration of that original framework (the etic 2 - Pike 1967). In this way one



can gain insight into the meanings of behaviours and institutions for those who participate in them.

However, in some research contexts what is needed is a way to make the *familiar* more strange (Rampton 2007). That is, if one is conducting research from within an institution, such as an education system where one has previously been a teacher, then one must act to gain some analytic distance from this familiar setting in order to facilitate observation (see section 4.3.1). On the other hand, this “from-inside-outwards trajectory” (Rampton 2007: 591) provides the researcher with historical insight into the local setting, omitting the exotic ethnographer’s need to ‘become familiar with the strange’ and allowing access to nuances of communication which can elude the exotic ethnographer even after years of fieldwork. Thus researchers can use themselves as sources of information and interpretation (Saville-Troike 2003). The challenge for the researcher employing an ethnographic approach close to home lies in striking a balance between reliance upon insider knowledge, and a healthy suspicion of that same knowledge (Johnstone 2000). Hymes (1996 [1978]: 13) puts it as follows:

The particular characteristics of the ethnographer are themselves an instrument of the inquiry, for both good and bad. For good, it is important to stress, because the age, sex, race or talents of the ethnographer may make some knowledge accessible that would be difficult of access to another. For bad, as we all recognize, because of partiality. Since partiality cannot be avoided, the only solution is to face up to it, to compensate for it as much as possible, and to allow for it in interpretation.

Hence there is the aforementioned need to gain some analytic distance and, in addition, to address during analysis the fact that one’s ability to do so is limited.

### **3.1.3 Strengths & weaknesses of an ethnographic approach**

Addressing the issue of researcher partiality, linguistic ethnography encourages a reflexive monitoring of the researcher’s trajectory, and this is compatible with what Tsitsipis (2007) refers to as ‘relational Sociolinguistics’. This is

a Sociolinguistics which “no longer assumes a strict division between subjects and data, and treats the idea that the data are already there before any agentive intervention as a mirage produced by reification and positivism” (Tsitsipis 2007: 637). In other words, it must not be seen as a detriment to research findings that the researcher was present at the research site and influenced the unfolding of events. Rather, intervention is inherent in research because all data gathered are produced post-arrival of the researcher.

As briefly outlined in the previous section, the strength of using an ethnographic approach is that it demands reflection and description of just how the researcher has interacted with the participants, and perhaps had an influence (sometimes profound) on the ensuing events from which data are gathered. On the flipside, a weakness of this approach is that one’s ability to generalise findings can be viewed as limited. In fact, for many qualitative researchers, generalisability seems an old-fashioned term. Some argue that rather than seeking generalisability, researchers need to conduct a thorough exploration of a phenomenon in one or more carefully described contexts, and this will be of interest to others who want to conduct a similar investigation elsewhere. Others may merely seek to vicariously experience (and gain insights from) individuals and sites they might not otherwise have access to. Stake (2005: 454) calls this kind of learning and enrichment “naturalistic generalization.” Within the purview of the field of gender and language, as part of a ‘postmodern turn’ (Cameron 2005), a shift to a focus on how gender is produced and given meaning across social settings (see section 2.5) has resulted in a move away from attempts to make generalisations.

As an alternative to generalisability, Duff (2006) encourages researchers engaging in qualitative research to see ‘beyond’ it as an issue. Such an approach is contrasted with approaches which position generalisability as the most crucial concept, a stance labelled ‘positivist’ by the author. She then suggests that “postpositivist, naturalistic, interpretive” qualitative studies emphasise a combination of *internal validity* and *reliability*.

### 3.1.4 Internal validity and reliability in qualitative research

Internal validity in qualitative research is made up of contextualisation, which comprises: thick description; holistic, inductive analysis; triangulation; and prolonged engagement with research participants. It also includes recognition of complexity and a need for credibility of observations and interpretations (Duff 2006). The following section describes these elements and relates them to the current study. Duff (2006) elaborates on contextualisation, complexity and credibility as part of research, and the following explanations draw heavily on her accounts.

The first aspect of internal validity that will be addressed is *contextualisation*. This term refers to the understanding and documentation of the research context, and this can include: (a) the larger sociopolitical or historical context (how it influences, mirrors, and is constituted in the events of everyday settings); (b) the participants and their interests; and (c) practices of the site and participants' understandings of these. It can also include (d) how the research itself creates a special sociolinguistic context that is temporally, socially, and discursively situated. In relation to the current study, elements 'a' and 'b' are addressed in chapter 4 (Setting and Participants), and elements 'c' and 'd' are addressed in detail in chapter 5 (Tracing the Emergence of a Community of Practice). The goal of those two chapters is to draw on insights gained from three months of fieldnotes as well as information gleaned from ethnographic interviews and to relate those insights via *thick description*.

The term thick description refers to a style of descriptive writing which develops from observation and is told from the perspective of those being observed; this is achieved by striving to set aside researcher conceptions and view participant experiences from their own behavioural framework (Geertz 2000 [1973]). In other words, the writer tries to help outsiders to imagine what it is like to be an insider. From the point of view of generalisability, a suitably 'thick' description of research participants and concepts allows readers of the findings of an ethnographic study to "determine the generalisability of findings to their

particular situation" (Gall, Gall, and Borg 2003: 466). That is, the description should equip readers to draw their own conclusions about whether or not the findings can be applied to other specific settings. The task of thick description begins later in the current chapter and continues throughout the paper as analysis is continually 'warranted' (Swann 2002- see section 3.3.2) via ethnographic detail.

In terms of *complexity*, Duff (2006: 78) asserts that this theme of social research is captured through a realisation that the complex interactions which lie beneath human behaviour are co-constructed and unpredictable within society and within individuals. In ethnographic approaches, the researcher must help the reader to appreciate the complexity of the situation, while at the same time situating observations in a "coherent and accessible framework" (Duff 2006: 79). Otherwise the reader cannot see the proverbial forest for the trees. The primary way in which complexity has been tackled in this study is via the adoption of the communities of practice framework as a way to understand the social milieu of the classroom (see Chapter 5). By presenting detailed observations of the gradual transformation of this class of students and their teacher (and 'their researcher') into a community of practice, readers of this study can gain insight into the complexity of this research setting whilst being guided through it in a manner which enables understanding rather than hindering it.

*Credibility*, according to Duff (2006), can be enhanced when enough data is presented to readers in the body of an article (or appendix) that they can draw their own conclusions. It is also a product of the amount and type of data presented to support the findings, and triangulation of data and methods is a key part of this process. Another way to enhance credibility is to use 'member checks' and incorporate members' feedback into the report and conducting interviews is also seen to have great value (Duff 2006). Credibility has been addressed in the current study through the triangulation of data analysis by recording and analysing data from varying circumstances within the classroom programme (i.e. teacher-led whole class discussions, teacher-supervised small group discussions, semi-anonymous online discussions, and unsupervised small group discussions).

Extensive fieldnotes also add to triangulation, as these were kept in relation to the classroom, but also in relation to observations of the broader school community so that classroom dynamics could be related to the wider culture of Matangi College. Participant perspectives were sought via focus group interviews and some of the data analysis was also presented to them, and their responses noted. In these ways, every effort was made to enhance the credibility of the findings in this study.

### **3.1.5 Discourse analysis – a poststructuralist approach**

The grounding of this study in poststructuralism and performativity brings with it a corresponding concern with subject positions and power relations during interaction. Thus the approaches taken to the analysis of discourse in this study are also poststructuralist in orientation. This ultimately means that an anti-materialist stance is taken, which leads to a focus on the discursive production of social 'realities'. Rather than sitting outside of discourse, the subject positions of speakers are open to redefinition and being continuously reconstructed *through* discourse (Baxter 2002: 830), but with a sense of agency on the part of subjects – they are not 'dupes' of discourse (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of performativity and agency). It is this anti-materialist stance which differentiates a poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Leap (2008) puts the anti-materialist stance in more explicitly gendered terms, asserting that poststructuralist approaches to discourse hold that gender is always in formation, and language practices enable and limit these formations. He also indirectly endorses Baxter's claim above that subject positions are reconstructed *through* discourse. "Linguistic practices provide sites for these formations; they do not simply index a gendered presence that enters the social moment already constructed" (Leap 2008: 283). In other words, language use *constructs* a 'gendered presence' (i.e. subject position) as *part* of the social moment, drawing on idealised abstractions of gender in order to create a gendered presence which makes sense in context.

### 3.1.6 Discourse analysis – queer inquiry

Nested within the general poststructuralist approach adopted is queer inquiry, which is a particular type of poststructuralist 'lens' often applied to the data in this study. Motschenbacher (2010: 2) positions queer approaches to research as having a central focus on “critical heteronormativity research”, and it is this inclination to critique heteronormativity which differentiates it from a more general poststructuralist perspective. Critiquing heteronormativity refers to a process of revealing how heterosexuality is naturalised (i.e. made to look like common sense) whereas other forms of sexuality or sexual identity are marginalised (Sauntson 2008: 282). This critique is also applied to normative gender binarism (i.e. man/woman) and sex binarism (i.e. male/female), as it is these types of binarism which, according to Judith Butler, serve as heteronormativity's "stabilising mechanisms" (see Motschenbacher 2010: 12).

The queer critique directly addresses the exclusionary nature of these binary systems, or the way in which binary categorisation has the effect of erasing certain subjectivities that fail to fit neatly into such polar opposites. Making the statement that it is one's aim to adopt a poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis is an action that brings with it no guarantee that the resulting analysis will avoid the trap of reproducing such binary cultural ideologies and their accompanying “methods of social domination” (see Barrett 2002: 39). In other words, even with benevolent intentions, the analyst can set out to examine the construction of sexual subject positions through discourse and yet be constrained by 'heteronormatively realised' social categories, and thus erase subjectivities which fall outside the narrow field of view such categories afford. This is because the dyads of 'woman and man' and 'female and male', although inadequate classification systems for describing the world around us, are widely believed to constitute the extent and range of genders and bodies available:

Because the terms *female* and *male* insufficiently categorise our experience, English also includes *tomboy*, *sissy*, *bisexual*, *gay*, *lesbian*, *hermaphrodite*, *androgyne*, *transvestite*, *transsexual*, *transgendered individual*, etc. The

negative connotations often associated with these words suggest that although such a multiplicity exists, these are aberrations and departures from a basic dichotomy: female and male. The belief in 'only two' is not an experiential given but a normative social construction. (Bing and Bergvall 1996: 2)

It is precisely this normative social construction of 'only two' which stabilises heterosexuality as a taken-for-granted, 'common-sense' way of viewing sexuality. As Wilchins (2002: 31) has eloquently said, binary thinking is like a strictly bifocal lens worn from childhood, "through which we view a Technicolor world. Wherever we look, no matter what is 'out there,' we see only black and white." Heteronormativity critique aims to remove these metaphorical, black-and-white, bifocal lenses from the researcher's gaze and make salient, during analysis, the socially constructed nature of heterosexuality.

In this study, although I keep a critical eye to heteronormativity during analysis, it does not provide an exclusive focus. For this reason I have chosen to present poststructuralist and queer approaches to discourse analysis separately and thus avoid collapsing one into the other. This heuristic separation affords a switching of the analytical lens during analysis, allowing heteronormativity to be backgrounded and foregrounded whilst maintaining a more general poststructuralist approach.

Choice of approach is not simply a matter of determining 'best fit' or going with 'whatever works' (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2008: 12). As with most scholars, ontological considerations (Mason 2002) have also influenced my decision to be explicit about the fact that a queer approach has formed an integral part of my qualitative research perspective. By ontological considerations, I refer to identifications and commitments which have shaped my contributions to this research from its foundations. There is my own academic commitment to the problematisation of heteronormativity, a commitment which has influenced my input into the planning of the classroom programme, its implementation, and the choice of activities for data recording (see section 3.3.8). I also refer to the

particular perspectives I bring to research as a self-identified gay man, and the corresponding 'gaze' which I apply to participant observation and the analysis of data. As Kitzinger (2006) has revealed, performances of heterosexuality can pass unnoticed for many whilst being 'clamorously apparent' to non-heterosexual eyes and ears. Thus it can be argued that my own subjectivities have instilled a queer approach into my efforts to research sexual agency as part of sexuality education in New Zealand. However, as asserted in the previous paragraph, heteronormativity critique is not the exclusive focus of this study; therefore, I maintain that queer inquiry is one element of a broader qualitative approach taken during this research, and does not define the enterprise.

### **3.2 Research aim, purpose, and questions**

In order to answer the very broad question of how young people's sexual agency is linguistically negotiated during interaction in this CoP, the proposed research will address the following three questions.

- 1. What linguistic and discursive processes do young people employ to perform sexually agentive subject positions during a classroom-based sexuality education programme?*
- 2. What linguistic and discursive processes do participants employ to ascribe sexually agentive subject positions to others during a classroom-based sexuality education programme?*
- 3. What linguistic and discursive processes do young people employ in order to align with, rework or resist ascriptions of sexually agentive subject positions during a classroom-based sexuality education programme?*

### **3.3 Overall research design**

#### **3.3.1 Process of selecting setting & participants**

As part of contextualisation of this research study (see section 3.1.4), it is important to outline the setting and participants, and it is also important to emphasise why and how they were selected as a focus for the study of language



use and sexual agency in sexuality education. The characteristics of the setting and participants will be described in detail in chapter 4, but sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 (below) provide a brief introduction to the decision-making process which led to their involvement in the study.

### **3.3.2 Why a school?**

In choosing a focus for a study related to language, gender and sexuality, it is important to be mindful of the imperative to warrant such a focus (Swann 2002, 2009; Swann and Maybin 2008). The question that must be asked is how one can be reasonably confident that language, gender and sexuality are in fact relevant in any given situation, or at least more relevant than other social categories or processes. In the case of sexuality education, students are asked to discuss issues of sexuality and gender as part of “on-task” behaviour, or what Swann (2009) refers to as ‘official’ interactions in the classroom. This overt focus clearly warrants the investigation of sexuality and language (and gender by close association). What perhaps requires more careful warranting is a focus on sexuality and gender in the ‘off-task’ or ‘unofficial’ interactions that infuse classroom interaction.

### **3.3.3 Why this particular school?**

Matangi College offers senior secondary level students the option of studying Health (and thus sexuality) as an academic subject and thus offers a rare opportunity in the New Zealand context. It is rare because in New Zealand, the provision (or not) of sexuality education as part of the curriculum at senior level is left to the discretion of schools (see Allen 2005b; Jackson and Weatherall 2010). The senior school age group was chosen as the target group for this study for both symbolic and instrumental reasons. Symbolically it is important to hold up this example of senior academic Health study for others to see (a motivating factor for the cooperating teacher involved). In addition, from an early stage in the planning of this project, it was realised that this research needed to be conducted within a sexuality education classroom organised around the principle that sexuality education should “open discursive spaces for young people’s own sexual subjectivities, rather than positioning them in ways they would prefer students to

be” (Allen 2007c: 229). This is important from an educational perspective because sustained engagement with sexuality lessons results from young people recognising themselves in the meanings they offer. It is important from the point of view of the research questions of this study because it was decided that such an opening of discursive spaces would maximise opportunities to observe sexual subject positioning. The approach taken to sexuality education at Matangi College matches such a model, and this meant that it was an appropriate research site for this study.

Instrumentally, a focus on 16- to 17-year-old students places the study on more ethically firm terrain because participation in the Health course and the research project (indeed ‘school’ at all) is maximally voluntary within the context of parental advice and/or directives, as well as student perceptions of their teacher’s approval (see Allen 2005c). Beyond the desire to target such a setting, the choice of this particular school was ‘opportunistic’ (see Duff 2006, 2008). The head of Health at the school was the one Health teacher (of those contacted) who voiced interest in cooperating with this investigation during the timeframe in which it had to occur. Without his interest, and the support of school administrators and staff, the project could not have proceeded. I contacted him through university sexuality education advisors who knew that he planned to implement a senior Health class with a sizeable sexuality education unit. Upon hearing about my research proposal, he quickly indicated that he wanted to cooperate with it because he could see its value for his students and for the development of Health as an academic subject in New Zealand.

### **3.3.4 Observation schedule and why it was chosen**

To take an ethnographic approach is to commit oneself as a researcher to gaining some understanding of the community in which the research is to take place. Eckert (2000) has indicated that a month of close participant observation provides enough background knowledge for fruitful investigations of language use. However, it was felt that an investigation into language use in a *sexuality education* programme would require a longer period of participation. Importantly, this was partly because I was preparing to audio-record participant conversations about

sexuality, and so earning the trust of participants was paramount and could not be taken for granted. It was also done in order to enrich my own level of literacy in relation to New Zealand senior Health classrooms, supplementing the long-term knowledge of New Zealand secondary schools which I possessed before commencing this research.

Sarangi (2005) emphasises that such an elevated level of literacy can be gained through 'thick participation' a concept metaphorically presented as knowledge not just of the rules of a game, but knowledge of the game itself. In other words, via thick participation (framed as long term immersion in a setting, coupled with the provision of exploitable feedback to participants) a researcher can learn first hand about a community's everyday practices. In order to engage in thick participation, I began collaborating with Mr. Johnson on the planning of the classroom programme five months before data recording began, and spent 10 weeks in the school and classroom in order to engage with the students in their Health programme. However I would argue that it was my four years of experience as a secondary-school teacher in New Zealand, some of it accrued in this same city (albeit nine years earlier), which provided a strong foundation of thick participation (i.e. knowledge of 'the game' of secondary school classrooms in this neighbourhood). The five months of participant observation prior to the data recording served as a fine tuning of knowledge in relation to this particular CoP. Granted this earlier experience had not been accrued when I was in the role of a researcher, however as outlined in section 3.1.2, linguistic ethnography often exploits such insider knowledge, whether or not it has been acquired via a researcher's gaze. This process of participation involved countless small decisions, some of which I will relate in the next section for the purpose of disclosure and transparency, certainly, but also as a means to demonstrate the insights gained.

### **3.3.5 The ethnographer in the field – decision and compromise**

Eckert (2000) writes that any particular pathway that a researcher takes into a community builds a particular history and a particular perspective on the people there. Of course the reverse of that point is that the same pathway also builds a

certain perspective on you, as the researcher, in the eyes of those same people. Because my entry to the school had been through Mr. Johnson from the start, I was obligated at first to take on a role as what Tewksbury & Gagné (2006) call the 'patron-introduced empathetic outsider.' That is, I had been introduced to everyone, staff and students alike, by Mr. Johnson (my patron) and presented as a university student who was empathetic to their school community (i.e. the empathetic outsider). As a result of my patron's status as a teacher in the school, and the fact that I myself was an adult and a former teacher, I was acutely aware of the need to distinguish myself from the teachers and demonstrate that, although I had collaborated with Mr. Johnson, my 'allegiance' was not solely to him. This was particularly important in relation to the students in the Health class, for I wanted them to realise that I was not reporting to Mr. Johnson about what they did during his absence.

My status as a former teacher also motivated me to de-emphasise this aspect of my identity by cultivating for myself what Holt (2004) refers to as a 'least adult role.' This is a role in which one neither denies being an adult nor attempts to act/dress like a youngster, but rather 'does adulthood' in a way that is atypical in a school. This variety of researcher identity parallels Eckert (2000: 72) in her role at Belten High as an "anomalous character" on the school's landscape, a role which afforded her a kind of mobility that students lack but also gave her access to their privileges (i.e. lack of responsibility for the behaviour of others). Part of my cultivation of this least adult role was to look more like a university student (i.e. younger) by dying the 'creeping grey' out of my hair and dressing in a way that was still adult-like but not teacher-like. At Matangi College, like most New Zealand secondary schools, the students wear uniforms except on 'mufti days' when they can wear their weekend/holiday clothes. Partly in sympathy with this expectation of students, and partly out of a sense of simple professional propriety, the teachers tend on the whole to dress semi-formally at minimum. This inclination was interpreted in a variety of ways by individual teachers at Matangi, but certain items of clothing were noticeably not worn by men teachers on an average day, such as

jeans and sneakers. With strategic use of these items of clothing from the start, I was able to begin the ongoing task of differentiating myself from the teaching staff without alienating myself from them. These strategies were important because assumptions regarding a researcher's identities are often made outside of active identity-management efforts (Tewksbury and Gagné 2006). Impressions given while chatting in the car park, changing the tape, or even when the researcher is viewed from afar, can generate assumptions and formulate expectations.

In terms of the ethnographer's daily labour, I also had to consider carefully where, when and how I did things. In order to make observations of the broader school culture, I needed to get out and about in the school as much as possible, particularly at times when students were not in class. While walking around, I soon realised that I looked like a teacher on supervision duty in spite of my best efforts to differentiate my appearance from that of the teachers. In fact, on the first day, the teacher who was truly on duty joked with me, asking me if I was also on duty. I soon realised that there was one thing that no teacher was doing out in the school grounds, and that was sitting. Therefore I opted to sit in one place and observe the students passing by. Rather than carrying my "adult-looking" leather portfolio around, I merely got around with my small pocket notebook and 'hung out' during interval and lunch breaks, but in various parts of the school, including the far corners (e.g. playing fields, music room). I checked the school notices every morning so that I knew what was going on that day and could locate myself where I felt interaction was likely to happen.

I had not been able to secure desk space for writing because such space was already at a premium for the teaching staff. The only place where table space was freely available to me was the staff room, but to be seen from afar, coming and going at will from that 'least student' of spaces, would have aligned me too closely to the teachers. Therefore I resolved at first to carry my laptop in its bag and write on it at varying locations. As one teacher (a researcher too, and sympathetic to my enterprise) pointed out to me, this was a poor choice because it made me stand out too much as an outsider, for no one else was carrying laptops around in that way

and using them out in the open. Therefore I resolved to keep everything in the boot of my car in the visitor car park, located out of sight on a terrace below the administration block. In the end I wrote my fieldnotes in the car, which gave me the privacy I needed for writing and some security for my belongings. It also afforded me a fairly low profile because I was acutely aware of the possibility of 'wearing out my welcome'.

One thing that stood out for me was that relevant observations began to be salient almost immediately. For example, very quickly I was noticing aspects of the school's 'sexual culture' such as the degree to which student couples were publicly 'demonstrative' via touching and other body language. Also, I was able to hear examples all around me of reference to sexual acts (in banter and in more serious conversations). Based on the literature, I had thought that it would take a bit longer before anything 'noteworthy' started happening (see Eckert 2000). This productivity was a pleasing development, but also a bit surprising. In pondering what it meant, I decided that my entrée via Mr. Johnson had smoothed things over in the classroom and school grounds alike. As Johnstone (2000) points out, teachers too are often insider-outsiders in the communities they work in and thus an adult researcher who comes from outside the community can 'fit in' in a similar manner without filling a teacher's role. It is also possible that New Zealand's prevailing 'laid back' culture had an impact, with this attitude influencing the level of comfort that the students and staff felt, despite having a stranger in their midst. The real reason is likely to remain elusive to some extent, but this smooth start permitted the project to launch quickly, and it was soon time to focus energy on the classroom programme.

### **3.3.6 Methodology and the classroom programme**

The following section shifts focus to the Health class which comprised the CoP under study, beginning with what was being learned and taught. The classroom programme was related to the broader Health curriculum, and prior to the commencement of the school year, Mr. Johnson and I met numerous times over summer and had long discussions about how to bring the classroom programme and my research goals together. As a result, the sexuality unit was largely planned

by Mr. Johnson but with considerable input from me. We decided together that Tasker (2000) would form the basis of the unit (see section 3.3.8) and choices around which sections of that unit to include were heavily influenced by my opinions concerning which ones might generate the kind of recorded data I needed (reasons which I address in the analytical chapters). In hindsight, this planning period comprised a form of participant observation for me because, as we planned the unit, I gained a great deal of insight into how Mr. Johnson taught the subject and his philosophies of teaching and learning in general. I did not keep detailed fieldnotes during that time, but those discussions certainly enhanced my understanding of the later events of the classroom. For example, I had learned that he has a passion for Health teaching, and that sexuality education is a subject of great importance to him, one which he enjoys teaching. I also knew that he valued the input of students into curriculum choices, knowledge which led me to realise that his teaching practices could possibly lend themselves to mutual engagement and the formation of a CoP in the classroom. I aligned with his preference for student involvement, and this led us to treat the student interviews as an opportunity for them to have a say in what would happen during the sexuality unit. In hindsight, this was a pivotal aspect of the formation of the CoP (see Chapter 5).

When I first arrived in class on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, the students and teacher were engaged in a unit on drugs and alcohol, and this was followed by a unit on discrimination and then the unit on gender and sexuality. Figure 3.1 (below) shows the distribution of classroom topics in relation to the recordings which were done as part of the research project.

**Figure 3.1 - Classroom topics and recordings**

Week	Topics	Data Recordings
May 6-26	Discrimination Unit	Interviews in self-chosen groups (sexuality ed.)
May 28-29	Gender Across Cultures	none

June 2-5	Sexuality in History	none
June 9-12	Gender, Sex and Power	none
June 16-18	Masculinity & Femininity Gender in the Media	June 18 – whole class – small groups
June 23-26	Gender in the Media Defining Heterosexuality Intersex Awareness	June 23 – whole class June 24 – small groups June 26 – intersex guest session 1
June 30- July 3	Sexual Arousal, Cultural Diff	July 3 – online chat session
July 21-24	Dilemmas in Relationships review for assessment	July 21 – small groups (unsupervised)
July 28-31 & Aug 4	Social Justice and Sexuality	Aug 4 – intersex guest session 2

In addition to these audio recorded sessions, detailed ethnographic fieldnotes were kept, starting upon arrival and continuing until the classroom-based audio recordings began in the third week of June. The gap in audio recording after the interviews (i.e. focus groups recorded outside of class time) were completed in late May occurred for two reasons. First of all, the early part of the sexuality unit was less conversation-oriented in pedagogy and more about engaging with readings and concepts (and thus deemed less likely to produce data related to sexual agency). Another consideration was that students needed to become gradually accustomed to the open discussion of sexuality in the classroom, and work out community practice around this endeavour, before ‘going on record’ via recordings. The classroom-based audio recordings commenced in mid-June once the course of study returned to a more interaction-oriented phase. I decided to stop taking



detailed notes at this point because I felt that they were providing diminishing returns for me in terms of insight. This might have been because I was becoming a core member in the CoP (see chapter 5). Instead I began to focus my energy on managing the collection and cataloguing of recordings.

### 3.3.7 How was sexuality education implemented?

Although I have been transparent and explicit about the likelihood that my commitment to heteronormativity critique had a direct influence on the classroom programme (see section 3.1.6), in some ways this result was a 'fait accompli'. This is because Mr. Johnson had already planned to implement readings and activities which were compatible with such a goal. Using the teaching resource called *Social and Ethical Issues in Sexuality Education* (i.e. Tasker 2000) and the 'Beacon Schools Project Planning Guide' (comprising lesson plans which Gillian Tasker and a group of teachers had developed while working with that same unit in classrooms in Christchurch, New Zealand), Mr. Johnson was engaging with a curriculum which was grounded in social constructionist, and largely poststructuralist, ideas about gender and sexuality. These ideas include the social construction of gender and the challenging of biological determinism and gender binarism. For example, Tasker (2000: 16) stresses the development in students of critical awareness of how gender and sexuality are discursively constructed, stating plainly that "[t]his resource problematises or challenges biological determinism". In the *Notes to the Teacher* section of the Beacon Schools Project Planning Guide, it says, "The aim of the unit is to encourage students to think critically about where their views relating to sexuality and gender have come from and whether these views are health-enhancing or health-harming for themselves and others." These social constructionist themes can also be found in the Intended *Learning Outcomes* of the lessons, some of which are included in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 - Sample of 'critical' learning outcomes from the Beacon Schools Guide**

Students will analyse how gender and sexuality images vary across cultures
Students will examine how concepts of gender and sexuality are socially and biologically

constructed
Students will investigate some societal influences that contribute to social norms about gender.
Students will examine their own and others' culture in relation to aspects of sexuality
Students will critically analyse gender related assumptions underlying common statements.

From the list in Table 3.1, there is plenty of evidence of a social constructionist (if not always anti-materialist) perspective, with references to social construction of gender as well as references to social norms and cultural differences in relation to sexuality and gender.

In terms of explicitly poststructuralist influences, there is a mixture of anti-materialist and materialist discourses (see section 3.1.5) in the resource, with subject positions being located both outside of discourse and within it. However the introduction to the resource ends with a statement of its purpose, and this summary, although not directly referring to poststructuralism, grounds the resource in its precepts. For example, the stated purpose is to help young people with the development of critical thinking skills which will “enable them to recognise” that “they are actively involved (often unconsciously) in the construction of their sexuality and gender identity” (Tasker 2000: 4). By emphasising the ongoing and often unconscious self-construction of identities, it can be seen that the resource locates the formation of subject positions in discourse. The same statement of purpose also indicates that the resource will help students to learn how to *recognise power structures and processes* in relation to gender and sexuality and “to resist restrictions placed on them by others’ constructions of gender and sexuality”. By locating power in ‘processes’ and referring to ascriptions of subject positions and resignification, the unit provides further evidence of an anti-materialist alignment. Thus it can be argued that Tasker (2000), is a resource grounded in poststructuralism, and it locates the ongoing formation of gendered and sexual subject positions in discourse.

As a result of Mr. Johnson's training with this resource, and combined with my stated desire to observe students who were engaging with that type of resource, sexuality education in Matangi College Health Level 2 proceeded under a poststructuralist influence. In terms of a queer approach, heteronormativity critique is not directly mentioned in the unit (nor is the word 'queer'), but it does contain the notion of critical inquiry around heterosexuality and the destabilising of its taken-for-granted status. One of the main ways this is achieved is via the problematising of sexual and gender binarism, which are the stabilising mechanisms of heteronormativity (see section 3.1.6). These binaries are positioned in Tasker (2000: 16) as contributing to discrimination and victimisation, and one goal of the unit is to create ruptures in their taken for granted status: "A key task in a critical approach to sexuality education is to disrupt or 'bust' the binaries." Along such lines, the *Beacon Schools Project Planning Guide* included a reading which examined biological sex at the chromosomal level and discussed the existence of intersex people (i.e. people whose bodies and/or genetic codes defy classification using the binary construction male/female – for details, see section 7.1.4). Again, the presence of all of these ideas in the resource, and Mr. Johnson's independent decision to include them in the classroom programme, meant that the influence of my queer approach was in tune with his plans to some extent. However, because of my commitment to heteronormative critique, I encouraged a more detailed exploration of this theme and orchestrated the involvement of Mani Bruce Mitchell as our intersex guest facilitator (see Chapter 7). This is another way in which a queer approach to research influenced the classroom programme in a significant manner.

### **3.3.8 Why/how did I select my data and criteria for analysis?**

The specific reasons for selecting particular extracts of data for recording and analysis are given in each chapter in which the extracts are analysed. More generally speaking, in pondering which classroom activities to record, I decided to focus on those which were likely to generate conversations that would be 'saturated' with sexually agentic subject positions, whether performed or

ascribed, or at least likely to generate some discursive manoeuvring around the avoidance of sexual agency. For example, conversations about sexual desire were deemed highly suitable candidates for recording because the content would demand sexual subject positioning to some extent.

At the time when these sections were chosen, I had made few decisions concerning criteria for analysis of what type of language constitutes evidence of sexual agency in conversation. This was a conscious decision because I wanted examples of sexual agency to emerge from the data. To facilitate this approach, I listened to the audio recordings and coded my initial impressions about the data using NVivo software. Starting from a foundation of subject positioning (following Allen 2005b), as I listened and encountered moments in which students seemed to be positioned or position themselves as sexual subjects (i.e. they inhabited a subject position which could be interpreted in some way as sexual), I paid attention to whether that subject position seemed also to possess 'active' or 'passive' status. As I went through this process, categories for analysis emerged such as agency performance vs. agency ascription and responses to these positioning such as alignments, disavowals and reworkings (based on my reading of Butler, see section 2.7.2). Also emergent was a growing awareness on my part of the types of language/discourse which were influencing these positionings. Details of the language used appear in the analysis chapters.

In addition, as stated in the final paragraph of section 3.1.6, my academic commitment to the problematisation of heteronormativity had an influence on my data focus in the classroom programme. This influence is particularly obvious with the choice to record the activity which forms the basis of Chapter 6 (i.e. activity 5, section 1 of Tasker 2000). Titled *Questions for Exploring Sexual Orientation*, this activity asked students to interview one another using a list of questions normatively asked of homosexuals (see section 6.1.1 for details). Anticipating an upcoming planning meeting with Mr. Johnson, I wrote the following in my research journal:

*[This activity] would also provide a fascinating opportunity for small group recording sessions with the teacher circulating and having input. The turning around of questions normally asked about homosexuality might generate some useful data because it will get them to think outside the box and perhaps provide a bit of distance from heterosexuality. Wouldn't it be great if it got them into territory that heteronormativity would usually preclude?*

Clearly a queer approach emerged at this early point, and at the ensuing meeting, the recording choices were agreed to by Mr. Johnson.

### **3.3.9 Ethnicity and the research site**

During observation of the CoP, it soon became clear to me that there was a continuous lack of foregrounding of ethnicity by participants. Despite being an ethnically diverse group of people based on the class list, with nominal representation from Cambodian, Cook Island, Fijian, Māori, Pākehā (i.e. New Zealand European), and Samoan cultures, direct discussion of ethnicity was both infrequent and highly marked during my time as a participant observer and core member of this CoP. This silence around ethnicity made it difficult for me to elicit ethnic self identifications for many of the students because to do so was to go against localised practice. Therefore despite being *intuitively* convinced that the ethnic backgrounds of these students must be having some influence on interaction during sexuality education, I felt compelled to leave the issue in the background during analysis as well. Perhaps future studies can find a way to elicit a focus on ethnicity in sexuality education classrooms in New Zealand in order to fill the gap that this silence has created.

## **3.4 Summary**

In summary, the qualitative perspective on research adopted during this project led to the integration of three interrelated approaches: linguistic ethnography, poststructuralist discourse analysis, and queer inquiry. Linguistic ethnography in this case refers to a commitment to prolonged participant observation and topic-oriented investigation of a linguistic nature. These

observations are made while the researcher is on a 'from-inside-outwards' trajectory. In other words, a researcher who is familiar with the research setting attempts to gain some distance from the familiar whilst taking advantage of the insights that prolonged insider status provides. This form of ethnography is compatible with the poststructuralist approach taken to discourse analysis in this study, which entails a focus on the formation of subject positions through discourse. Nested in this poststructuralist approach is a queer approach to inquiry which allows for a periodic focus on the critique of heteronormativity.

The participants of this study (students and teacher) became involved in this research because they were getting ready to participate in a sexuality education programme grounded in a poststructuralist approach. This seemed compatible with a focus on sexual agency in the classroom. From the beginning my influence on the classroom programme was considerable. However all planning was done in dialogue with Mr. Johnson, who had the final say on what happened in the classroom. The primary way that my influence manifested itself was in a strong focus during the programme on the breaking down of sex and gender binarism (which was a stated aim of the resource used to structure the unit). In adopting an ethnographic approach, I was obligated to conduct extensive observations of the school and classroom. These observations required careful consideration of researcher identity performances as well as reflexivity about how to conduct research in this setting.

What is most clear is that theory and practice cannot easily be separated as aspects of research approaches, and thus reflexivity is required concerning the degree to which practice reflects theory as part of methodology and research design. With this fact in mind, in this chapter an effort has been made to inter-relate the ontologies of performativity and poststructuralism with the choices made concerning setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis. Transparency about these choices and the inclusion of detailed descriptions of all aspects of research design thus support the goals of internal validity and credibility during qualitative research.

# Chapter 4

## *Setting and participants*

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### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to address issues of contextualisation, or the understanding and documentation of the research context (Duff 2006 - see section 3.1.4). More specifically, the focus will be on description of: (a) the larger context of the school, including the communities in which the participants live, and (b) the participants and their interests. The descriptions of participants have been built from my fieldnote observations, and include retellings of their behaviours and, when possible, their original words. These retellings are further supplemented by my insider impressions as a core member of this CoP. The purpose of including a detailed description of each participant in this chapter is to enhance the ability of outsiders to imagine what it is like to be an insider in this community, a goal of thick description as part of an ethnographic approach to research (see section 3.1.4).

### **4.2 Research site – Matangi College**

This research was conducted in a secondary school in New Zealand which I have labelled as 'Matangi College' (a pseudonym). This school has about nine hundred pupils, and is a 'decile five' school, based on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest socioeconomic indicator. The decile figure does not indicate the overall socioeconomic mix of a school; rather, a school's decile indicates how many of the school's students live in low socio-economic communities (New Zealand Ministry of Education n.d.). Ranked nationwide, decile one represents the schools which have the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities whereas decile ten schools are those with the lowest proportion of these students. The decile figure is used mostly for allocation of government funding, with the lower decile schools receiving more money. The figure is calculated from census information about: household income (i.e. the percentage of school households which fall in the lowest twenty per cent nationally);

occupation (percentage of parents working in lower-skilled jobs), household crowding, educational qualifications of parents, and the number of households depending on income support. Each decile houses ten per cent of the nation's schools, and so as a decile five school, Matangi College sits in the fifth-highest category. This effectively means that forty per cent of schools in New Zealand contain higher proportions of students from families of low socio-economic means than Matangi, and fifty per cent of schools contain lower proportions of these students. In actual fact, students from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds attend Matangi College.

#### **4.2.1 School communities – statistics and interpretation**

Table 4.1 contains statistical information about the suburbs in which the participants live. These figures have been taken from the Statistics New Zealand website and adapted to fit the terms that the participants used to describe their home neighbourhoods. For example, some suburbs exist as one location in the minds of residents, but for statistical purposes they have been divided into smaller subunits which have limited saliency for residents. In these cases, I have taken averages of the statistics for these smaller units in order to reach a figure that represents the broader suburb. As a result, the figures are only approximations. The terms used by Statistics New Zealand to categorise ethnic groups are also problematic in the sense that there is controversy in New Zealand society over which terms should be used. For example, 'European' encompasses New Zealand-born peoples of European heritage and recent European immigrants, and sits in contrast with 'Pākehā' which usually means native-born and white (also a contested description - see King 1999). Similarly, 'Pacific Peoples' encompasses all Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian ethnicities and sits beside 'Pasifika', a term which has a similar meaning but varying currency. Debate continues within these communities as to which term best applies. 'Asian' subsumes ethnicities from Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Finally the 'other' category includes 'New Zealander', another term of contested usage, which can describe the



nationality of New Zealand citizens, but is sometimes used as an ethnic category by people who, by strict ancestry, would fit under the ethnic category 'European'.

**Table 4.1 – Median income and ethnic groups by suburb**

<i>Suburb</i>	<i>Median Income</i>	<i>Asian (%)</i>	<i>European (%)</i>	<i>Maori (%)</i>	<i>Pacific Peoples(%)</i>	<i>Other (%)</i>
Hillside	\$25,000	6	43	31	45	5
Manakura	\$18,000	3	22	25	65	1
Tairua	\$18,000	5	29	27	58	4
Harbourview	\$38,000	4	78	9	5	15
Pahaki	\$35,000	8	76	12	4	15

The students from this school predominantly live in five neighbourhoods. Three of these are suburbs of largely lower socio-economic means, to which I've applied the pseudonyms *Hillside*, *Manakura*, and *Tairua*. These suburbs also have a large percentage of residents who claim a "Pacific Peoples" ethnicity in the census (about forty per cent for Hillside and around sixty per cent for Manakura and Tairua) with a strong Māori presence (about twenty-five to thirty per cent in all three cases) and Pākehā presence (forty-five per cent for Hillside and twenty to thirty per cent for Manakura and Tairua). There is a diverse mixture of other ethnicities represented as well, but these account for less than five per cent of the population. The other two suburbs, represented here by the pseudonyms Harbourview, and Pahaki, are middle class communities and largely European (seventy-eight per cent for Harbourview and seventy-six per cent for Pahaki) with the main difference being a considerably larger percentage of people in Pahaki claiming both Maori and Asian ethnicity.

These statistics are further contextualised via comparison with ethnic statistics for the local region (also taken from the 2006 census). The median income for the local region is \$24,800. The ethnic statistics are represented in table 4.2 (below).

**Table 4.2 – Ethnic demographics of the local region (%)**

'European'	70
Māori	13
Pacific peoples	8
Asian	8
Other ethnicity	13

#### **4.2.2 School communities – lived realities**

Although the students from Tairua and Harbourview, for example, attend the same school, they largely lead separate lives, a situation evocative of Mendoza-Denton's study of a school in San Francisco (2008: 25). This separation of social networks is partly a result of the geographical separation of the neighbourhoods in which they live. For example, because they come from further afield than students from the other suburbs, students from Harbourview tend to come to school on school buses or in their parents' cars, or by the time they reach the legal age to drive (16 in New Zealand), many drive their own cars. Students from the same suburb have frequently known one another since early childhood, having attended primary schools in their local neighbourhoods. As can be observed from the ethnic statistics for suburbs in Table 4.1, this has meant that some of the participants experienced their earlier education in schools where self-identified Māori and Pacific students represented a significant majority while others (i.e. Harbourview and Pahaki residents) likely had comparatively limited contact with students who self-identify as Māori or Pasifika before attending secondary school.

#### **4.2.3 School description**

Overall the atmosphere of the school was friendly and casual from my perspective as a newcomer. I recorded numerous incidents in my fieldnotes of random students being quite welcoming when I was out and about in the school, and this began to happen immediately after my arrival. At the end of my first full

week of participant observation, I had left class before the rest of the students, picked up my lunch from my car and headed for the 'tuck shop' area (like a small convenience store with a window), which is where a lot of students congregate. Some junior students (3 boys and 1 girl, all Maori/Pasifika except for one Pakeha boy) called out to me from a bench beside the cricket pitch, one boy saying "Sup mister! Are you a new teacher?" while two of them each raised one arm and held it horizontally above their heads in a greeting gesture that was new to me. I said hello back and walked up the slope to them and explained that I was not a teacher but a researcher. The girl said "What are you researching, mister?" and I replied that I was researching language. I said I'd be around a lot during the year and she said "All right, when we see you we'll say hi then" and they left. This was typical of the kind of interaction that I had with students in the school. They were friendly, polite and courteous, traits which I found charming. I was not certain whether all visitors to the school were received in this manner, but a few minutes after being greeted by those students, I had a conversation with a relieving teacher, another recently arrived insider-outsider in the school, and she agreed with my assessment, as outlined in the next paragraph.

I had remembered that sitting in one place made me look less like a teacher, so I sat on a small barrier near the tuck shop, hoping to observe student interaction. I had just begun to realise that there were too many people around (hence all the conversations were just 'white noise'). Suddenly Carla (the reliever who had taught that day's Health class because Mr. Johnson was away) came to sit and talk to me. She had only been in the country eight weeks, but she had previously been an assistant principal in England. She commented that she thought the kids at Matangi were lovely, being polite and courteous, and she had found the same pattern at another secondary school nearby. At first I was unhappy that she had sat down with me because it worked against my non-teacher identity, but upon reflection it was quite useful to hear her first impressions (which were in accord with my own).

#### ***4.2.3.1 Classroom descriptions***

##### *Room B2*

This room only serves as their classroom one day a week, and it is a computer suite with tables in the middle. The walls have a lot of colourful papers, making the room feel warm and welcoming. There are three large empty tables in the centre, each seating about eight students. One table was predominantly Harbourview girls (with one boy) and one was predominantly Tairua boys (with two girls). The other table was mixed-gender but mostly non-Harbourview students. This is a seating pattern which remained fairly consistent in this room during the semester.

##### *Room G12*

This is the room in which the class meets three out of four days a week. It is a pre-fabricated classroom beside the gym, and it is a sunny room and cosy, with some posters on the wall. The door often remained open throughout the lesson, and fresh air flowed in. The desks were arranged in a square, open at the front and back, with a few desks in the middle. The students were spread around quite evenly by gender, but there was a slightly higher concentration of Harbourview students on one side and Tairua students on the other. This is a seating pattern which continued for a couple of months, but it began to break down as Mr. Johnson intervened in an attempt to enforce more mingling (see section 5.2.3).

### **4.3 Participants and participation**

Human ethics approval for this research was granted by Victoria University of Wellington's human ethics committee (see Appendix F), an application which was based on an empowering research model. One aim of this research is to expand upon an 'ethical' approach to research, which has tended to focus primarily on the mitigation of harm. Instead the focus has been on empowerment; participants' own research agendas (i.e. those of the teacher and students) have been given consideration. The goal in such an approach is to work towards the mutual benefit of the researcher and the 'researched' as opposed to being content with the mitigation of harm (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson

1997 [1993]). This focus on mutual benefit motivated the inclusion of the students in decision-making about the sexuality education programme, and it led me to debrief them concerning the findings of this project, two processes which are referred to throughout the present chapter and chapter five.

As with a more traditional ethical paradigm, potential participants received formal letters informing them about the aims of this research project. They were assured that their participation was voluntary. Because this research took place in a school setting, it was essential to work closely with the teacher to ensure that *voluntary* informed consent was as robustly supported as possible. It was crucial that students who did not wish to participate in the research still had their learning needs met so as not to be deprived of the curriculum (see Allen 2005c).

Mr. Johnson and I met during the summer break before the class convened and discussed the consent issue in some detail. I raised the concern that students must not feel under pressure to participate. However, Mr. Johnson pointed out that all recordings that I intended to make would be of the planned units of work, which were all elements of the class programme. He felt that students who did not want to participate in the research should still participate in all discussions because they had already consented to participate in the class fully. However, their words would never remain part of any recording. So, this means that their contributions to recorded large group discussions would be erased, and they would be grouped together for small group and focus group tasks and not recorded. If it turned out to be only one student, then we would just have to erase all of their contributions. We also talked about any parental concerns and he agreed that parents/guardians should be informed, but ultimate consent lay with the students. His feeling was that parents/guardians had already signed their child's Health course registration forms, knowing that sexuality education would be part of it, so it was unlikely that they would protest at the research. In the end this course was followed, and indeed no families expressed concern, and there were no students who declined to participate. It was made clear to them (when all were present) that they were free to change their minds at any time.

In keeping with the provision of exploitable feedback to participants as part of thick participation (see section 3.3.4) and with the empowering research model adopted, feedback to participants was given in an oral presentation by the researcher at the end of the sexuality education programme. I gave an explanation of my analysis of the extracts in chapters seven and eight and comments were elicited from the class and their teacher. The consensus was that they agreed with my analysis, with an overall feeling, however, that the performances I'd drawn attention to were 'normal' behaviour. These comments were carefully considered as part of analysis and were incorporated into the thesis where appropriate.

#### **4.3.1 Researcher as participant**

I am originally from Canada, but my mother was born and raised in New Zealand as a member of the European/Pākehā majority. In terms of ethnicity, I self-identify in the New Zealand context as European but not Pākehā, as I was not born and raised here (a contested distinction, but one to which I align). As mentioned in sections 3.2 and 3.3, I came to this research as a former teacher of the New Zealand secondary school system. From 1996 to 2000 I worked as a secondary school teacher, first in a small town on the North Island and then in a school near Matangi College. In both of those schools there were large numbers of students who identified as Māori and Pasifika (including Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian, and Tokelauan) and about half who identified as European/Pākehā. Both schools also had decile ratings similar to Matangi College (see section 4.2.1), meaning that the students came from families who tend to be categorised in a fairly similar range of socio-economic 'bands'. Because I had previously lived and worked with students of the same age, the same ethnic identifications, and the same 'class' backgrounds, I brought with me implicit understandings about how my own subjectivities could engage with theirs. Although almost a decade had passed since I had last lived and worked in this suburb, these understandings shaped my approach to interacting with the participants, and they certainly had an influence on my relationships with them.

For example, full participation in the research project by all students in the class was by no means a foregone conclusion; however, in the end everyone chose to participate in the audio recording. It was made clear to me by one significant group in the room that this was strictly because they were pleased with the way I had interacted with them in the first few days. This group was a small circle of Pasifika girls who were feeling marginalised in the class (see section 5.2.3 for more about their gradual integration). During their focus group interview, they explicitly stated that their participation in the research project was a direct result of the fact that I had sat with them on day one and talked to them. Thinking back to that day, I remembered that sitting with them first had been a conscious decision.

Experience with the politics of New Zealand classrooms had long ago taught me that words count for little in comparison with actions, and I knew that I could not let myself become too closely aligned with one social 'faction' if such schisms had formed (see Eckert 2000; Lofland & Lofland 1995). I was also convinced based on past experience, that the Māori and Pasifika identified students would be more likely than European/Pākehā students to notice subtleties of racial/ethnic alignment such as 'who' I sat with most often or who I talked to and in what manner. Reflecting on this chain of events has also led me to the conclusion that my ability to interact with these girls successfully once I had sat down with them was at least partly because I had spent years interacting with other Pasifika girls from this same community. To put it in less academic but perhaps more evocative terms, I felt at ease with them. This was also true of all the other students in the class, and I argue that this sense of familiarity which I felt with New Zealand teenagers from across a broad spectrum of identifications facilitated my integration into the class.

As previously outlined (see section 3.3.5), I put a lot of effort into cultivating a 'least-adult role' (Holt 2004) for myself within the context of a school, which included the ongoing performance of a non-teacher identity. In the classroom, while interacting directly with the students, this led me to encourage them to call me Brian instead of Mr. King or 'mister' (a common term of address for male

teachers in New Zealand). This was aligned to by most of the students most of the time, but old habits are hard to change; therefore formality often returned, particularly during formal classroom discussions in which I was framed by Mr. Johnson as an 'expert' (e.g. academic discussions about gender and sexuality). However, it did mean that I was not viewed as a teacher, but as an adult university student. The students knew that I had worked with Mr. Johnson on course planning; thus it is difficult to say how they viewed my 'allegiances'. I was always very careful not to report to Mr. Johnson about what happened when he was away or out of the room, but it is most likely that, like my identity in the school, this aspect of my position in this CoP remained anomalous.

My role during lessons changed as time passed, but I always sat with the students and interacted with them. During the first two months (before the sexuality unit began), I took part in classroom activities as much as possible, often jotting notes in my notebook but also putting the notebook away sometimes and just engaging with the classroom activities. At times I made a point of joking with them and sometimes colluded with 'irreverent' behaviours such as giving humorous answers instead of always taking the activities seriously. In hindsight, these interactions 'broke the ice' and put everyone more at ease (including myself). Once we started the sexuality unit, however, things began to change because increasingly I was perceived as an 'expert' and called upon as such by Mr. Johnson. When I spoke about gender or sexuality everyone listened. I observed this shift to a more formal 'educational' role with some concern at the time, worrying that it was shifting me into more of a teacher's role, something I had been at great pains to avoid. However, in hindsight it is clear that 'sharing expertise' became my way of contributing to the 'joint enterprise' of this CoP (see section 5.1.2), and it was similar to the contribution of students who were also called upon by Mr. Johnson to share their expertise (e.g. Kate, who contributed her knowledge of classical Greek sexualities from her Classics course).



### 4.3.2 Teacher as participant

Mr. Johnson (a pseudonym) is originally from Australia and had previously taught Physical Education and Health in Australia and England. At the time of data collection for this study, he had been living and teaching in New Zealand for about six years, most of that time spent at Matangi College. From the beginning Mr. Johnson was told everything about the project from my perspective, and his role was to be one of *teacher participant*. I stressed to him that, as much as possible, I wanted him to teach the course according to his own training with Tasker (2000), which was the planning resource exploited for the sexuality unit, and according to his own professional instincts and routines.

During extensive meetings in the summer before the course began, he was told about the problematic discourses which had been identified in school sexuality education programmes (see section 1.2) and that I was planning to analyse the recordings to find examples of sexual agency on the part of participants. I mentioned that I planned to enact a 'least adult role' in the classroom and distance myself from a teacherly role (see section 3.3.5). He agreed that this was an understandable goal for a researcher, yet also stressed to me that one of the ways he and the students stood to benefit from this research project was by having extended access to my academic knowledge about sexuality. As a result he was hoping that I could 'help' students with the programme by filling in any explanatory gaps that I perceived, or perhaps answering questions that he, as teacher, lacked the knowledge to answer in a comprehensive manner. I agreed to contribute to class discussions of sexuality because such a role was compatible with my role as participant observer, but only at times which he, as teacher, deemed appropriate. Finally, I emphasised to him that these contributions would always be done in a 'non-teacherly' way, by which I meant that I would not be in front of the class talking or checking student work. Rather I would participate in discussions from my seat amongst the students, contributing as a non-teacher adult. It was on this understanding that we proceeded.

### 4.3.3 Students as participants

The following section provides a summary of each of the twenty-five student participants from my point of view as (a) participant observer and, later, (b) a core member of this CoP. Each description begins with a summary of their background and interests which was gathered from focus group interviews, followed by my first impressions (written in italics), taken from fieldnotes which I jotted down the first time that I observed that particular student. These early observations are important because as time passed, and my understanding of the CoP (and its members) emerged, my ethnographic gaze altered (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). The 'naive' clarity of early impressions was lost while deeper insights were gained. For this reason I have chosen to introduce each participant in a short narrative which attempts to capture the evolution of my impressions. This approach forms an essential part of thick description (see section 3.1.4), for by relating observed events, and including direct quotations from the participants where possible, the objective of helping outsiders to imagine what it is like to be an insider is further enabled. The participant descriptions are arranged in alphabetical order, but these names are all pseudonyms.

#### Amber

Amber lives in Pahaki, and her list of close friends includes two girls from this class: Olivia and Kate. However she describes herself as a 'floater' who moves between social circles. In her free time she likes to go for long walks and hang out. She is on the class list as Māori, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Amber is a fair-skinned girl with dyed hair (dark brown) and reddish roots coming through. She appeared Pakeha to me, but she's on the list as Māori. She was wearing dark eyeliner, whereas the other girls were wearing little make-up that I could see.*

Amber was quiet during the earlier part of the course, but she began to speak up more as the term passed. There was one classroom incident in which she performed an identity as a tough girl, one who is prepared to stick up for herself.

Mr. Johnson ran to his nearby office to get something for the lesson and Josh got up to fiddle with a question that had been left projected on the screen. He started to type Amber's name in place of the character in a scenario. He asked Amber how her name was spelled, and Luana called out the spelling. Amber turned to her and said, in a calm but sarcastic voice, "Why don't you just shove it up your asshole!" Luana said, "Let's take it over there" which is similar in meaning to "Let's take it outside". It was unclear to me why Amber was aggressive with Luana, but Josh quickly changed it back and shortly afterwards, Mr. Johnson returned. Amber always took the research project seriously and participated extensively in all recorded discussions.

## **Ana**

Ana lives in Tairua, and her list of close friends includes two girls from this class: Ruby and Lito. In her free time she likes to read and write poetry. She also likes to hang out. She self-identifies as Tokelauan.

*Ana is a tall, confident girl who was wearing a long yellow skirt. She has long black hair, but it was tied in a loose bun. She must be in year 13 because she wasn't wearing a school uniform.*

My first impression of Ana's confidence remained consistent throughout my time at Matangi College. Some of this self-confidence could have come from her family's prominent standing in Tairua, for her father is an important church figure in the community. Also, as the only Year 13 student in the class, she had some status because she had previously mentored some of the Year 12 girls in student leadership roles. However, during the focus group interviews, Ana admitted that this was partly why she felt like a bit of an outsider in the class. During the same interview Ana also commented on the sense of marginalisation that she, Lito and Ruby felt (see section 5.2.3 for more about their gradual integration). She felt that it was mostly because the rest of the girls were a bit afraid of them. She expressed her puzzlement at this possibility because, as she said, "I'm not scary!"

## Aroha

Aroha lives in Pahaki and her list of close friends includes six girls from this class: Ata, Sarah, Paige, Hannah, Caitlin, and Sophie. In her free time she likes to play soccer and netball. Her ethnicity is on the class list as Māori, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Aroha has long brown hair tied back in a ponytail. She is bigger than the other girls in the class. Based on her name, I presume there is some connection to Māori heritage. I didn't notice her saying anything.*

Aroha is another student whose reticence soon ended. One day I sat with her, Ata, and Paige in an activity that asked us to look at pictures of people and make assumptions about their jobs and their parents' jobs (with the ultimate purpose of underscoring that such assumptions often lead to discrimination). Aroha got into the discussion and talked a lot. The images circulated round, and one was of an androgynous person who was probably a slim woman, but could just as easily have been a tall adolescent boy. Paige thought it was a boy and said, "It looks like that boy XXXX!" and Aroha replied "It DOES, but he was a girly guy" ((laughter)). She continued, pointing at the picture and saying, "Look, she plucks her eyebrows". Paige was not convinced and said, "XXXX plucks his eyebrows" and Aroha answered, "Yeah, but he's a homo" (stated quite matter-of-factly). In Aroha's defence, she did not seem to think there was anything particularly *wrong* with him being 'a homo', but she felt he was a poor example on which to base a decision about the picture. This was the beginning of Aroha's engagement with the gender and sexuality themes of the course. Her contributions to recorded sessions were always numerous and usually insightful.

## Ata

Ata lives in Manakura, and her list of close friends includes two girls from this class: Aroha, and Paige. In her free time she likes to play netball and do waka ama (outrigger canoe racing), as well as hanging out and going to parties. She is on the class list as Cook Islander, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Ata is clearly athletic with long dark hair tied back into a ponytail. She has large pretty eyes and smiles a lot. I didn't notice her saying anything.*

Ata seldom spoke up during whole class discussions and was frequently absent during the first month of my participation in the class. As we got into the sexuality unit, her attendance had become regular, and she contributed quite a lot to small group discussions, taking the recorded activities particularly seriously. One thing that stood out about Ata was her relative innocence about sexual topics compared to many in the class and a lack of knowledge of the meaning of terms such as 'heterosexuality' or 'penetration' (in a sexual context). She had a tendency to get lost easily during discussion, and a bit frustrated as a result, but she did her best to take part.

## **Ben**

Ben spent his childhood in Hillside, but he now lives in Harbourview, and his list of close friends includes two boys from this class: Caleb (his cousin) and Matt. In his free time he likes to play rugby and drive around in his car. He also works part time at a fast-food restaurant. His ethnicity is written on the class list as "other pacific peoples" but I was unable to elicit his ethnic self-identifications.

*Ben is a tall slim boy with spiky hair that is a mixture of brown and red/blonde.*

*Based on skin tone and facial features I wondered if he would self-identify as Pākehā. He introduced himself to me outside the classroom and seemed polite and confident.*

My first impression of Ben as polite and confident is a good summary of how he conducted himself most of the time during class. He did not speak up much during whole-class discussion, but during small group sessions he did his best to contribute, and always in an assertive but non-confrontational style. His sense of humour was always in evidence, and he often responded to activities in a 'tongue-in-cheek' manner. He was never afraid to be frank about his opinions, and this meant that he was outspoken during the sexuality unit. During his focus group

interview (with Callum), he said “When I think of sexuality, I think of sex itself, not just diseases and body parts. We should talk more about sex.” I asked him whether he felt it would be realistic to talk about ‘sex itself’ and sexual desire in this class, and he said, “I reckon it’s realistic to talk about sexual desire in the class. I would speak up I think. Depends what it’s about.”

## **Caitlin**

Caitlin lives in Harbourview, and her list of close friends includes five girls from this class: Hannah, Paige, Sophie, Sarah and Aroha. In her free time she likes to do hip-hop dancing, ballet, group fitness and sports. She is on the class list as Pākehā, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Caitlin is a fair-skinned girl with long, straight dark hair and fair skin (a bit freckled). She’s somewhat small in stature. She was drinking water from a bottle throughout the lesson. She is not a shy girl at all, and in fact she is quite chatty.*

Caitlin’s chattiness turned out to be the norm for her. She tended to speak very quickly most of the time and was a prolific user of the word ‘like’ as a discourse marker (e.g. “I was, like, so annoyed”). The other students perceived her as someone who has ‘a way with words’; thus, a couple of times she was called upon by other students to articulate ideas which they were struggling to express. As an example of her ability to elucidate, one day in a discussion about masculinity someone said that a study had shown that ballet dancers are fitter and stronger than rugby players. Mr. Johnson then asked whether that meant that one was more or less feminine or rather that they represent two types of masculinity. Nobody responded directly to this idea, but there was a noticeable gap of silence and then Caitlin said, “Masculinity is more about how you act, not what you do for a hobby.” This is fairly typical of her summative statements, which were often quite insightful.

## **Caleb**

Caleb lives in Hillside, and his list of close friends includes two boys from this class: Ben (his cousin) and Matt. In his free time he likes to play rugby and touch football. He self-identifies as Māori, Samoan, and European-Australian.

*Caleb is tall, with curly hair cut in a gentle Mohawk. He's on crutches these days. He is mild-mannered and polite and appears to be a very kind person.*

My first impression of Caleb as gentle and kind certainly proved to be accurate. Although always silent during whole class discussions, Caleb did talk during small group work, particularly once the sexuality unit got started. One of the earlier classes in the sexuality unit focussed on the socially and biologically constructed nature of gender. During this lesson I was positioned as a sexuality expert by Mr. Johnson in that he continually asked me to elaborate on or clarify academic concepts to do with gender and sexuality. Caleb came up to me after class and said "Brian, I think that there's no difference between men and women when we're born. It's all what we learn." And we had a brief chat about this idea. This incident serves as evidence that Caleb was listening closely and taking interest in these discussions despite his silence. He took the research project seriously and did his best to contribute during recorded discussions.

## **Callum**

Callum lives in Harbourview and his list of close friends includes one boy from this class, Logan, as well as his girlfriend, Kate. In his free time he likes to play golf, play computer games and hang out. He is on the class list as Pākehā, but his self-identifications were not revealed to me.

*Callum appears Pākehā, with brown eyes and short hair on top but long in the back. He speaks clearly and confidently but with a softer voice.*

In his focus group interview with Ben, Callum said that he wants to be a police officer, and this is why he was studying Health. As a result, he said that he is open to learning about all kinds of things because of the broad knowledge of health he

will need for his future career. He also said that his family is quite relaxed about talking about sex, and so he has always found sexuality education “good”. For the most part he was reticent in class, and so most of the time if he was mentioned in fieldnotes it was to comment on the fact that he was a quiet but attentive presence. However, in small group sessions he tended to contribute more.

## **Codey**

Codey lives in Tairua and his list of close friends includes two boys from this class: Isaac and Liam. In his free time he likes to do hip-hop dancing and play computer games. He identifies as Samoan.

*Codey has medium-length black hair and was wearing a ‘hoodie’ in class. When I made an effort to talk to him, he looked at me sideways and didn’t smile. When I asked him his name he said “Codey, just call me Codey...” in a friendly enough manner and then got back into his work.*

Looking back on this first encounter with Codey, I had the sense that he was going to be difficult to get to know. This turned out to be untrue, and in fact before long he was very friendly towards me and quite relaxed. On the third day of participant observation, I arrived early and stood outside the door of the classroom, talking casually with Josh, Codey, Caleb, Rawiri, Isaac, and Liam. Codey was still looking at me with some distrust. When I said all of their names and got them all right, (including Josh and Codey’s surnames because they in fact share the same name), he suddenly smiled and said “Oy, you’re good! Easy names though.” It seemed this moment was a breakthrough for me because he joked with me during class a bit. I was leaving school later that day and had signed out at the office. When I came out, Rawiri and Codey were sitting outside the door, and I said “Bye Rawiri, bye Codey” and I think both replied. I only heard Codey, who said “See ya Brian”. As I was heading for my car, I barely heard him say to Rawiri in the distance “He’s a nice fella, eh!” Codey often took a casual approach to lessons, but when the course material started to get more academic during the sexuality unit, he got involved and contributed a lot. During his group’s interview, he said he hoped that the class



could be mature about studying sexuality. He took the recorded discussions seriously and a few times insisted that others respond instead of remaining silent or saying “I don’t know”.

## **Hannah**

Hannah lives in Harbourview and her list of close friends includes three girls from this class: Sarah, Caitlin and Sophie. Her favourite things to do in her free time are hip-hop dancing and sports. She is of European/Pākehā heritage according to the class list, but I did not manage to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Hannah is a fair-skinned girl with straight, long, reddish brown hair. She was listening to music in one ear throughout the lesson while also completing the activity sheet. She clearly and confidently answered all the questions aloud at the end, despite being asked repeatedly to put up her hand.*

Looking back on this early description of Hannah, I see that one of her persistent classroom identities came through - that of conscientious, if not fully compliant, student. What soon became obvious was her wit and dry sense of humour. In my fieldnotes there are numerous examples jotted down in which she engaged with Mr. Johnson in banter, and she tended to approach most activities with a sense of humour (see Chapter 9 for case in point). It also later became clear that she possessed a certain amount of social capital in terms of student leadership. One Friday afternoon Mr. Johnson was doing his best to review an assessment that the students would do on the following Tuesday morning. Everyone was tired, and he was constantly struggling to keep them listening to his explanations. At one point, Hannah said to the room, in a calm clear voice with raised eyebrows, “Everybody, we need to CHILL” and this resulted in (temporary) quiet. At one point, Caitlin (normally a model student) was talking when Mr. Johnson was talking. He kept calling her on it, and she just repeatedly said, “I don’t know” in response to a request to share her answer from the sheet. Hannah said, “Caitlin, you need to smile please” (with her eyes widened and looking askance at Caitlin). This forced Caitlin to bear her teeth in a mock smile and give a proper answer.

## Isaac

Isaac lives in Hillside and his list of close friends includes two boys from this class: Codey and Liam. His favourite things to do in his free time are watching violent movies, playing computer games, and playing touch football. He identifies as Māori and Cook Island.

*Isaac is full of energy and basically on task but easily distracted in class by his computer game. He doesn't say much, but he smiles a lot. When I asked his name he joked and said "Isaac Newton!" and then laughed and said "Nah, Isaac...call me Isaac."*

Although Isaac is mostly a quiet class member it would be incorrect in hindsight to say that he is shy. On my second day of observation, I sat at the same table as him and he asked me, "Why are you here, mister. Are you gonna teach us later or what?" My reply was cut short because Mr. Johnson wanted their attention. I replied, "No, I'm here to get to know you guys. I'll tell you more later." We hit it off well from the start and always had a connection. I soon realised that Isaac was a very sincere person who had a casual attitude about school (e.g. sometimes reading magazines or playing computer games in class instead of listening) but took his involvement in this research seriously and did his best to respond during recorded discussions.

## Jay

Jay lives in Tairua and his list of close friends includes four boys from this class, whom he refers to as 'the boys': Josh, Caleb, Rawiri, and Codey. In his free time he likes to play rugby, watch TV, and do online chatting. He is on the list as Cook Island, but I did not manage to elicit his ethnic self-identifications.

*Jay is a tall slim boy with a slender face. His hair is spiked up on top and straight on the sides, mid-length and light brown with dyed blond streaks, but he also has a very long 'tail' running down his back. I didn't see him speaking at all.*

Jay's reticence soon ended, and it turned out that he was very talkative during small group discussions. Although certainly not conceited, he had an abundance of self confidence and tended quite often to perform what I refer to in this study as 'hip-hop swagger' (see section 6.2.1.2). For example, once during a discussion of gender, a group spokesperson was reading out their brainstormed characteristics of men (i.e. muscular, fitter and stronger, hornier, etc.) Jay pointed at himself and said (for everyone to hear), "They're talking about me" and he smiled. Nobody reacted to this, which is indicative of the unmarked status of this type of humour for Jay – he joked this way all the time. Another time I saw Jay walking across the school grounds with two friends whom I did not recognise. They appeared to be Samoan or perhaps Cook Islanders, which I surmised from the way they had teased their hair up into very large 'afro' style. As they walked across the school yard (hip-hop musical accompaniment playing softly on an I-pod) they struck quite a presence. After that day I thought of them as the 'extreme hair' boys. However, not long after that observation Jay cut off his long tail and kept a comparatively conservative hair style from that point forward. During class activities Jay was mature and courteous and often contributed to academic discussion.

## **Josh**

Josh lives in Tairua and his list of close friends includes four boys from this class: Caleb, Rawiri, Codey, and Jay. In his free time he likes to play rugby, watch TV, perform music and use his computer. He is on the class list as Cook Island, but his ethnic self-identifications were not elicited.

*Josh is a tall, medium build boy with a kind face. He is clearly a leader in the group. Mr. Johnson trusts him, leaving the class under his direction today for about 10 minutes. I asked him his name and he said "XXXX...I'm the good XXXXX" and Ana laughed, saying "That's the other XXXX" pointing at Codey.*

Sharing a name with Codey, it was interesting to hear that Josh was 'good' and Codey 'bad' because Codey's behaviour was not 'bad' in this class. The related incident of being left in charge by Mr. Johnson turned out to be a marked

occurrence. Josh participated in class discussions but usually in a soft-spoken manner and often was 'drowned out' as a result. I participated in one small group discussion with Josh, and the topic of discussion was masculinity. We had to respond to the statement "There is something strange about male ballet dancers." Josh said that ballet dancing is very hard and requires a lot of strength and physical fitness. He also said that the movements and costumes are not very masculine, but he later stated that he disagreed with the idea that male ballet dancers are feminine because of the strength and fitness required. Although frequently reticent during whole-class academic discussion, Josh always participated in small group discussion activities, albeit quietly.

## **Kate**

Kate lives in Harbourview and her list of close friends includes four girls from this class (Olivia, Sarah, Hannah, and Caitlin) as well as Callum (her boyfriend). In her spare time she likes to 'hang out' and she works on the check-out at a local supermarket. She identifies as European (with an Armenian grandfather) and Māori.

*Kate was working with Callum. She is Pakeha and has dyed blonde hair and comes across as a good student, remaining on task. She commented that class is going well, but she's finding it challenging (she didn't take Health last year). Her surname is Armenian, but I didn't ask her about it.*

After I had been there for a few weeks, I asked Kate if her family name was Armenian in origin, and her face lit up and she said, "How did you KNOW that? Oh my God, nobody has ever figured that out before!" I explained that I had an Armenian friend in university, so I knew that the ending of her surname is a classic Armenian ending. She explained to me that her dad identifies as Māori and her Grandpa was from Armenia (full Armenian). Sometimes Kate and I interacted like friends. For example, once Mr. Johnson read through a reading passage with the whole class, explaining difficult terms so that everyone could access the ideas. Kate turned to me and said quietly, "This isn't going to work. I don't know why he does

this. Let's just read it alone." I said to her, "He wants to make sure that everyone reads it, I think." And she said, "I don't think this is the right way." This moment demonstrated to me that Kate saw me as someone to interact with as she might another student. In academic discussions, Kate always took part and often contributed insightfully. She was also taking Classics, and thus she was able to contribute her knowledge about alternate constructions of sexuality from ancient Greece.

## **Liam**

Liam lives in Keikora (a distant suburb similar to Hillside demographically) and drives to school because he prefers Matangi College to the school in his own neighbourhood. His list of close friends includes two boys from this class: Isaac and Codey. In his free time he likes to play computer games. He hopes to study commerce at university in the future. His ethnicity is on the class list as Pākehā, but I was unable to elicit his ethnic self-identifications.

*Liam was keeping his group on task by giving ideas. He sat tipped back on his chair. His voice is gentle and kind. His hair was mid-length, straight and a bit unkempt but not messy.*

Liam is a very bright student who overtly takes a casual attitude to lessons while at the same time learning a great deal. This would often result in a scenario in which he had appeared to be completely disengaged (e.g. reading a magazine) but then he would summarise an idea or respond to a query in an academically astute manner. Although clearly close to Isaac and Codey, he sat outside of the childhood social networks that mostly defined friendship groups in this CoP. As a result he tended to be more 'free floating' and maintained classroom friendships with Luana as well as Ruby and Lito. These last two appreciated his friendly attitude a great deal, mentioning him as the exception in relation to their sense of marginalisation in the class. Liam took the research project seriously and did his best to respond sincerely during recorded discussions.

## **Lito**

Lito lives in Tairua and her list of close friends includes three girls from this class: Ana, Ruby, and Luana. In her free time she likes to hang out and watch TV. She was born in Samoa but came to New Zealand at the age of three. She identifies as Samoan. Her father is an important church leader in Tairua.

*Litomata goes by Lito and might be from Samoa originally (I later confirmed this). She has a fair complexion. Her hair is black and she wears it tied back. She comes across 'street wise' but mature.*

Lito often took a casual attitude to Health class, turning up late and frequently reading magazines. At times she put her best foot forward and worked hard. It was mostly in discussion time that she got more involved. It came out in the focus group interview that Lito and her friends felt somewhat marginalised in the class (see section 5.2.3 for more about their gradual integration). Lito said that she did not know if “it’s because we’re Islanders”, but she had to wonder if that was the reason. She also asserted that it might be because she has never taken classes with these particular people before. Lito had a tendency to use language that was deemed inappropriate by other students. One day a reliever gave them an assessment to do. Lito looked at it and said, “Fuuuck!” in a soft but emphatic voice upon examining the reading. Liam looked at her and said, “Oy!” and Rawiri said, “Language Lito!” in a high and falling tone. She replied, “Oh, sorry” (with a brief smile and then looking down) and said softly, “I’m just mad that I don’t know what’s going on.”

## **Logan**

Logan spent his childhood in Harbourview, but had recently moved to another suburb about twenty minutes drive away. He drove to Matangi College every day in his car. His list of close friends includes one boy and three girls from this class: Callum, Sarah, Hannah, and Sophie. He and Olivia had previously been a couple. In his free time he likes to play cricket, soccer, badminton, and tennis. He also likes to

play computer games and hang out. His ethnicity is on the class list as Pākehā but I was unable to elicit his ethnic self-identifications.

*Logan is a tall, slim, fair-skinned boy with blonde/brown hair, mid-length, pulled straight down around his face with gel. He's a bit of a clown, always joking around and often quite funny.*

Logan is a bright student who seemed to always see the point of lessons, particularly during the sexuality unit. He also had little difficulty with the troubling of gender and sex binaries, and often filled a leadership role in discussions involving such topics. For example, during the lesson in which the concept of intersex was introduced in preparation for the session with Mani Mitchell, the students were asked whether it is possible for an intersex person to live in our society without getting sexual assignment surgery. Caitlin said "They need to be one or the other because otherwise they have to hide" and this would be an impossible life. Logan then disagreed, saying that if we started to leave their bodies alone, then soon there would be more of them, and they wouldn't feel so out of place. He felt that it's society that should change. This response was fairly characteristic of Logan's tendency to take an individualistic stance in which he argued against social control.

## **Luana**

Aroha lives in Tairua, and her list of close friends includes one girl from this class: Ana. In her free time she likes to participate in the school's Polynesian dance club. Her ethnicity is on the class list as Cook Island, but she self-identifies as Fijian.

*When I introduced myself to Luana, we chatted a bit about how she's from Fiji and hasn't been back there since she was eight years old. She was a bit guarded but civil. She has dark curly hair and has a solid build and a strong voice. Her ethnicity is on the class list as Cook Islander.*

Luana's guard came down soon after this first observation, and it was not long before she and I were interacting like friends. She took to calling me Brian very quickly and, as a voluble individual, often greeted me on a first-name basis. Of all

the girls in the class, Luana is the one who seemed to least embody hegemonic femininity (see section 2.5.3), and this was a subjectivity she tended to experiment with. During one activity in which groups had to list characteristics of men and women, Luana (who is most definitely an alto, not a soprano) observed that someone had written 'high voice' on the woman paper. She deepened her voice as much as possible and said, "Whadya mean, high voice!" Then she spoke in a comically squeaky voice, saying, "I have a high voice!" Her group was laughing (Liam and Lito). I found this response interesting because by doing this, Luana used the deeper timbre of her own voice to demonstrate the questionability of that assumption quite effectively. Another day she arrived late and Sarah explained to her that the females were to be on one side, and the males on the other. Luana said, "Which side is this?" and Sarah said, "EEmale!" (laughing a bit, eyebrows raised). Luana looked over at the boys and said, "Aw, yeah" (higher pitch on 'aw', and 'yeah' falling and then rising). She turned in their direction and after the briefest of pauses, she chose to sit on the girls' side. These 'gender-bending' moments were given emphasis by her tendency to draw on 'hip-hop swagger' in a similar manner to Jay (e.g. high-fiving and using nicknames from male in-groups to address boys). This was marked behaviour for a girl in this CoP, but Luana consistently performed these identities.

## **Matt**

Matt lives in Tairua, and his list of close friends includes two boys from this class: Ben and Caleb. In his free time he likes to watch animated films and play touch football. He identifies as Cambodian in ethnicity although it seems he does not talk about it much (see below).

*Matt smiles a lot and it was easy to break the ice with him. He has a friendly voice. He's on the list as Cambodian, but based strictly on appearance I would not have guessed so. He has a Chinese-sounding surname.*

I found out in the focus group interviews that his family name was 'made up' by immigration officials. His parents came to New Zealand as Cambodian refugees.



Our discussion of his ethnicity created a bond I think, and this is because I had visited Cambodia and knew a bit about the place. His focus group members (one a good friend of his) admitted that they did not know that Matt's parents were from Cambodia (they said they had never thought about it much). Considering that he obviously had not talked to his friends about it, there was some risk in initiating this discussion, but I think their genuinely interested response was pleasantly surprising to him. I expressed that I hoped it was okay that I brought it up, and he said it was not a problem at all. Matt tended to remain quietly on task during class time, even at times when most others were not doing so. He always took part in classroom discussions. For example, one day we were doing a task in which we had to stand in certain locations in the room to indicate our level of (dis)agreement with certain statements (positioning ourselves from right to left). The first statement was, "Teenage pregnancy is okay". I went and stood in the middle, and everyone else was on my left (on the disagree side). Matt was standing next to me, and we talked about how we could see problems with teenage pregnancy in the big picture, but we agreed that it is important for the community to support girls who get pregnant and not make them feel that they are "not okay". Matt reported this to the class.

## **Olivia**

Olivia lives in Harbourview and her list of close friends includes four girls from this class: Kate, Sarah, Hannah, and Caitlin. Logan and Olivia had previously been a couple. In her free time she likes to do hip-hop dancing and ballet, and she likes to hang out. She also has a part-time job as a receptionist. She is on the class list as Pākehā, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Olivia is a fair-skinned girl with dyed-blond hair, and very quiet. She smiled brightly at me when Sophie introduced her to me. I didn't notice her saying anything.*

Olivia remained fairly quiet in class until Sophie's departure, after which she took over Sophie's role as a leader of whole class discussion. She seemed to take particular interest in the discussions of gender and sexuality, and spoke up

frequently during recorded sessions for this research project. This shift was quite a transformation from my point of view.

## **Paige**

Paige lives in Pahaki, and her list of close friends includes five girls from this class: Ata, Aroha, Sophie, Sarah and Hannah. In her free time she likes to play netball and hang out. She is on the class list as Māori, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Paige is a fair-skinned girl. She is of average height with long, straight dark hair, worn in a ponytail, and a slender nose. She's fairly reserved but contributes confidently when called upon.*

My first impression of Paige as 'reserved but confident' changed little as time passed. She was usually quiet in class although always listening and fully engaged. Paige's confidence was well displayed one day when Mr. Johnson held a class meeting about behaviour. He had realised that the group still had social fissures which needed to be addressed before the sexuality unit, and he was also spending too much time dealing with off-task behaviour. After the students all gave their input, he ended by asserting that he had picked up on a theme in which the students had implied that off-task talking was going on to such an extent because he'd been too tolerant of it. He admitted that this surprised him because he felt as though he was continually trying to deal with it. Paige spoke up at this stage and suggested "It's mostly our issue because we control our own behaviour, but it's sometimes the topic that creates the problem". She suggested that sometimes lessons do not progress quickly enough and everyone starts to get bored. I feel that the ability to raise this sensitive point with their teacher is an indication of maturity and confidence on Paige's part.

## **Rawiri**

Rawiri lives in Tairua, and his list of close friends includes four boys from this class: Caleb, Josh, Codey, and Jay. In his free time he likes to play rugby and hang out with

his family. His ethnicity is on the class list as Cook Islander, but I was unable to elicit his ethnic self-identifications.

*Rawiri is handsome, with a smallish face and large eyes. He has a colourful small braid that runs down his back. When I repeated his name and asked for clarification on my pronunciation, he smiled and said "Yes, that's right." Although he was friendly, he didn't say much.*

For the most part he was passive in class, but he had a tendency to admonish others for using inappropriate language. When asked in focus group interviews about what he wanted to study during the sexuality unit, he said that he was 'easygoing' about it and would go along with whatever Mr. Johnson wanted to do. This statement summarises well his approach to the whole enterprise, for he tended to 'float along' and retained his reticence through most of the semester, particularly during whole-class discussion. However, he took the small-group recording sessions seriously and did his best to respond when called upon.

## **Ruby**

Ruby lives in Tairua and her list of close friends includes two girls from this class, Ana and Lito. She said that in her free time she likes to smoke and eat. She self-identifies as Tokelauan in ethnicity.

*Ruby has a strong voice, and looked at me with a serious face when I sat down to say hi to her group. She was civil. She has a rich brown skin tone (I later found out that she identifies ethnically as Tokelauan).*

On the third day of observations, I had a chat with Ruby; she was friendlier than she had been the first time I approached her. I said, "It's Ruby, right?" and she smiled and said, "Yes, that's right." We had a chat about the Health class, and Ruby commented that it was much harder than last year's Health class. During the several months I was there, Ruby was often tardy or absent, and when present remained silent for the most part. There were times, though, when she demonstrated that she could be engaged and articulate. One day she got very

involved in a debate about whether or not anti-smoking laws were discriminatory. We were all standing at locations in the room in order to take a position. I was standing in the section that disagreed that they were discriminatory. Mr. Johnson asked me to say why, and I said that although I can see some problems with these laws, I do not see them as discrimination. Ruby asked me to say what word I would use to describe them. I admitted I did not have one, and she pointed out that these laws create social segregation. At the end of the activity she told me that she liked my “speeches”.

## **Sarah**

Sarah lives in Harbourview, and her list of close friends includes five girls from this class: Hannah, Caitlin, Sophie, Paige, and Aroha. In her free time she likes to do jazz and hip-hop dancing and hang out. She is on the class list as Pākehā, but I was unable to elicit her ethnic self-identifications.

*Sarah is a fair-skinned girl with long light brown hair (today tied back in a ponytail). She's small in stature with a small face. She's sociable but soft-spoken and chooses to listen a lot of the time.*

Sarah's penchant for listening continued throughout the time I was participating in the class. She was almost always there and clearly paying attention, but she seldom said very much. During the focus group interview she had expressed that it would be good to talk about sexual desire instead of just focusing on the biological aspects of sexuality. She said this had been a topic of discussion in Health class the year before, and it had been 'cool'. During the online chatting session she participated much more actively.

## **Sophie**

Sophie lives in Harbourview and her list of close friends includes four girls and two boys from this class: Paige, Caitlin, Hannah, Sarah, Ben and Logan. In her free time she likes to go to the gym, watch TV, and write poetry. She identifies as Pākehā and Samoan.

*With her hair tied back in a small bun, Sophie was on-task and vocal, often asking for clarification. She immediately asked me some questions to strike up a conversation (e.g. Where are you from? Do you want to be a Health teacher?) She had earlier sent me a message on the BBS system a few weeks ago.*

Although very much a leader in the class, Sophie departed on a trip abroad shortly before classroom audio recording began and returned soon afterwards. Therefore she has a strong presence in my fieldnotes but fails to appear in any of the conversations analysed. As a leader in the class, Sophie played an important role in the evolution of the CoP, and so I include description of her here in spite of her later absence. She often contributed to academic discussion in a very astute manner. For example, she once said that men and women are unequal in society, and this means most men are discriminating against women all the time even if they are unaware of it. This was a subtle and clever point via which she put her finger right on hegemonic power without having that term at her disposal.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In summary, this chapter has included detailed information about Matangi College as a place, the communities in which its students live, the classrooms in which the research was conducted, and the research participants themselves (i.e. researcher, teacher, and students). This information has been presented in considerable detail in order to provide a thick description as part of contextualisation of the research (see section 3.1.4). The next chapter continues this process of thick description, demonstrating how the places and people described here evolved into a mutually engaged community, one negotiated in relation to (a) the enterprise of participating in learning about sexuality and (b) the enterprise of participating in social research.



# Chapter 5

## *Tracing the emergence of a community of practice*

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### **5.1 Introduction**

As previously outlined in section 3.1.1, taking an ethnographic approach entails gaining some understanding of the ‘community’ in which research is being conducted. A crucial and fundamental question to answer, then, is whether or not the medley of people under the researcher’s gaze even constitutes a community in any known sense of the word. Moreover, one might even ask whether that medley of people constitutes the boundaries of the community, or does community membership extend to people whom the researcher (and perhaps even the community’s members) have never met (e.g. strangers in the broader neighbourhood) or have met in some sense, but have never seen face-to-face (e.g. internet contacts)? If the group does indeed represent a community in and of itself, then what sense of the word community is being evoked in defining it as such? In other words, what has brought these people together? And what does ‘being together’ entail and symbolise for them? Do they ‘feel’ like a community? Does community saliency matter? Addressing these questions is important for this study because the plausibility of the analyst’s interpretations of spoken interaction (i.e. the etic perspective – see section 3.1.2) might need to call upon emic (i.e. insider) understandings of what utterances mean and how they have come to mean that amongst those in the group under investigation. Equally viable is the possibility that the meaning or force of an utterance is either external to, and/or in conflict with, existing localised practices and understandings. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to empirically demonstrate that the participants in the present study constitute a community of practice. As will be seen in later chapters, such an evidence-driven understanding of the social milieu of this classroom will enable analysis, and contribute to contextualisation, complexity and credibility as part of a qualitative approach (Duff 2006 - see section 3.1.4).

### **5.1.1 Putting sexual agency in its place**

To study interaction in a classroom environment is to enter a domain with which the vast majority of people are familiar based on personal experience. However personal experience of classroom interaction varies widely, creating the necessity to clearly describe the types of social organisation prevalent in a particular classroom setting. If positionings and performances of a sexually agentic nature are identified during analysis, then what has precipitated them? Just how do these people fit together (or perhaps form a poor fit), and on what basis do they interact? Can the observer, participant or otherwise, 'hear' and 'see' accurately, based strictly on detailed cultural knowledge of institutional 'schooling' ideologies and systems? Possibly so, but then this would suggest that all instances of classroom interaction within a culture and school system should look the same, which is clearly not the case.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet assert that it has become common in interactional sociolinguistic investigations of language, gender and sexuality (indeed interactional sociolinguistics generally) to adopt a *communities of practice* framework in order to assist the analyst in locating the production and reproduction of gender and sexuality in localised daily practice (2007: 35). However, as these authors also point out, one cannot safely presume that a random group of people constitutes a CoP merely because they are participating in an activity together on a regular basis or because they share a social identity. Presumptions such as these can lead to inaccurate analysis because a group of people does not need to be a CoP in order to share certain practices (see section 5.1.2). In the context of the present study, observations of agency in relation to sexuality become far more useful if one first clearly identifies the array of foundations on which group interaction rests.

### **5.1.2 Communities of practice**

The community of practice (CoP) construct as it was first developed (see Lave 1988; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), and as it has been interpreted for use in investigations of language in society (see Eckert and McConnell-Ginet



1992, 1999; Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999) has proved to be a robust framework for the investigation of language in use. Its usefulness has become common knowledge, prompting Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 175) to rationalise its appeal:

The obvious appeal of this approach is that it offers the sociolinguist a framework of definitions within which to examine the ways in which becoming a member of a CoP interacts with the process of gaining control of the discourse appropriate to it.

In other words, the approach is in a strong position to enable insight into the inner workings of a community's discourse-driven formation and maintenance. In this framework, a given community (of practice) gains its distinct character as a product of the sustained interaction through which it has formed, and through the shared practices which concurrently emerge from and shape that sustained interaction. It follows that analysts applying this framework cannot presume that a group of people constitutes a community with shared language practices, even if those people call themselves a community. These are distinctions which separate the CoP framework from the *Speech Community* of Gumperz and Tajfel's *Social Identity* theory as well as social network theory (see Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999). These distinctions are significant, for in discourse analysis a great deal can depend on the notion that people in a group somehow share language practices.

As suggested in section 5.1 above, aggregates of people need not develop shared practices, nor even interact at all, in order to be considered communities at some level because a variety of 'modes of belonging' exists (Wenger 1998). Sometimes we align ourselves with broader enterprises beyond the local, even if we have never met the other people who also see themselves as part of those enterprises. Through communities of the imagination (Anderson 1991; Wenger 1998) individuals imagine themselves to have something in common with other people (often far flung individuals) with whom they share a certain trait or collection of traits (e.g. sexual identity, gender, nationality). Then again, those who imagine themselves to be a community can find sustained interaction challenging once they organise themselves under a banner as a 'community of alignment'

(Wenger 1998) or begin to engage with one another on a continual basis (one of the catalysts of communities of practice). As the experiences of gay men (e.g. Bérubé 2001; King 2008) and women (see Morgan 2004) have demonstrated, that which individuals 'imagine' they have in common can indeed turn out to be largely in their imaginations, and imagined quite differently by various members.

It is of course possible that 'members' of imagined communities or communities of alignment do share some practices as a result of their sense of belonging together, but a key distinction between types of communities lies in how the practices have developed. In a CoP, practices arise from *engagement* between members in a shared enterprise, and this engagement is "bounded" in time and space (Wenger 1998). Importantly, the boundedness is necessary (although limiting) because it affords mutuality, or *interactive co-presence*, which in turn allows members to contribute to the defining of enterprises and identities. Three elements together represent the driving forces of engagement; contribution to the pursuit of a joint enterprise, negotiation of meaning, and the development of shared practice (Wenger 1998: 184). In reference to joint enterprise, Wenger writes that even in an institutional setting where many edicts come from upper management, "It is [the members'] response to their conditions, and therefore *their* enterprise....Their practice responds to institutional conditions with an inventiveness that is all theirs" (Wenger 1998: 79). In other words, the joint enterprise belongs to the members in spite of all the things beyond their control. This is because it is a response which the members negotiate together, and it is based on their own understanding of their situation, even in certain cases where practice is profoundly shaped by external forces.

As observed earlier in this section, members of a community can align to broader enterprises and see themselves as part of an imagined community without necessarily engaging with others who are doing so. Likewise, in a community of alignment, members can 'align' themselves as part of an institution, but complying with institutional requirements does not necessarily entail engagement with the practices that generate them (or with one another). Rather, relation to these

broader enterprises can be “literal or procedural” (Wenger 1998: 187) and based on compliance rather than engagement. This means that, in such a case, any shared practice has not been locally negotiated. Where, then has it come from?

To explore this question, an example provided by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992: 483) is helpful. They put forward a commercial airlines flight as a hypothetical example of a community which might exhibit ‘commonalities’ of practice even though those present lack a shared history of mutual engagement. Using this example, they argue that the airplane is a very short-lived community, involving “limited and routine practices common to many similar communities.” To illustrate this, they compare the social effects of the utterance “How about some more coffee, hon” when spoken by a woman to her husband as opposed to being spoken by a young man to a middle-aged female flight attendant. The authors attribute the self-evident incongruity of these two situations to the notion that a marriage constitutes a CoP, replete with couple-specific practices, whereas people who might share aeroplane-specific practices draw on ‘routines’ which are not specific to the medley of people on that plane. Here they seem to imply (consistent with Wenger’s assertion that sustained mutual engagement is what distinguishes a CoP from other types of communities) that an airplane is a reiteration of external communities (and by implication perhaps external communities of practice), but it is not an actual CoP. This is because it is ephemeral and ‘routine’ as opposed to being sustained and grounded in any history that might be shared by the members. In fact, one might question whether this medley of people on a plane comprises a community in any sense mentioned thus far. Perhaps it is not imagined to be a community by those present. Similarly, perhaps these people share nothing in common in terms of their alignments. Rather they are people who find themselves together in a place, and they must interact, their only mode of belonging being the mutual possession of a valid boarding pass. The reiterations alluded to by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet above are ways of making sense of their actions in such surroundings.

In order to make sense of their surroundings, past performances of place and community are reiterated, and those who are present act accordingly (King In Press, 2009a, 2009b). It is no great leap, then, to suggest that many communities of practice start out like this hypothetical commercial flight. Before mutual engagement forms community practices, and possibly independently of imagination and alignment, or in conjunction with these modes of belonging, co-present individuals are reliant to a degree upon social understandings of space (i.e. place) as a way to organise their behaviours. Places are also articulation points for individuals who find themselves amongst a collection of other individuals in a given location. Returning to the aeroplane example, 'commercial flight' practices exist. For example, passengers pay attention to the safety presentation 'even though they might have seen it before' and defer to the cabin crew to a degree that is marked in service arrangements. These (and other) specific practices are activated by the location of that aggregate of people. Though not everyone is fully versed in those practices, they join in 'doing the commercial flight' because they find themselves there. In this way place and practice are co-constitutive.

Classroom communities of practice can also shed some interesting light on the notion that medleys of people can align to places. Haneda (2006) essentially suggests that some classrooms which have been labelled as communities of practice might actually be medleys of people who rely on cultural routines to 'do school' rather than comprising a particularly well-developed CoP. In a sense this description of a classroom is very similar to the commercial flight scenario described above, where people find themselves together in a certain kind of space and/or place and begin to align to any cultural scripts or routines which they might associate with it. However I would like to suggest that what Haneda calls 'doing school' can be more usefully described as 'performing the classroom.' Grounded in space, the latter concept permits the analyst to explain why doing school can vary greatly in performance depending on the spatial surroundings it is 'done' in, and our social understandings of those spaces (i.e. place). For example, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1999) focus on the 'Asian wall' at a California school,

demonstrating that in this particular school-space there are specific linguistic practices which have acquired meanings that differ markedly from their meanings in other parts of the school. Thus doing school is seen to be a spatially grounded process, and so it is more productive to say that members of a classroom-based CoP are, on one level, performing the classroom. Given the correct conditions, they might simultaneously be developing localised practice through sustained mutual engagement. However bearing in mind the wide variation that exists in classroom structures and behaviours, it cannot be presumed that a specific group of students and their teacher are engaged in a joint enterprise at all, let alone negotiating meanings and developing shared practices specific to such an enterprise (see Haneda 2006). In order to illustrate that the participants in the present study indeed comprise a CoP, the next section will trace the development of that CoP. During this analysis, localised practice emerges as a significant element of this group's social dynamics.

## **5.2 A 'classroom-sexuality-education-research' CoP: From alignment, to engagement, to shared practices**

The CoP which is the focus of this study comprises the students, their teacher and me (the researcher). Ethnographic observations and classroom recordings provide a record of this group's transition from what was arguably a 'community of alignment' at the start of the school year, to becoming a CoP as the year progressed. We will see how our localised practices were closely tied to our participation in a sexuality-education research study. As the Health course progressed, the students' engagement with the research process became part of the joint enterprise. In addition, when the sexuality unit began halfway through the year, 'frank' or 'direct' discussion of sexuality gradually became part of the shared repertoire, as did strategies for managing the experience of being audio-recorded during such discussions.

In examining a group of people and attempting to determine whether they represent a CoP, the nature of the measuring stick is a vital question. How can the

researcher verify empirically that the criterial characteristics of a CoP (i.e. mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire) are in fact present? Wenger (1998: 130-31) outlines a set of specific features which, in practice, represent these notional qualities. These are:

- Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
- Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
- Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- Mutually defining identities
- The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
- Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- Certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- A shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective on the world.

Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999) point out that these features can be operationalised as a means of identifying a CoP's distinguishing qualities. The logical extension of this point is that these same features can assist one in ascertaining whether a given group is indeed a CoP at all. With the CoP that is the focus of this study, most of these features can be identified, and their development traced, via ethnographic fieldnotes and audio recordings. In the interest of efficiency they will not all be explicated here, but it is instructive to examine some of them in order to provide evidence that this group indeed represents a CoP.

### **5.2.1 Nascent phase of CoP – Emergence of localised practice**

While reflecting on the use of ethnographic approaches as part of linguistic investigations, Rampton (2007 - see section 3.1.2) comments that such research is often done in familiar surroundings rather than in exotic locales. This localised

situation is the reverse of that of the 'exotic ethnographer.' Instead of working to make the strange familiar, the researcher working 'close to home' must act to gain some analytical distance from the familiar. Although the classroom which is the focus of this study was located in a community where I had once been a secondary school teacher, it was during my first few days as a participant observer that I realised what the passage of a decade had given me. It had rendered this place at once both strange and familiar, and I soon realised that I had the luxury of some analytic distance, at least for a while.

By the time I arrived to meet the students and began the process of getting to know them, the class had been meeting together four times per week for about seven weeks. Sitting amongst them during that first week, the students came across as amicable towards their teacher Mr. Johnson, yet (to my eyes) not very attentive. Moments after we all settled into our chairs, Mr. Johnson asked them to reflect on the class guidelines they had set up together at the start of the course (see Korowai, Figure 5.1 below).

**Figure 5.1 – The class korowai**

- Respect yourself, others, our property and your classmates' ideas
- Include everyone
- What gets said in this room, stays in this room (although see section 5.2.4.2)
- Honesty
- Be confident
- No fighting
- Get to know each other and don't judge
- Be the first penguin
- Always be positive
- Being happy
- Interact with students to make them more comfortable with you

- Think for yourself
- Treat others the way you want to be treated

The students had to address whether or not these things were being done. Only a few of the students were engaged with this task at first, but then bit by bit everyone settled in. This delayed rallying of focus did not seem to worry anyone, including Mr. Johnson. Caleb, Liam, Isaac and Codey settled last, and they were talking while others were attempting to give their feedback. Mr. Johnson let it go for a while but finally said “Liam!” and this seemed to be the signal that enough was enough. After that, all were quiet and focussed, and the consensus seemed to be that for the most part the korowai had been followed.

Reflecting at the end of the first day (i.e. April 1<sup>st</sup>), I wrote the following in my written reflections:

*The students are mature but not classically studious, with a constant combination of on-task and off-task behaviour. It's a very student-centred room, and Mr. Johnson leaves a lot to them. He doesn't wait for silence or anything like that. He just gets on with it, and they all get there in their own time.*

At the time I felt as though this classroom atmosphere was unfamiliar to me. Despite my efforts to suspend judgment and get on the same wavelength as the others, by the end of the second day (i.e. April 2<sup>nd</sup>) I confessed in the reflective portion of my fieldnotes that it was causing me some distress:

*Once again, the lesson began very informally with no clear beginning. Mr. Johnson started to teach, and let them come round in their own time. This seems to work, but I have to admit I find it a bit distressing. I think I'm just not accustomed to secondary school classrooms anymore.*

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems that to some extent I had indeed become less accustomed to being in a secondary school classroom. In fact, as time passed, and my memory was jogged by the events around me, I realised that the classrooms which I myself had facilitated (in this very neighbourhood a decade



previously) had probably not looked or sounded very different from what I was observing around me. Incidents came back to me, as did the reactions of visitors to my classes at the time, and it became clear that interaction in secondary school classrooms in this neighbourhood had not changed significantly. Rather it was my perspective that had shifted. Furthermore, and what is most relevant to this chapter, localised practice had also begun to develop, and my peripheral status had often prevented ordered routines from coming to my attention. With time, the jargon and shortcuts of this CoP began to reach my ears as meaningful input, and Mr. Johnson's lack of preamble at the beginning of lessons, formerly a source of confusion and concern for me, became understandable in light of established routines. In fact, it was this tendency to get set up quickly and informally that provides some of the clearest evidence that this community of alignment had indeed already started to become a CoP during that first seven weeks before I arrived.

#### ***5.2.1.1 Absence of introductory preambles***

As outlined in the introduction to this section, Wenger (1998) includes "absence of introductory preambles" as a possible feature of a CoP, in which he means that members seem to treat conversations as though they are picking up where they had previously left off. Of course when casting an analyst's gaze on these behaviours, it is important to remember that, at times, members might in actual fact have been continuing a previously interrupted conversation. However this is less likely to be the case at the start of a lesson when not all were present at the previous one, or, as with the case below (taken from my field notes April 28<sup>th</sup>), when Mr. Johnson was giving instructions for a learning assessment:

*The instructions for the assessment were delivered quickly because these are all established routines. The students seemed to know what he meant (but I was unable to process it).*

Relying on localised routines, the students were not thrown by Mr. Johnson's instructions, which were too vague for a newcomer like me. Similarly, extract 5.1 below is a sample of a typical start to a mid-unit lesson in this CoP. Mr. Johnson

quite abruptly put a statement on the screen and told the class to “get started on that”, and the students indeed got started, with no need for guess work concerning what they should be doing. For a guide to the transcription conventions applied in this study, please refer to Appendix A.

**Extract 5.1 – Absence of preamble 2 – June 18<sup>th</sup>**

- 1 Mr. J**           um (2) okay toDAY’s lesson  
                      there you go↑  
                      *((places statement on screen – “How men and women are portrayed  
                      in advertising))*  
                      you can get started on that↑  
                      and w- (.) and then this is what we’re doing  
                      critical examination↑ of sexuality and gender in advertising
- 2 Olivia**           *((reading aloud))* how men and women are portrayed differently  
                      in advertising
- 3 Luana**           isn’t it the eighteenth today↑
- 4 Mr. J**           (1) and (1) how do we reinforce our stereotyp- how does THAT  
                      reinforce our stereotypes↑
- 5 Aroha**           this is ahhh  
                      //whenever i get a pen// it always runs OUT
- 6 Luana**           //mister isn’t it the eighteenth today↑//

As observed in the April 28<sup>th</sup> note above, I had been ‘unable to process’ some of the teacher’s instructions. Upon hearing Mr. Johnson’s instructions, it was unclear to me how one might follow them, and this was because they contained jargon and verbal shortcuts which were unfamiliar to me. Although I confessed in the opening to this section that I at first felt somewhat unaccustomed to being in a secondary school classroom, these inaccessible practices were unlikely to be just broader ‘school’ discourse. As a former New Zealand teacher, I understand New Zealand educational jargon. After several weeks of planning the sexuality unit with Mr. Johnson and many hours spent talking about the curriculum, it was apparent that my knowledge of broader educational discourse in New Zealand was largely up to date. Any gaps had soon been filled, and I had also become familiar with Mr. Johnson’s own personal toolbox of terms for describing classroom activities. The reason that I had failed to understand the jargon in those instructions is that it had

developed locally, through mutual engagement of teacher and students, in the intervening weeks.

### **5.2.1.2 Do Nows and Whats**

Many times during my first weeks there, the students had been asked in the first few minutes of class to ‘do the what’ or ‘get started on the what’ or ‘do the do now.’ These phrases were easy for them to interpret but left me none the wiser. In fact, for a few weeks after my arrival the existence of these terms had escaped my attention, and then, once reaching my attention, had been a temporary mystery which was soon solved through observation. It was not until late May that I first wrote in my fieldnotes about the jargon terms ‘do now’ and ‘what’, used as nouns to describe classroom routines deployed in the first few minutes of class. By the time I wrote about these terms, I had become aware of what they meant.

Jargon and Shortcuts 1 – May 28<sup>th</sup>

*Mr. J wrote a “Do now” task on the board for the class to write about while he was taking attendance. The question they were to write about was “Where do we get our ideas about what it means to be male or female?” Bit by bit the students engaged with this task.*

It turned out that a Do Now was a question which was to be responded to in writing in preparation for a small group discussion. A ‘What’ was a statement describing the main learning goal of that day’s class (literally ‘what’ we were going to be focusing on). Upon seeing a What on the board, the students were obliged to copy it in their books word for word (as can be seen in the May 29<sup>th</sup> fieldnote extract below) and then look up in the dictionary any words that they did not understand. As can be seen in the June 4<sup>th</sup> extract (also below), these statements were sometimes phrased in difficult academic discourse and so required considerable ‘unpacking’.

Jargon and Shortcuts 2 – May 29<sup>th</sup>

*We all entered the room and as the class was getting settled, Mr. Johnson placed a statement on the projector.*

*He said “I’ve put up a what so get out your pen and start copying it down.”*

Jargon and Shortcuts 2 – June 4<sup>th</sup>

*The DO NOW was put up on the screen promptly, “Read your partner’s homework in silence.” On the screen was also a WHAT, “Analysing how western concepts of gender are socially and biologically constructed in the historical context.” The students got straight into what was required.*

The main point here is that, as a newcomer to this group, at first these locally negotiated terms were not part of my linguistic repertoire. My failure to understand them was an indication of my lack of access to the shared repertoire which had begun to develop, and this provides evidence that even at this relatively early (or nascent) phase, the ability to understand and/or deploy localised practice had begun to separate core members from those who were either marginalised or on the periphery. This community of alignment was starting to become a CoP through mutual engagement.

### **5.2.2 Focus group interviews – inclusion in things that matter**

Although it is plausible to assert that the presence of these nascent signs (i.e. jargon and lack of preamble) is suggestive of a CoP in its early formation, their presence is only a small part of the CoP picture. For this reason it is useful to follow through and examine other features that manifest themselves; in this case agreement on belonging, sustained mutual relationships, the development of ‘shared discourses’, and inclusion of members in what matters in the community. This final point, although not explicitly listed in Wenger’s criteria (see introduction to section 5.2), is crucial here because by involving the students in decisions around course planning, the group interviews conducted played a core role in the development of this CoP. As Wenger (1998: 74) makes clear, a CoP is unlikely to coalesce unless its members are “included in what matters” in the community. As it happened, all of the members – students, teacher and researcher alike – became involved in things that mattered in this CoP, although their ease of access to involvement varied depending on the community aspect in question.

Next I will outline how these ‘involvements in things that matter’ came to pass, and the fact that they took place in spite of the demands placed on members by roles such as ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ and the power differentials carried by these roles. A good portion of this key involvement certainly took place in class, but it was particularly productive during the ethnographic interviews which were conducted outside of class during the first three weeks in May. These group interviews took place after I had become a peripheral member of the CoP, but prior to the commencement of the sexuality unit. The whole interview process took a few weeks because there were nine groups to talk to, and the interviews were done outside of class time. The interview procedure became an element in the ongoing negotiation of localised practice and involved group discussions, an anonymised summary to Mr. Johnson, and his subsequent efforts to sincerely address the themes raised in those interviews.

Some background to the interviews is useful in order to convey clearly why they were conducted in the manner they were. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, as soon as Mr. Johnson and I had agreed to cooperate on this research project, we began regular meetings, extending as far back as the final months of the previous school year (November/December 2008). As part of this project’s ethnographic approach, these meetings comprised the beginning of my role as participant observer. Continuing to meet periodically during the summer holidays, we planned the sexuality unit together, deciding how to meet both pedagogical and research-oriented objectives. At this time, I gained a great deal of insight into Mr. Johnson’s values and experience in relation to teaching and learning, but most specifically pertaining to sexuality education. One of the points that we immediately agreed upon was that involving the students in decision-making (as much as was practical) was an excellent policy. That is, we would involve them in discussions of what to include in the sexuality unit and how it should be taught. The research project itself would also involve discussion with the students about research focus and procedures. At the time of our meetings, I was speaking the language of communities of practice. Mr. Johnson was not speaking the same

community-of-practice language, but these ideas were clearly compatible with his own professional notions of how classroom communities should work if they are to be truly effective.

Acting upon my suggestion, we agreed that I would facilitate the group interviews and summarise them, without attaching student names to their opinions. The hope was that this would liberate them to be more than usually frank in their assessments of the CoP, and of Mr. Johnson's management of the class. After the process had finished, Mr. Johnson said that he was very interested in the feedback he had received via the interviews – particularly the students' insights into the (previously tacit) social divisions between groups of students. He also commented that it was good to read about their critical comments concerning how he himself answers questions and explains things. He acknowledged that this is information he might not have been privy to had the students not been permitted anonymity. His implementation of many of the students' suggestions concerning sexuality education and classroom management solidified the mutual negotiation of joint enterprise in this CoP at a crucial juncture for the present study – the commencement of classroom discussions of sexuality.

The interview procedure was designed to serve both pedagogical and ethnographic purposes. Pedagogically it gave the students an opportunity to talk about their past sexuality education experiences, and to make recommendations for the upcoming unit. As stated above, this information would certainly prove useful to Mr. Johnson as a teacher, but equally important was the opportunity it provided to meaningfully involve the students in the planning of the course. If we hoped to cohere enough to feel safe and comfortable together by the start of the sexuality unit, the theory was that students needed to feel included at this official level. As it happened, the interviews indeed furthered a transformation which had begun before my entrée as researcher. Starting out as a community of alignment in mid-February, when institutional conditions had brought the class together, the students and Mr. Johnson merged into a CoP which, after my arrival, was intrinsically tied to the research process. We became a 'classroom-sexuality-

research' CoP, and closely linked to this transformation was my own shift to core membership, a shift which I will argue was influenced by my role as interviewer.

Eight self-chosen groups participated (3-4 students per group), encompassing the entire class. All groups met with me in a conference room in the school, and we first had lunch together, taking the opportunity to interact outside of the classroom in a more casual environment. When lunch was mostly complete, the recorder was turned on and a series of simple questions formed the basis of discussion (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2 – Interview questions**

1. Please think back to your past experiences with sexuality education. Which parts were good? Which parts were not so good? Please give your reasons.
2. How do you think those not-so-good experiences could have been improved? Should the teacher have changed something? Acted differently? How about the students? What are your reasons?
3. How about this year in Mr. Johnson's class? If you could have three wishes for the sexuality education unit what would they be? It could be *what* you want to learn about or maybe *how*? What are your reasons for wanting those things?

Restrictions of space prevent a full exploration of the themes which arose from these interviews. Suffice it to say that these interviews, and the summaries that I prepared for Mr. Johnson, had an observable impact on the students' involvement in what matters, and this was because Mr. Johnson took the feedback very seriously and followed through with changes to the course of study. For example, some of their suggested topics were included, such as discussions of the experience of pregnancy (both its pleasures and challenges) as well as the social realities of becoming a parent unexpectedly. Inclusion of this topic was well-received by Sophie, whose group had made this suggestion. He also very actively and noticeably took on board constructive criticisms in relation to teaching practices which the students felt had not been working (e.g. elaborating too much on his answers to their questions and losing them in the process).

Being involved in ‘things that matter’ in this CoP was an issue that pertained not only to students. Because social relations and camaraderie also ‘mattered’ in this CoP, Mr. Johnson and I needed to become part of the social fold in spite of the power relations of age and position. To fail to do so would have jeopardised our ability to be core members. Institutional forces of alignment gave Mr. Johnson a legitimate role in the classroom, and the same was true for me to some extent (as researcher and perceived sexuality ‘expert’). However, to be core members we had to enact the “criterial characteristics” of a CoP (see intro to section 5.2 above); demonstrating competence with the shared repertoire, taking on board the goals of the joint enterprise (goals both official and unofficial), and engaging with other members (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999: 176). As participants in a CoP in which having a laugh and getting to know one another was deemed crucial by its members (a theme which repeatedly arose in ethnographic fieldnotes), for us to remain aloof as adults might have resulted in marginalisation, or at best, peripheral membership. This was also true of a small number of students who remained at the social periphery by mid-May. As outlined in the next section, the urgent need to socially ‘shore up’ the group was salient to everyone involved.

### **5.2.3 Shoring up membership – addressing marginalisation**

#### ***5.2.3.1 Agreement on belonging & sustained mutual relations***

Having one’s name written on the class list does not necessarily mean that one unproblematically belongs to any given classroom-based community. Furthermore having a good or perfect attendance record can be an equally weak foundation for membership. Although not particularly profound observations, these facts only became fully clear to me after I had sat in this classroom for a few weeks and observed the comings and goings of secondary school existence. Certainly being present in body (and therefore co-present with others) is a step in the right direction, but there were some students whose truancy and tardiness began to reveal a pattern that, as it turned out, was not lost on anybody involved.

On April 7<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Johnson had just finished filling out the attendance list once class had been dismissed, and he expressed to me his concern about not being



able to engage Ruby, Lito and Ana in the class. They had been absent, and he revealed that this was a common pattern, and indeed the pattern continued over the following weeks.

During the group interviews (outlined in section 5.2.2), it became obvious that there was general agreement across groups that social relations were still somewhat fragmented.

May 8<sup>th</sup> - Sophie and Logan suggested that more trust needed to develop if discussions of sexuality were to go well and asserted that this was unlikely to happen with this class (but failed to elaborate on why).

May 12<sup>th</sup> - Olivia, Kate and Amber agreed that the class was basically getting along, but there were still some people they felt they did not know very well.

May 22<sup>nd</sup> - Aroha says she can talk to most girls in the class, except for "obvious ones, like YOU know who I'm talking about." I comment that there are always some people in any class who don't fit well together, and Aroha said, "Definitely they don't."

I chose not to probe further as to who these problematic individuals might have been, but I suspected that they were referring to Lito, Ana, and Ruby. On May 26<sup>th</sup> I was interested to hear these three girls talk about their own marginalisation:

*Lito pointed out that some people were being marginalised in the class, saying to me "You have noticed that it's us three, haven't you." I admitted that I'd noticed. Then Ruby said some of the other girls are snobs. Her evidence was that she'd make an effort to talk to them, and they'd give a short, insincere response with a "can you not talk to me" face.*

Lito then explained that it was the first time she had "been in a class with those people" and said "we see them around but we never talk" and they mixed in separate circles. She said it was sad that "whenever we go in the room, it's like us talking to them and they don't talk to us." Ruby and Ana agreed with this assessment. Lito said, "It would be sad if they think that way because we're

Islanders" thus reserving judgment on that possibility. Ana was convinced some of the others were frightened of her, although she asserted that she's "not scary". Finally they quite openly linked this social situation with their truancy and tardiness, with Ana telling about how she tended to text Lito and Ruby before class, and if they were not going to be there, she would not come, and this even applied to the interview that we were having at that moment. They asserted that they realised that absence would do little to resolve the situation; however they basically felt ignored.

So it had been evident to everyone that these girls were in a marginalised position in the CoP. I asked them if they wanted me to summarise their points of view for Mr. Johnson, and they were quite keen for this to happen even though they felt the anonymity of the exercise was unlikely to conceal their identities in the end. This was done, and the result was that Mr. Johnson actively intervened by imposing a rotating seating plan which forced mingling outside of friendship groups. He also repeatedly pointed out non-inclusive behaviours, prescribing alternative behaviours, and insisting that they be used. By June 12<sup>th</sup> it seemed as though some positive changes had taken place, as fieldnotes indicate:

*Mr. Johnson gave the class a question to discuss in groups. "What was the useful/important thing you learnt last lesson?" Luana said (smiling) "Olivia, did you feel the strength in our discussion yesterday?" and Olivia laughed, saying yes.*

Thus it seemed as though some boundaries had broken down. In the conversation that Luana is referring to, Lito also got very much involved, and I could see from across the room that she was engaged, and laughing with Olivia and Kate. That is certainly a breakthrough, so Mr. Johnson's seating guidelines and interventions had the desired effect of breaking down social barriers, particularly between the Pacific Island girls and the other girls. This move to core membership ensured that the voices of this group would appear in the audio-recorded conversations, for they became central participants in discussion.

## **5.2.4 Development of shared discourses**

### ***5.2.4.1 Pushing the boundaries – negotiating localised practice around the discussion of sex and sexuality***

As the term progressed and the topic of the Health class began to turn to sexuality, there was an ongoing and mutually negotiated evolution of a shared repertoire around the open and frank discussion of sexual acts, sexualised body parts, and sexual identities. This expansion of our shared repertoire occurred in tandem with other developments, such as the peripheral and core memberships (and marginalisations) outlined above. In writing of the shared repertoire as ‘ours’ I aim to emphasise that, as a participatory researcher, I had considerable input into that repertoire and influence upon it. Obviously the teacher’s influence was considerable via the choice of activities and other curriculum-based decisions (processes in which the students and I also had a voice as outlined previously), but he also greatly influenced the ongoing *negotiation* of this repertoire, and from the point of view of tracing the emergence of this CoP, that is the key point. As adults in the room, at times our individual influences were conscious while at other times far less so and grounded more in our reactions to student contributions (or lack of expected reactions). As the field note extracts below demonstrate, the pushing of classroom interactional boundaries concerning the discussion of sex and sexuality was a collectively achieved effect – one which resulted in localised practice.

### ***5.2.4.2 ‘Getting into’ gender and sexuality – fieldnote observations***

It was in week eight of my time at the school that we began to engage with learning about the socio-cultural construction of gender, as preparation for the unit on sexuality. These challenging ideas had been introduced one day via analysis in small groups of images of men and women from various cultures around the world. This was done with the goal of shedding light on the fact that different cultures ‘interpret’ male, female, man, woman, masculinity and femininity differently. This had been the previous day’s activity and it was now time to follow up on that experience.

We all filed in and started to get settled and Mr. Johnson placed a statement on the projector. He said “I’ve put up a ‘what’ so get out your pen and start copying it down.” The statement read “What: Examine how concepts of gender are socially and biologically constructed.” This was discussed in groups for a while and then the discussion was opened to the class, and Sophie asked “What do you mean, socially and biologically? Don’t the two go together?” She asserted that biology meant that men and women are different. Mr. Johnson responded, briefly explaining that ideas about bodies are also important, and I then volunteered to add to what he had said. The class went very quiet, and I said “This statement is asking how we put culture onto bodies.” I brought up the example from the previous day’s lesson of a photo of a young Massai warrior, and I asked the class if they agreed that he had looked quite soft and feminine to their eyes. Aroha said “Yeah!” and nodded vigorously, with her eyes locked on me. Numerous other students also vocalised their agreement. “And he’s a warrior!” I said. “We look and we see femininity but Massai people see masculinity. His body hasn’t changed, but the eyes looking at him have. That’s what this question is asking. How do different eyes look at male and female bodies and form ideas about manhood and womanhood.” I could see Aroha and Sophie carefully considering these ideas. Their eyes were searching to the upper left and then the upper right and they appeared to reach an understanding. Mr. Johnson then took up the concept of *the eyes we look with* in order to launch into the next activity.

For the next activity, our group (myself, Ben, Caleb and Matt) was combined with another group nearby so that we added Aroha, Sophie, Olivia, and Kate. We were each given a chart to fill in and then told that we had to explain to an alien from outer space how to identify men and women. Some sheets said Man at the top, and some said Woman. We had ten seconds to write two characteristics the aliens could use for a positive identification and then we had to pass the sheet on.

*I wrote ‘penis’ on the man one, and when Olivia and Sophie saw it they burst out laughing and then Sophie wrote ‘vagina’ on the woman paper. Then I wrote ‘no penis’ on the woman one and the laughter started again. Other*

*things written included facial hair, hairy ass, big boobs, and soft features (amongst other things).*

The goal of this activity was to get students to realise that, in fact, giving an authoritative definition of male and female bodies to an alien would be quite challenging because bodies actually vary a great deal. It is difficult to know whether this pedagogical goal was achieved; however it was in these types of interactions that I began to have direct involvement in the development of a shared repertoire around the free discussion of topics normally taboo in a classroom, such as sexualised body parts.

The students and Mr. Johnson were of course very much involved with this ongoing negotiation as well. As the students pushed the boundaries, sometimes encouraged by me, as seen above, and other times acting quite independently, they often found that those boundaries had shifted considerably. This process of negotiation took place under the watchful eye of Mr. Johnson whose responses were likewise watched closely by the students (see below).

An excellent example of his management of the shared repertoire occurred the following week when the alien activity was reviewed. Mr. Johnson had observed some words on the charts which certainly pushed boundaries (e.g. 'muff' and 'dick', which are slang terms for vagina and penis). He said to the class "I don't know what "no muff" means, so cross things like that out ((class laughter)). Cross out things that you think shouldn't be there." When the Man group was working, Codey said loudly "Dick! You should write dick because it's on this paper." Mr. Johnson was there, and he said "When it says penis already, you don't need to say dick because it's the same thing." In responding calmly to the use of these words and repeating them aloud, Mr. Johnson made it clear that such words were not 'taboo' in this CoP. However, there was also an implicit message that their use is unnecessary when other terms are available which represent an appropriate register for academic discussion.

As the sexuality unit progressed, this type of ongoing negotiation continued, and at times ventured into uncharted territory as students continued to probe the

boundaries of appropriateness. When such risks were taken with the frank discussion of sex and sexuality, I felt as researcher that it was very important to demonstrate that I found this type of conversation interesting in the context of a sexuality lesson, and not disturbing. Mr. Johnson also took this approach, and if risk-taking led to embarrassment then this, too, was treated as an opportunity for learning. There were moments when we all sensed that a conversation we were having was unlike any other classroom conversation any of us had previously participated in. This was usually because we had ventured into a topic (and therefore the language required for discussing it) that some outsiders might consider 'inappropriate' for a classroom even though it was quite appropriate as part of our CoP. In the spirit of the korowai for this CoP (see section 5.2.1), those more risky discussions were 'said in that room' and so they will 'stay in that room' as promised. However, it was from these moments that localised practice evolved into an overall attitude of 'careful guilelessness' around sex and sexuality, accompanied by a mix of calm analysis and tension-relieving humour.

During audio recording, the dictates of the korowai were reinterpreted, with all participants giving permission for their words to be transcribed and presented in other forums (such as this document). Therefore recorded examples of the negotiation of a shared repertoire around the discussion of sex and sexuality can be looked at more closely. The advert which is the focus of discussion in extract 5.2 (below) was also described in King (2010), and I follow that description closely here. The class is discussing a print advertisement for Dolce and Gabbana in which a woman is lying prone on the ground with a man on one knee beside her, leaning down towards her face. Other men can be seen nearby watching with some enthusiasm, and so the scene is suggestive of sexual violence but not incontrovertibly so. All figures in the picture are fully clothed except for the kneeling man, who is not wearing a shirt. Codey has just said that the scene is rather disturbing, and a disagreement ensues as to whether or not the scene depicts sexual violence (either ongoing or impending):

**Extract 5.2 – ‘Olivia say the WORD’: Speaking ‘sex’ into sexuality education**

- 1 Mr. J** so  
what’s disturbing about it
- 2 Codey** um //the GANG//
- 3 Luana** //NOTHING//
- 4 Lito** NOTHING’s disturbing
- 5 Aroha** they look like they’re gonna have a hot steamy ROOT
- 6 Luana** NOTHING it looks normal
- 7 Olivia** NO it does NOT↗ ((high rising))  
it looks like they’re about to (.) between her LEGS↗
- 8 Lito** he just needs to get between her legs and then
- 9 Ata** yeah he’s not
- 10 Aroha** //Olivia say the WORD//
- 11 Ata** //he’s like on the side//
- 12 Aroha** ROOT
- 13 Olivia** SEX↗
- 14 Kate** it’s he just wants to kiss her //and she’s like NO↗//
- 15 Ata** //it’s like// he’s doing CPR↗
- 16 Aroha** they look like they’re gonna have a
- 17 Olivia** SEXy time
- 18 Mr. J** okay

What is most relevant for this chapter is that, in turn 5, Aroha is the first to throw euphemism aside and state quite baldly what the picture suggests. She says “they look like they’re gonna have a hot steamy ROOT”. Olivia in turn 7 then says “they’re about to (.) between her LEGS↗”. Aroha interprets Olivia’s micro-pause as avoidance of the word sex and encourages Olivia in an aside (turn 10) to just “say the word.” Olivia then says “SEX↗” with some gusto, however still keeping the volume within her group rather than to the whole class. What is most important here is what is not said. When Aroha uses the term ‘root’ she is not censured by her peers or the teacher. The implicit message here is that it is all right for students in this CoP, and significantly girls, to speak this way. As time passed, more and more of these terms became part of the shared repertoire as members of the CoP experimented with their usage in a classroom setting.

However, as can be seen in extract 5.3 below (taken from later in the same conversation about the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement), not all members of this

CoP experienced unproblematic use of the shared repertoire around sexuality discussions. During this lesson, Lito experiments with the frank discussion of sexuality, demonstrating that she has moved (or is moving) towards core membership. Yet her contribution is questioned by Jay. Hailing from the same neighbourhood and church community as Lito, Jay reveals to his small group some information about her background to explain why he reacts as he does. All contributions which were addressed (and audible) to the whole room appear in larger letters and farther indented. A small group of students simultaneously engages in an on-topic side discussion, which is audible only to their own group. This conversation is more closely indented and appears in italics.

**Extract 5.3 – Policing the repertoire: Differential access to localised practice**

- 58 Lito** maybe they're having like a five- foursome or something  
**59 Jay** yeah that's what i'm SAYing (.) GANG bang  
**60 Luana** and y'know HE'S just getting it started or something  
**61 Lito** it looks naughty but sexy at the same time  
**62 Ata** yeah (laughs a bit)  
**63 Luana** it doesn't look-  
**64 Jay** Lito↯ Lito↯  
**65 Aroha** says Lito  
**66 Jay** you go to CHURCH remember↯  
**67 Luana** it doesn't look disturbing cause like y'know↯  
**68 Lito** yeah true (laughing)  
**69 Luana** her legs are on this side and his her legs are like (.) on the other side  
**70 Codey** *she doesn't care about- nah*  
**71 Aroha** *church↯*  
**72 Mr. J** okay interesting  
**73 Lito** i was just↯ being HON↯est↯  
**74 Jay** *minister's daughter↯*  
**75 Aroha** *IS she↯*  
**76 Jay** *yeah*

In turn 58, Lito says that the advert appears to be suggestive of group sex, and Jay at first orients to this assertion, presumably because it supports a point he has been making for several minutes (before line 58, and not transcribed here) without engendering a response from anyone; that is, that this advert depicts a potential



“gang bang.” In turn 61, perhaps encouraged by Jay’s alignment (and Luana’s in turn 60), Lito then says, “it looks naughty but sexy at the same time”, and Jay reacts negatively to this in turns 64 and 66, chastising her with his falling/rising tone and the repetition of her name (Lito↗ Lito↗), reminding her that she “goes to church”. He reveals to Aroha and Olivia that in fact her father is a minister, which is news to Aroha.

Based on the ethnographic observations outlined in section 5.2.3, I would argue that Lito has managed to achieve a level of core membership by this point in the course; however as a Pasifika girl whose father is a minister, there are certain discursive expectations placed upon her. Jay (a Pasifika boy) also presumably goes to her church, the evidence being that he speaks to Lito from an insider’s position (“you go to CHURCH remember↗”), but his own public use of the shared repertoire around frank sexuality discussion (i.e. gang bang) is not questioned. Certainly one could argue that there is a gendered double standard at work here, but Jay’s positioning of Lito in this instance could be more directly related to her status as the child of a local church leader. This extract demonstrates that membership in a CoP is a complex affair, and not everyone has equal access to the core, or legitimacy within it (cf Davies 2005). Furthermore, even from within the bounds of core membership, one might not gain legitimacy in relation to all aspects of the shared repertoire.

Regardless of its source, this ‘disciplining’ of Lito provides evidence that although a shared repertoire has developed, it is closely tied to what Wenger refers to as “sustained mutual relationships” and to the ongoing negotiation of peripheral and core memberships, a process which cannot be entirely separated from communities (of various definitions) which are external to this CoP, or from broader ideologies of, for example, gender and religion. In the words of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2007: 28):

Practice, by its very nature, involves a relation to the world:  
it looks outward. Relations among participants within a  
community of practice are intricately tied to relations

beyond the community of practice, and to the community's joint construction of its place in the wider world.

Thus, having established that the participants of this study had formed a dynamically evolving CoP by the time the sexuality unit began, it is important to keep in mind that those dynamic influences extend beyond the classroom walls.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

From the point of view of the research questions of this study, the identification of the research participants as a CoP will have considerable influences on the interpretation of data in relation to sexually agentic subject positions. Localised practices must be attended to and teased apart from the discourses of institutional alignment, for to conflate the two during analysis would create an analytical blind spot. It has been demonstrated that shared discourses around the discussion of sexuality (and differential access to those resources) built up over time. Being mutually negotiated by students, teacher and researcher, it is probable that the recorded discussions contain some idiosyncrasies of approach to, or expression of, sexually agentic subject positions. However this is, in fact, the main point. This Health class and their teacher and researcher became a CoP and therefore created a social dynamic and a shared set of tools which together enabled discussions in which sexual agency could be indexed and responded to. Whether or not the development of a similar CoP (or indeed any CoP at all) is a prerequisite for the exploration of sexual agency in other classrooms remains an open question, and one which future study can fruitfully address.

# Chapter 6

## *Small group recordings:*

## *Gender performance and sexual agency*

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### **6.1 Introduction**

Scholars who study the interaction of gender/sexuality with language have long been grappling with the closely linked questions of whether and when gender is relevant during interaction (McElhinney 2003; Swann 2002). This focus leads to a subsequent questioning of *to whom* it is relevant and *for what purpose*, for “‘Gender’ retains significance for people living their lives, not just people analyzing how people live their lives” (McElhinney 2003: 30). In relation to sexual agency, this becomes an important question because ‘gendered people living their lives’ might possibly be approaching the performance, avoidance and/or subversion of sexually agentive subject positions in ways which are directly influenced by gender.

This possibility leads to the question of what is meant by gender and how it manifests itself. In poststructuralist approaches to gender, an effort is made to steer clear of asking what gender differences are manifest in a given interaction and instead to ask how gender came to make a difference in that interaction (McElhinney 2003: 24). This distinction highlights the need to investigate orientations to *norms* of masculinity and femininity in order to get closer to an understanding of how other social constructions (such as sexual agency) can be in a mutually constitutive relationship with masculinities and femininities (see section 2.5). It is important to emphasise that this statement refers to orientations to both masculinity and femininity by men, for example, or orientations to both by females, or by those whose bodies fail to fit this binary classificatory system.

The data in this chapter suggest that being placed in a sexually agentive subject position, regardless of whether this positioning is precipitated by a classroom resource, the self, or someone else, can elicit responses which draw upon gendered norms (i.e. normative masculinity and femininity). However

gendered norms are not referenced in ways which match what Nicholson (1994) refers to as “coat rack” models of sex and gender (i.e. models which assume that there are two genders, based on the assumption that there are two sexes). That is, the data does not show a simple causal relationship between having a male body and the performance of masculinity, or having a female body and the performance of femininity. Rather, the picture is much more nuanced. 'Females' in this activity demonstrate both sharp variation and close alignment in their performances of gender in relation to sexual agency. Indeed, in one case, a female student deploys sexual agency performances which are normatively masculine. 'Males' also show variation in their performances of masculinity in relation to sexual agency. The resulting picture is one of concomitant performances of both gender and sexual agency in the classroom, thus showing that masculinity and femininity make a difference to sexual agency, but not in ways which ‘hang’ conveniently on male and female bodies.

### **6.1.1 - Classroom activity – Answering questions about heterosexuality**

The activity from which data for this chapter were taken was provided in section 3.3.8 as an example of one which was included in the classroom programme by my request (although compatible with Mr. Johnson’s own plans), and one which serves as evidence of the influence of a queer approach to research. Taken directly from Tasker (2000), the activity presented to the students on this day attempts to turn heteronormative thinking on its head by prompting participants to ask and answer questions of heterosexuals/heterosexuality which are stereotypically asked of homosexuals/ homosexuality. Therefore this activity forms part of the resource’s stated aim to disrupt or ‘bust’ the binaries of sex and gender (see section 3.3.7). The primary reason that it was chosen as a focus for audio recording and analysis was in anticipation of the activity’s positioning of students in ways that might prove sexually agentic (or not) or at least stimulate discussions in which sexually agentic subject positions might emerge, prompting the performance of sexual agency and/or the circumvention or resignification of such performances. It was also included because of the possibility that, by problematising heteronormativity,

it might generate data which provide a different view of sexual agency than other activities grounded more firmly in heteronormativity, thus contributing to triangulation of data as part of credibility and internal validity of research (see section 3.1.4).

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009 we gathered in room D4, a room which we used instead of room B2 because the computer suite was needed by another class (for a description of rooms, see section 4.2.3). Under the supervision of Mr. Johnson, the students were audio recorded, and this for the third time, as they had previously been recorded during whole-class discussions on June 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. In a variation of what is often referred to in New Zealand classrooms as the 'carousel' discussion method, half of the students remained stationary at desks (and beside an audio recorder - there were eight recorders in the room) while the other half rotated tables after every second question. They went through the questions in sequence and did their best to answer them in interview style. While observing the class in full flight with this carousel interview, I was struck by the degree to which the underlying point of it was lost on most of them (perhaps until the end). There were various reasons for this, including confusion over what the term heterosexuality refers to (i.e. it has been named, so it must be something non-normative, like homosexuality – see Extract 6.1 below). There was also a noticeable sense that the point of the activity was either going right over their heads because they have never heard these questions asked of *anyone* before, or that the message embedded in the lesson was 'preaching to the converted' and thus puzzling to the students in its focus. Thus the degree to which the questions have currency in New Zealand a decade after publication (at least in the manner intended by the resource) is thrown into question.

The teacher picked up on the confusion and closed the lesson with a discussion of some of the questions, a discussion which shored up understanding and helped them to see the point. Lito suggested that they are 'strange' questions that one is not usually expected to answer. Callum and others added to this sentiment, saying that many of the questions were pointless because they do not

have an answer. Mr. Johnson then elicited from the students the fact that it is usually homosexuals, not heterosexuals, who get asked when they 'chose' their sexual orientation. He then points out that the apparent pointlessness of the question exposes the fact that it's a myth that homosexuals choose their orientation. These pedagogic concerns are important for the classroom programme and future implementation of this lesson. However, for the purposes of the present study and the research questions at hand, what are most interesting are the positionings created by the questions in relation to sexual agency and young people, and the responses of the participants to those positionings.

### 6.1.2 – Preparing the students for the task

Table 6.1 shows the questions that the students worked through two at a time. Mr. Johnson circulated while the students were talking, explaining questions to those who had trouble understanding them.

<b>Table 6.1 - Questions from the activity</b> (Tasker 2000: 51)
1. Define heterosexuality
2. How can you tell if someone is heterosexual (straight)?
3. What causes heterosexuality?
4. Is it possible that heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
5. The media seems to portray straights as preoccupied with (genital) sex. Do you think this is so?
6. Do you think straights flaunt their sexuality? If so, why?
7. In a straight couple, who takes the dominant role and who takes the passive role?
8. Forty per cent of married couples get divorced. Why is it so difficult for straights to stay in long-term relationships?
9. Considering the consequences of overpopulation, could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual?
10. 99% of reported rapists are heterosexual. Why are straights so sexually aggressive?
11. The majority of child molesters are heterosexuals. Do you consider it safe to expose children to heterosexual teachers, scout leaders, coaches, etc?
12. Are you offended when a straight person of the opposite sex 'comes on' to you?
13. When did you choose your sexual orientation?
14. How easy would it be for you if you wanted to change your sexual orientation starting right now?
15. What have been your reactions to answering these questions? What feelings have you experienced? Why?

When Mr. Johnson introduced the activity, consistent with practices of this CoP, he engaged in relatively little preamble or explanation. Although he addressed the meaning of key terms such as ‘heterosexual’, the recording transcript demonstrates that, as stated previously, understanding of the word heterosexual was problematic and evolved as the task progressed. In fact the point of the whole activity was rather obscure to the students until after it was complete. In extract 6.1 (appears in full), Mr. Johnson explains the activity to the class. All contributions which were addressed (and audible) to the whole room appear in larger letters and farther indented. Two small groups of students simultaneously engage in on-topic side discussions, which are audible only to their own group. These conversations are more closely indented and appear as underlined (a group composed of Liam, Callum, Luana, and Lito) and boxed (a pair – Matt and Caleb).

#### Extract 6.1 - Defining heterosexuality

- 1 Mr. J**            *now (1) these are questions about sexual orientation  
now (2) for answering these questions we're asking that you  
(.) um think aBOUT the question  
and think about the BEST way you can answer that question  
all right (.) the questions are all about heterosexuality  
does everyone know what that means*
- 2 Matt**            *yeah=*
- 3 Luana**           *=no*
- 4 Matt**            *different*
- 5 Liam**    normal
- 6 Codey**           *can you //define it//*
- 7 Liam**    //as in//
- 8 Callum** boy likes girl
- 9 Liam**    yeah
- 10 Mr. J**           *define it↑  
it's //people who are interested in the opposite sex//*
- 11 Liam** //that's what WE consider// normal
- 12 Codey**        *EH ((heightened pitch))*
- 13 Mr. J**           *ok↑  
Luana*
- 14 Luana**        *yes*
- 15 Mr. J**           *do you understand what a heterosexual is*
- 16 Luana**        *yeah he's telling me ((indicating Liam))*
- 17 Mr. J**           *//people interested in the opposite sex//*
- 18 Matt**    //i learnt it in science//
- 19 Caleb**    so a homosexual man likes guys  
and a heterosexual likes the opposite sex
- 20 Liam**    people in the opposite sex

*into the opposite sex*  
**21 Mr. J** now  
**22 Callum** *so not gay*  
**23 Luana** *you mean interested in men*  
**24 Liam** *that's the SAME sex*  
**25 Callum** *just straight not gay*  
**26 Liam** *//yeah//*  
**27 Mr. J** *//we're looking// at ((picks up paper))*  
*assumptions*  
*societal assumptions and myths about homosexuals*  
*but the WAY we're doing that*  
*is by answering a lot of questions about heterosexuals*  
*(1) does everyone understand what we're doing↑*  
**28 Many** *yeah/yes/mhm ((but murmured only))*  
**29 Mr. J** *the outcome is we're looking at the societal myths of*  
*(.) about homosexuals*  
*myths and assumptions*  
**30 Matt** *//what locals//*  
**31 Mr. J** *//about homosexuality//*  
**32 Matt** *what locals think*  
**33 Mr. J** *as a concept*  
*all right↑*  
*so things that happen in society about homosexuality*  
*you're gonna ask some questions↑*  
*of people*  
*about what heterosexuality means (1) to them et cetera*  
*(1) all right↑*  
*now*

To begin with, Mr. Johnson's explanation does not lead to the positioning of the students in sexually agentive subject positions. This is partly a result of the fact that Mr. Johnson's language is carefully worded in these instructions, presumably so as to avoid ascribing to the students a subject position which suggests any particular sexual orientation, whether it be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. This avoidance eventuates from the absence of the word 'normal' from his definition of 'heterosexuals' (i.e. *people interested in the opposite sex*) in lines 10 and 17. In addition, Mr. Johnson repeatedly says 'heterosexuals' and 'homosexuals', avoiding (consciously or unconsciously) any reliance on the pronouns 'us' and 'them'. For example in line 31 he does not say 'about them' but rather 'about homosexuality', and such an avoidance of pronouns is marked in English (Wales 1996: 30-31). A side effect of this generalised way of speaking about heterosexuals is that there is no direct recognition of the students' sexual agency. However,



neither are they entirely precluded from sexually agentive subject positions. It could be argued that they are included via the word 'people' but this is a rather 'derivative' version of agency (see section 2.4).

The students maintain this positioning for the most part, even in their small-group asides. However, Liam does suggest in line 11 (only to his group) that 'we' consider heterosexuality to be normal. This statement works against the teacher's lack of normalisation of heterosexuality, and the inclusive 'we' to some extent ascribes heterosexuality to all present via its assumption that 'we' are all people who possess a heteronormative gaze. However this statement stops short of recognising any sexual agency on the part of those present, for members of this 'we' could merely be observers of 'normal heterosexuality' rather than potential participants. Thus by the end of this stretch of whole-class and small-group discussion, the sexual agency of the participants has not been recognised by any speakers. As the students begin interacting however, agency recognition/non-recognition, and responses to these positionings, begin to emerge from their own words as well as the words of the activity questions.

## **6.2 Findings**

Space does not allow for an exploration of responses to all of the questions in the activity; rather, some extracts have been selected for analysis because it has emerged that sexual agency performances were taking place in these interactions, or sexual subject positionings were being actively avoided and/or resignified.

### **6.2.1 - Following Luana**

As an overview of this section, the analysis follows Luana as she participates in the carousel discussion. In the next few extracts (6.2-6.4), which occurred about three-quarters of the way through the broader activity, Luana has an experience related to sexual agency which she then retells to others as she circulates around the carousel. Her negotiations of sexual subject positionings and sexual agency are numerous in this section, and they interact with other interactive work with which she is involved. Most specifically they interact with norms of masculinity and

femininity, norms which she draws upon in an alternating fashion depending on her needs.

### **6.2.1.1 – Liam and Luana – the come-on**

In extract 6.2 below (appears in full), we hear from Liam and Luana. Over the term together in Health class, the two of them have become friendly, with Liam being one of the few students to casually engage with the Pasifika girls in the room (a fact which Lito pointed out in their focus group interview – see section 4.3.3). Although it must be said that Luana was at no point marginalised in the CoP in the way that Lito, Ana, and Ruby found themselves to be, these other girls said that Liam is ‘different’ from most of the students in the class in how he treats them (in a good way). Luana was not present at that interview, but she would often ‘high-five’ Liam as she entered the room and clearly approves of him as a person. In this extract Liam and Luana are temporarily paired together; the final question that they address is number 12 – *Are you offended when a straight person of the opposite sex comes on to you?* As it is her turn to be the asker, Luana puts the question to Liam. He answers it and soon turns it back on her, but with a twist that places the two of them in sexual agency performance together, creating much laughter.

#### **Extract 6.2 - Liam & Luana – Would YOU be offended?**

- 1 Luana**      *are you offended ∪*  
                  *when a straight person ∪ of the other sex comes on (.) to you ∩*
- 2 Liam**      *(4) //not really//*
- 3 Luana**      *//so if a// GUY came onto YOU liam HOW would you feel*
- 4 Liam**      *when a straight person of the OTHER (.) sex ∪*  
                  *which would be YOU ∩*  
                  *FEmale ∩*
- 5 Luana**      *eh::::::: ∩*
- 6 Liam**      *i I wouldn't really be that offended ∪*  
                  *i wouldn't really mind (.) that much*
- 7 Luana**      *thank you*
- 8 Liam**      *(quickly) you're welcome*  
                  *would YOU ∩ be offended*  
                  *(3) if I came onto you right here (.) in this //xxxx//*
- 9 Luana**      *((laughing uproariously))*
- 10 Liam**     *((joins in laughing)) that was pretty good there*
- 11 Luana**     *((continues laughing uproariously))*
- 12 Liam**     *((laughing)) that was funny*

**13 Luana** ((tears of laughter in voice)) hey YOU'RE another buzz killer bro ↗  
((interrupted by teacher for rotation))

In line 1, the question itself appears at first glance to have little to do with sexual agency. It asks the respondent to place him or herself in the position of being a recipient of sexual attention, with the operative question being whether or not this attention is likely to be wanted. From another point of view, by suggesting that one could take offence in this situation (or fail to), the question ascribes agency to the sexual subject of the imagined situation. The recipient of sexual attention is not a passive observer; rather one can respond negatively. Additionally, the use of simple present with the word 'are' implies that the respondent is likely to have been in this situation before: *Are you offended when this happens to you?* Alternatively the question could have asked: *Would you be offended if this happened to you?* Instead, the simple present construction and its assumption of a wealth of experience with 'being come on to' and responding actively to it, places the respondent in the position of being an ongoing sexual agent who is anything but passive. In this indirect manner, the question therefore recognises the respondent's agency.

In turn three, Luana misunderstands the question, thinking that Liam is being asked to respond to an advance from another guy. Liam corrects her, and in doing so ascribes sexual agency to her, and he does so in direct relation to himself. In turn four he says:

*when a straight person of the OTHER (.) sex ↗  
which would be YOU ↗  
FEmale ↗*

To change the focus of the question in this way is an interesting choice on Liam's part, for Luana is now positioned as having asked Liam "Would you be offended if I came on to you?" and this was not the original 'force' of the question at all. Luana does not actively resist this positioning, and so Liam goes on saying, quite plainly, that he would not really mind. Luana responds by saying "thank you" and Liam says

“you’re welcome” and these responses constitute performances of sexual agency. The two of them have aligned to sexually agentive subject positions, and this in relation to one another.

In turn eight, Liam then turns the question around and says “would you be offended if I came on to you right here” and the rest of what he says is drowned out by Luana’s explosive ‘belly laughter’, which continues for some time. In the absence of post-recording interviews, it is not possible to know what Liam’s intent was in this exchange, but he aligns to Luana’s treatment of it as a humorous incident. I would like to suggest that Liam’s use of the term “right here” changes the game, intensifying their mutual sexual agency from a hypothetical ‘would’ into the here and now. It is a sexual agency performance on his part. For Luana’s part, by laughing loudly (and quite authentically, with tears in her voice by the end) she responds to the sexual subject position that has been ascribed her, one which she aligned to a moment before when it was still hypothetical. By framing the whole thing as a very funny joke (and calling Liam a ‘buzz killer’, someone who ruins your good time or good mood), Luana calls an end to the game and effectively resignifies their performances of sexual agency as humorous play rather than overt sexuality.

It is important to note that the power dynamics in this exchange shift considerably depending on whether it is a male or a female who is placed in the position of being the ‘hypothetical’ recipient of sexual attention. Liam responds quite frankly, saying that he would not be offended by an advance from Luana, but when Luana is asked to assess her own response to Liam’s ‘hypothetical’ advances, she avoids giving an answer. Granted, as observed above, Luana is responding after Liam has intensified the situation; however it might be that she dodges the question because the answer would constitute a different performance for a girl. Luana must navigate the slut stigma (see section 2.5.3), and perhaps the ‘right here, right now’ force of Liam’s question was too much of a social risk for her to take. Luana soon moves on in the rotation to work with other groups, who could not help overhearing her raucous laughter, and she is quite happy to relate the incident.

These reports evolve into a story, and the telling leads to further navigations and performances in relation to sexuality and sexual agency.

### 6.2.1.2 - Callum & Luana –Reporting the come-on

The first person to hear about it is Callum, someone who knows Liam fairly well in the context of this CoP. They are friends in Health class, but they do not hang out together otherwise, according to their focus-group interviews. In extract 6.3 (appears in full) he asks her what Liam said to her that was so funny. She relates the incident.

#### Extract 6.3 - Callum & Luana 1 – He killed my buzz

- 1 Luana** ((crossing from previous table, where Liam remains)) MY god that's just SO bad (.) ((short loud laugh))
- 2 Callum** what'd liam SAY to you
- 3 Luana** aw  
 ((almost laughs again)) cause we were on number:::  
 twelve↑ ((short laugh))  
 aw::: ((starts laughing again))  
 (.) and I ASKED him the question he was like  
 no i wouldn't be offended  
 would YOU be offended if i came on to you (.) RIGHT now↗  
 i was like WHAT the F:::~::~  
 ((high pitch)) he KILLED my BUZZ↗
- 4 Callum** ((laughing))
- 5 Luana** i mean I↑ just can't acCEPT↑ that shit callum↗
- 6 Callum** ((laughs a bit))
- 7 Luana** that's just unacCEPT↑able↓  
 i mean it's not in my DICTIONary↑  
 it's not in my BOOKS↑  
 (1) ((more evenly)) HE'S in my buzz killer book
- 8 Callum** when did you=
- 9 Luana** =HIT me with (.) number 13↗  
 SAY it out loud↗

In the retelling, Luana relates being placed in a sexually agentive subject position by Liam and actively resists this positioning, re-presenting the incident with less humour and less benignly than it was treated in Extract 6.2. Her intonation throughout most of the extract is widely varying and therefore comes across as emphatic. Callum is of course unaware of the precise way in which the original incident unfolded, but late in turn 3 Luana reports the words which formulated the

crucial turn in how she viewed their discussion. She reports that Liam had said “*would YOU be offended if i came on to you (.) RIGHT now*”<sup>U</sup>, and this is a fair representation of what he had said (except that Liam said ‘right here’ instead of ‘right now’). She then immediately quotes her thoughts at the time by deploying a quotative ‘be like’ construction (see Buchstaller and D’Arcy 2009; D’Arcy 2010; Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2004). She says “*i was like WHAT the F::::*” thus beginning a series of statements in which she constructs the events for Callum as something that she can barely even comprehend (see extract 6.3, lines 6 and 7). Just what ‘it’ is that she cannot accept is ambiguous. Is it the idea of an ‘advance’ from Liam? Or perhaps, like the ‘it’ in ‘it is raining’, the anaphoric reference is not important; rather, these words are more useful to her as a performance for Callum, one in which she begins to repair her subjectivity as a girl in the class. In telling Callum what had happened, she essentially has to reveal that Liam had ascribed sexual agency to her in a very direct and immediate sense. The subsequent turns constitute a performance of resistance to this positioning in which Luana resignifies sexual agency into a form which is more socially useful to her.

To begin with, Luana says in turn 7 “*that’s just unacCEPT*”<sup>↑</sup>*able*”<sup>↓</sup> and this statement constitutes sexual agency because she is directly rejecting the sexual subject position which had been ascribed her (certainly an agentive act). Rejection is however a different ‘flavour’ of sexual agency, and this is where the resignification begins. She then says (again in turn 7), “*it’s not in my DICtionary*”<sup>↑</sup> which could be interpreted as a way of saying that she had found herself ill-equipped for the situation she and Liam ended up in. The pronoun ‘it’ remains ambiguous. By expressing her incredulity however, she separates herself from the socially problematic sexual agency that Liam had evoked, asserting her own innocence. In this way she makes it clear that she was a reluctant participant, and the slut stigma is held at bay.

The following dialogue in Extract 6.4 (appears in full) constitutes a continuation of the previous extract. There is no time gap between the two, rather

after explaining to Callum what had happened with Liam, they start to address question 13.

**Extract 6.4 - Callum & Luana 2 – *i LOVE boys***

- 1 Callum**      *when did you=*  
**2 Luana**      *=HIT me with (.) number 13 ↯*  
                 *SAY it out loud ↯*  
**3 Callum**      *when did you choose your sexual orientation*  
**4 Luana**      *i do NOT know what that means*  
**5 Callum**      *like when did you*  
                 *when did you choose what sex you LIKE*  
**6 Luana**      *(2) at a very young age ↯*  
                 *at about ten↑ i guess::*  
                 *(booming voice) i LOVE boys::*  
**7 Callum**      *(laughing a bit) ((rare for Callum))*  
**8 Luana**      *i love them S::O much ↯*  
                 *(1) oh they are just SUCH good workers::*  
                 *(2) in BED*  
**9 Callum**      *(laughing a bit)*  
**10 Luana**      *yeah*  
                 *(1) thank you*  
                 *(1) YOUR turn*

Before addressing the words of the participants, it is important to explore how the classroom resource positions the listener. The wording of question 13 (“When did you choose your sexual orientation?”) directly recognises the sexual agency of the respondent, and it discursively achieves this effect in three interconnected ways. First of all, the use of the word ‘when’ presumes that the person being asked has a clear sexual orientation, one which is highly salient to them (indeed it is framed here as ‘your’ sexual orientation, something that is owned). The illocutionary force of the question thus leaves no provision for ‘fence-sitting’ on the part of the respondent. His or her sexual agency is therefore being recognised.

The commonly deployed but rarely scrutinised term *sexual orientation* also merits deconstruction in this case because it could be argued that there is agency embedded within it. The word ‘orientation’ indexes directionality in the sense that

we orient ‘to’ things or concepts and so align to a course, or reposition our point of reference in some way. These concepts all involve agentic responses to our environment. The question which remains is how directionality can be sexual? Perhaps the phrase refers to targets of our sexual desires, asking what type of person forms our sexual point of reference. From this point of view, question 13 asks “When did you decide who to aim your sexual desires at?” or perhaps “When did you decide which sexual course to align with?” These underlying implications of the term sexual orientation add another level of agency recognition to question 13.

Finally, the presence of the word ‘choose’ in the question completes the agency recognition triad. Of course the idea of choosing one’s sexual orientation is highly problematic, which, as Mr. Johnson has suggested, is the main pedagogic goal of including this question in the activity (i.e. to make the point that sexual orientation is not something we pick and choose). Clearly choosing one’s sexual course or sexual alignment is agentic, for ‘choice’ as a concept leaves little doubt about who is in control.

In turn 1, Callum begins to ask question 13, and Luana orients to his efforts to return to on-task discussion, saying in turn 2, “*HIT me with (.) number 13 ↗ SAY it out loud ↗*” This way of talking indexes hip-hop ‘gangsta swagger’ (see Walker 2010: 5; Watkins 2005) through its imperative structure, commanding the listener and indicating a readiness for anything. My ethnographic fieldnotes indicate that this style is commonly deployed by Luana in the context of this CoP (see section 4.3.3 under ‘Amber’). In this way she stands out from all the other girls in the class, including the other Pasifika girls because they rarely deploy this style, and if they do (Lito for example occasionally does so), it is a less sustained performance. Throughout this extract, Luana maintains this swagger, and it has specific effects which are useful to her.

Confronted with the term sexual orientation, Luana is unable to understand it and admits this freely in turn 4. Callum rephrases it in a way that she understands, saying “*when did you choose what sex you LIKE*”. This re-interpretation deploys the ‘target of sexual desire’ meaning discussed previously.



Luana replies that she 'chose' at a very young age (citing age 10) and then goes on to engage in a vociferous performance of sexual desire for boys. In turn 6, Luana says "*i LOVE boys::*" in a voice which certainly reaches well beyond the ears of her discussion partner Callum. There was a lot of noise in the room, with seven other similar conversations taking place, however her assertion of attraction to boys seems to have been intended for a broader audience. Perhaps this audience also includes myself as the researcher via the recording device. As pointed out in the previous section, Luana has managed to keep the slut stigma at bay, but now when asked about sexual orientation, she takes the opportunity to emphasise that she is indeed sexually attracted to boys. She 'loves boys', and in fact performs sexual agency by suggesting that she has first hand experience with the 'work' that boys do 'in bed'. At this point it is unclear whether she is indexing a specifically heterosexual identity; rather, it is attraction to boys which she performs (see section 2.4 for discussion of different-sex attraction as distinct from heterosexual orientation and straight identity).

Following on the heels of her earlier assertions to Callum that she was a reluctant recipient of Liam's sexual attention, this performance of sexual agency could be read as a subsequent repair to her performance of sexual identity/orientation. Perhaps the 'spectre of homosexuality' (Cameron 1997b: 61) is making its presence felt as a result of common associations between masculinity and lesbian identity (cf McElhinney 1995; see Morrish and Sauntson 2007: 141). Therefore it could be argued that Luana feels motivated to distance herself from a lesbian 'butch' identity. As the next extract demonstrates, Luana begins to baldly assert a straight identity to the next group while she continues working to come to terms with her conversation with Liam.

It could also be argued that Luana's sustained use of swagger adds to the need for her to go bald on record about her attraction to men. As observed earlier, in this CoP swagger is done almost exclusively by boys; Jay, for example, deploys it in his sense of humour and when out in the school grounds with his friends (see section 4.3.1 under 'Jay'), and so by deploying it Luana is, like the boys, indexing

masculinity, and thus performing female masculinity (Halberstam 1998). It must be acknowledged that there is some circularity to the argument that swagger is masculine in this community because boys usually do it. However the swagger style observed in this CoP bears some of the hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity (i.e. hierarchy, dominance, overt heterosexuality, - see section 2.5.2). It is interesting that Luana's expression of sexual agency in "I LOVE boys, they're such good workers in bed" could be read as a display of 'heterosexual' attraction and dominance, two elements in this list. At other times, Luana draws upon threats of violent confrontation (see altercation with Amber, section 4.3.3 under 'Amber') and continual references to hierarchy in that her group is always framed as 'the best' (for example). This sustained performance of swagger on her part could, therefore, be argued to be a masculine gender performance.

### **6.2.1.3 - Luana, Ben & Isaac – telling the story again**

#### **Extract 6.5 - Luana, Ben & Isaac – WHAT the FUCK!**

- 1 Isaac** ((reading aloud)) what have been your reactions to answering these //questions//
- 2 Ben** //oh uh// to the questions we've answered ∪
- 3 Luana** I found it SO well until it came to number twelve that Llam was just being a little SHIT ∪
- 4 Ben** ((pointing at recorder and laughing))
- 5 Isaac** ((laughing))
- 6 Luana** ((whispering into mic)) i take that back
- 7 Ben** why:: ∩
- 8 Luana** well:::: ∪  
 (1) I asked him if he was offENDED ∪ when a straight PERson ∪  
 M::::E:: ∪  
 STRAIGHT ∪  
 ((high pitch and squeaky)) i AM straight ∩ ∪  
 (1) of the other sex comes on (.) to you ↑  
 and he goes  
 (1) no ∩ (.) i don't feel ∩ (.) offended ∩ (.) by (.) a (.) girl ∩ (.) that comes on to me ∩  
 why ∩ (.) would you feel it if i came on to you ∩ (.) right NOW ↑  
 and i was like  
 ((high pitch)) WHAT the FUCK ∪ ↑  
 i just got really offEND↑ed ∩  
 right THERE ∩ ((laughing during word 'there'))  
 ((laughter in group)) HE like just came and aTTACKED me like he came ON to me

*i was like (.) ((small quiet voice)) OH ↗ (.) back off ↗  
 i thought OH ↗  
 9 Isaac ((small laugh to the sound 'hm'))*

In this extract (which appears in full, with no omissions), Luana has left Callum and moved on in the rotation one final time, and the participants have been asked to reflect on how they felt while answering these questions. Speaking to Ben and Isaac, Luana relates her evolving story about the incident with Liam. At the beginning of turn 8 Luana says pointedly “*M::::E::↗ STRAIGHT ↗*” and deploys a scooping intonation, one which suggests that Ben and Isaac might require some convincing as to her ‘straightness’. She then escalates the emphasis even further, saying in a high, squeaky voice with a high rising and then low scooping intonation on the word straight, “*i AM strai↗ght ↗.*” Ben and Isaac have said nothing to indicate any doubt about this assertion, yet she repeatedly makes it in a tone that suggests they require convincing. This is perhaps because she is preparing to tell them about her rejection of Liam’s come on. She quotes her thoughts once again (as with Callum before) saying “*i was like ((high pitch)) WHAT the FUCK ↗ ↗*”, this time finishing the word ‘fuck’ and using a deeply scooped and then high rising ending, the effect of which is to again communicate incredulity. She then asserts for the first time that she was indeed offended, which is of course what Liam’s question had been (i.e. Would you be offended if I came on to you right here...). It seems that Luana has finally made sense of her own reaction. As before, this narrative performance of reluctant participation and offence permits her to avoid the slut stigma. Her prior emphatic insistence that she is straight balances this achievement with the need to come across as being attracted to boys.

Finally it is through femininity performance, rather than bald-on-record assertions, that Luana rounds off her navigation of sexual agency. She finishes her story with further quotation of her thoughts at the moment Liam came on to her, but her tone changes considerably. Using a very different voice, stripped of swagger and bravado, she sums up her internal reaction as “*OH ↗ (.) back off ↗ OH ↗.*” Each phrase is high pitch and breathy, with low rising then falling tone, which could be described as ‘lilting’. In Hall (1995: 200) telephone sex workers draw on a similar

breathy, lilting style to sound more stereotypically feminine to their clients, and so it is plausible to suggest that Luana is indexing similar feminine stereotypes (and perhaps hegemonic femininity). Sitting in contrast with the masculinity performances which have come before, an effect of this shift in style is femininity performance. By the end of the story, Luana thus reconciles straight identity performance with her rejection of a sexually agentive subject position by associating that rejection with femininity. As Kulick (2003) has argued, to say no to a sexual advance is to (heteronormatively) call forth the sexual subject position 'woman'. It is therefore interesting that femininity performance is where Luana's navigation takes her. In the next extract, it can be seen that the same question (twelve) causes similar conundrums for Paige, another girl in the class who also deploys strategies of femininity performance to keep the slut stigma at bay while navigating being positioned as sexually agentive.

## 6.2.2 – Paige and femininity

**Extract 6.6 - Hannah & Paige – *Are you offended? She LIKES it (appears in full form, no omissions)***

- 1 Hannah**     *are you offended*  
                     *when a straight person of the opposite sex comes on to you*
- 2 Paige**       *(5) ((words muffled by hand)) can you repeat that↑*
- 3 Hannah**     *huh ∪*
- 4 Paige**       *((high pitch)) i can't really XXXX that↑ //xxxx//*
- 5 Hannah**     *//so when a// boy comes on to you ∪*  
                     *are you offended*
- 6 Paige**       *((high pitch)) (2) um (2) NO not (laughing) really ∪*  
                     *(sharply indrawn breath - giggles)*
- 7 Hannah**     *she LIKES it (laughing)*
- 8 Paige**       *(laughing)*  
                     *((drops pitch, speaks up)) well I WOULDN't be ∩*  
                     *i mean if it was the same sex i might be ∪*  
                     *but (1) yeah*
- 9 Hannah**     *//yeah//*
- 10 Paige**      *//not// really ∪*

Keeping in mind the sexual agency recognition of question 12 (see analysis of extract 6.2 above) it is not surprising to observe that Paige, when asked this

question by Hannah, performs femininity in a way similar to Luana, with a high, quiet, breathy voice. Paige says with hesitation in turn six that she would not be offended. She then proceeds to giggle. Hannah interprets the meaning of this performance, saying in turn seven “she **LIKES** it” and confirming that Paige’s reply of ‘no’ has placed her in a sexually agentic subject position. Paige then calls an end to the high-pitched, giggly performance by dropping her voice and stating more plainly that, in fact, she would not be offended. By conveying reluctance and hesitation, Paige navigates the slut stigma while still managing to truthfully answer the question. The feminine indexicality of her pitch and tone (again drawing on feminine stereotypes - cf Hall 1995) as well as the gasping and giggling, serve to shore up her gender identity while she aligns with a sexually agentic subject position. The following extracts (6.7 & 6.8) provide further perspective on the intersections of sexual agency, gender identity and sexual orientation in conversation by turning attention to the responses of boys in the class. Juxtaposed with the performances of Luana and Paige, their performances confirm that responses to ascriptions of sexual agency cannot be presumed based on the sex of the subject in question. Rather, it is gender (i.e. masculinity and femininity) which makes the difference.

### **6.2.3 - Hearing it from the boys - masculinities and sexual agency**

In extract 6.7 (edited - for full version see Appendix B) are some contributions by three young men in the class as they encounter question thirteen. As was outlined in the discussion of extract 6.4 above (with Luana and Callum), this question positions respondents in sexually agentic subject positions because it suggests that they have a salient sexual orientation and, although problematic, even the implied 'choice' ascribes agency.

#### **Extract 6.7 - Codey, Ben & Isaac – I’m still a growing man**

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>1 Codey</b> | <i>when did you deCIDE //that you were either straight gay//=</i> |
| <b>2 Isaac</b> | <i>//on the day i was BORN niggah↑ ((short laugh))//</i>          |
| <b>3 Ben</b>   | <i>=or heterosexual</i>   |
| <b>4 Codey</b> | <i>so now (.) what is your answer</i>                             |
| <b>5 Ben</b>   | <i>well:::</i>  |
| <b>6 Codey</b> | <i>(laughs)</i>   |

**7 Ben** *i wouldn't have a clue*  
*i'm still a growing man*↑  
*//so:://*  
**8 Codey** *//HA HA//*  
**9 Isaac** *(laughing)*  
**10 Codey** *((calling out to room)) he //could be// GAY guys*  
**11 Ben** *i don-*  
*i i don't know*↑  
**12 Codey** *(laughs)*  
**13 Ben** *i i'm st- i'm still //experiencing// changes man*↑  
**14 Codey** *//true haha//*  
**15 Ben** *farg*  
*jeez*  
*but i'm pretty sure i'm heterosexual man*

Codey reads the question aloud in turn one, and in turn two, Isaac overlaps the question, replying “*on the day i was BORN niggah*↑” and following up with a short laugh. The others fail to respond to this apparent joke, but it seems that Isaac is suggesting that one does not choose, rather one is born with a sexual orientation. Ben responds in turn seven stating that he is still a ‘growing man’, and so he has no idea how to answer the question. He seems to imply here that he does not yet have a ‘fixed’ or salient sexual orientation because he is too young and so cannot be sure about his desires. This places young people (and by association himself) in a non-agentive position from one point of view because it separates them from the ownership of a sexual orientation, an ownership which is presumed by the question (as outlined in relation to Extract 6.4 above). From another point of view, this positioning is agentive for young *men* because it works against hegemonic masculinity, which dictates that young men should be heterosexual and dominant (see section 2.5.2), and this could be interpreted as ‘always sexually ready’, and ‘not in control’ of their sexual behaviour. By saying in turn thirteen and fifteen that he is ‘still experiencing changes’ but he is ‘pretty sure’ that he is heterosexual, Ben resignifies young male (hetero)sexuality and masculinity by inserting an element of measured consideration which is decidedly agentive.

In order to achieve these effects, Ben is prepared to engage in a performance in which he places himself in an ambiguous sexual subject position from the point of view of the gay/straight binary. This interpretation is confirmed

by Codey, who points out to all who will listen in turn ten that Ben's response opens up the possibility that he could be gay. This fact does not seem to worry Ben unduly, and his undeterred bearing maintains the resignification of young men's masculinity which began in turn seven. Ben's performance sits in contrast to that of Luana, who baldly claimed a straight identity (see Extract 6.4), and that of Codey in extract 6.8 below (edited - for full version, see Appendix B).

**Extract 6.8- Codey, Ben & Isaac – *I wanted to BOND to her***

- 1 Ben**            *when did you choose your sexual orientation*  
**2 Codey**        *(3) when i was:: SIX years old man*  
**3 Ben**            *six years old=*  
**4 Codey**        *=no no (1) FOUR years old*  
**5 Ben**            *four years old*  
                     *WHY four years old*  
**6 Codey**        *because i liked (2)*  
                     *i liked girls*  
**7 Ben**            *well how did you know you liked girls back from four*  
**8 Codey**        *aw cause=*  
**9 Ben**            *=when i was four i was-*  
**10 Isaac**        *cause he watched TV and he*  
**11 Codey**        *when i watched this Janet Jackson video and i liked her*  
                     *i thought she was*  
**12 Isaac**        *((singing like Janet Jackson))*  
**13 Codey**        *i don't know*  
                     *(1) i found her INTeresting*  
**14 Ben**            *(laughing)*  
**15 Codey**        *i wanted to BOND to her*

Codey is the last one in his group to answer this question, and in turn four he positions himself as sexually agentic from the age of four. Glossing over the problematic notion that sexual orientation can be chosen, his explanation says little about choice and more about saliency in relation to sexual attraction. In turn seven, Ben does not appear to believe that Codey is being entirely truthful, saying "well how did you know you liked girls back from four?" Codey's response was that he found Janet Jackson "interesting" in her videos and "wanted to BOND to her" (turn fifteen). Regardless of whether or not Codey actually sees sexual orientation as a choice, in the end he claims sexual agency firmly by aligning with the agency recognition of the question and insisting that he felt attraction to women at a very

young age. Codey taps into hegemonic masculinity via sexual virility, citing the imperative of heterosexuality which is missing from Ben's performance.

### 6.3 Discussion

It is significant that Codey's response has more in common with Luana's than it does with Ben's. Both claim childhood sexual knowledge (Luana at age 10, and Codey at age 4) and both are quite happy to perform sexual agency publicly. It could be argued that both align to hegemonic masculinity but for different reasons and to different effect. By claiming to love boys in bed, Luana repairs the damage done to her 'straight' identity, which resulted from her rejection of Liam's 'advance'. As a consequence of drawing on hegemonic masculinity, however, she is then propelled into further repair, this time of her femininity. In repairing her femininity, her use of a feminine stereotype of lilting, breathy speech is similar to Paige's performance. Both of them draw on the same script in order to reconcile a feminine identity with public performance of sexual agency. For Codey, drawing on hegemonic masculine norms of virility and innate heterosexuality is unproblematic in comparison with Luana's experience, aside from Ben's initial disbelief.

Ben's scepticism about Codey's claim supports the idea that hegemonic masculinity, although normative, is not viewed by him as particularly *normal* in the context of a public masculinity performance. Ben's display of 'measured consideration' of sexual orientation does indeed appear to resignify hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, Talbot (2010) refers to 'rationality' as a component of hegemonic masculinity, and it is an element which female police officers in McElhinney's study (1995) draw upon in order to perform a masculinity based on professionalism, as do young male officers. As McElhinney argues, however, this professional masculinity is hegemonic in broader society but a subordinate form of masculinity in the Pittsburgh police force, and one tied to middle class identities. Given that Ben is from Harbourview, a suburb of considerably higher economic means than Tairua (Codey's neighbourhood), it is possible that class helps to explain Ben's willingness to perform a subordinate masculinity and Codey's nonchalance



about performing hegemonic masculinity (see section 4.2.1 for statistics on these communities). This interpretation rests upon assumptions about their family backgrounds based on where they currently live, as well as problematic assumptions about the 'class' of their families (i.e. perhaps not everyone in Tairua is working class). Nevertheless it is a possible explanation for the difference displayed in their approaches, and one which must be acknowledged.

## 6.4 Summary

In summary, this chapter focused on the audio recordings of a teacher-supervised, small-group classroom activity in which students answered questions which are stereotypically asked of homosexual people. The purpose of the activity was to get them to see that these questions are based on stereotypes and assumptions and have no real answer (and thus probably should not sensibly be asked of anyone). Whether this pedagogical aim was achieved or not is outside of the scope of this study. What is clear is that the activity resulted in positionings of students in sexually agentive subject positions, and this agency recognition had two sources; the classroom sexuality education resource (via the wording of the activity questions) and the students' conversational partners (via their positioning of one another).

In Luana's case, she finds herself placed in a very 'real' (i.e. non-hypothetical) position of sexual agency in relation to Liam, and this leads her to resignify sexual agency as a joke. In retelling her experience to others, she performs disavowals of sexual agency in order to distance herself from the slut stigma, but these disavowals reveal that she is in a double bind. By rejecting the idea of sexual agency in relation to Liam, she is compelled to acclaim different-sex attraction. By doing so in the style which she adopts (i.e. with an air of dominance), she indexes hegemonic masculinity, thus raising the spectre of lesbian identity, a 'pariah' femininity which has to be banished through bald-on-record claims of straight identity and a performance of hegemonic femininity. Her hegemonically masculine performances bear resemblance to those of Codey who, answering the same

questions in a separate group, performs a version of hegemonic masculinity which also draws on overt heterosexuality. Luana's feminine repair sequences, on the other hand, bear a striking resemblance to those of Paige, both of them drawing on feminine stereotypes in order to manage sexual agency as girls.

Working with Codey's group is Ben, who performs a different version of masculinity by indexing rationality in relation to sexual agency. In order to do this, however, he places his own sexual identity in doubt by suggesting that he is too young to know his sexual orientation. By positioning himself in this manner, Ben leaves the masculine imperative of heterosexuality out of his performance, and thus performs subordinated masculinity in contrast with Codey's performance. Rationality is a component of hegemonic masculinity, but it is a middle-class, professional version, and so perhaps class plays a role in this difference.

The data analysed in this chapter support the notion that gender, sexual identity, and sexual agency are interconnected, but not interconnected in a way which supports a “normative conception[n] of how sex, gender, and sexuality should be aligned” (McElhinney 2003: 24). This is because ‘body dimorphism’ (see section 2.5.3) is seen to have little relevance; rather, it is gender performance (i.e. performances of masculinity and femininity) which ‘set the agenda’. In other words, it is not maleness and femaleness but masculinities and femininities (and their close associations with sexual identities such as ‘lesbian’ or ‘straight’) which must be negotiated if one is to align to a sexually agentive subject position. Luana's double bind, and resulting struggle to make sense of her experience, stand out as more fraught than the experiences of Codey and even Ben. Thus it is tempting to theorise that the sexual agency performances of girls are precisely that - fraught. However Paige's rapid navigation of the slut stigma while still aligning to sexual agency, suggests that girls in this community can successfully lay claim to sexual agency and explore its interconnections with aspects of their identities. Likewise, Ben's resignification of sexual agency via rationality shows that things are not always straightforward for boys either, and can be also be fraught with challenges.

From the point of view of sexuality education, it seems that providing students with a learning community in which they can 'safely' experiment with sexually agentive subject positions is beneficial in that it allows them some space to negotiate how sexual agency might fit with their other identifications and identities. Thus Luana's experimentation as she moves around the 'carousel' might represent a valuable learning experience for her, preparing her for future experiences of being placed in sexually agentive subject positions. Further research can perhaps more reliably answer this question from an educational perspective.



# Chapter 7

## *Guest facilitator recordings: Intersex awareness and sexual agency*

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### **7.1 Introduction**

Despite Butler's efforts to eschew ontological essentialism (see sections 2.7.1-2.7.3), arguably essentialism is a dominant way of thinking in western society. In terms of the present study, sexuality education in the broader world is most often an exercise which rests upon unquestioned essentialist foundations, during which robustly reified, binary categories such as 'man' or 'woman', 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' are granted strong ontological status. Such unquestioning essentialism is not conducive to sexuality education programs which allow for discussion of gendered and sexual diversity, for the binary categories tend to foreclose on other possibilities. However, as Spivak (1993, reported in Pennycook 2001: 72) argues in spite of her reservations about essentialism, it is an ideology which we "cannot not use." This is at least partly because essential categories are widely intelligible in society, and so we must deploy them if we are to be understood. In other words, one can talk about socially constructed gender for instance, but while talking about it one must often make use of essentialised terms like man or woman because no other terms are available. The key difference between the former and latter approaches lies in the *questioning* of essentialism, as opposed to engaging in complicity with its unquestioned hegemony.

This chapter takes as its focus a lesson grounded in the exploration of the challenges faced by people whose bodies throw into doubt the credibility of body dimorphism. In Chapter Six, masculinities and femininities were 'uncoupled' from male and female bodies during analysis in order to explore the degree to which sexual agency articulates with genders as social constructs, regardless of the bodies who perform them. The present chapter takes advantage of classroom discussions of intersex bodies and sexual subjectivities in order to find out what difference (if any) a non-binary approach to both bodies and gender makes in relation to sexual

agency in the classroom. This chapter also examines the influence of a narrative orientation to discourse on the sexual subject positioning of participants, exploring its limitations and affordances for classroom sexual agency performance.

### **7.1.1 Intersex awareness and the curriculum/unit**

The resource used by Mr. Johnson (i.e. Tasker, 2000) makes a consistent effort to present a social constructionist view of gender and sexuality (see section 3.3.7). By the time the students reached the stage of being recorded for the first time, they had read texts and participated in activities which had introduced them to the marked and rather challenging idea that being a man or woman is not something that unproblematically ‘just is’. Through their analysis of images of men and women from diverse cultures, this point began to sink in (see section 5.2.4 for an example of their developing understanding). However it was via the introduction of the existence of intersex people, and subsequently their introduction to an intersex person, that the ‘social constructedness’ of male and female (let alone gender) finally fell into plain sight. That person was Mani Bruce Mitchell, a New Zealand-based global/local intersex awareness advocate who first came to the students’ attention through a DVD that Mr. Johnson showed them after seeing reference to Mani (and the DVD) in the *Beacon Schools Project Planning Guide* (see section 3.3.7 for more information about this resource). Mani is a friend of mine, and when I informed Mr. Johnson that Mani would be willing to come and work with the students on activities around gender and sexuality, he embraced the idea with enthusiasm.

### **7.1.2 Mani Bruce Mitchell (Who is Mani? What was Mani told?)**

Mani Mitchell lives in New Zealand. As a result of a long personal search starting in his/her 40's, Mani self-identifies as intersex and feels no attachment to any specific third-person pronoun in English (i.e. he/she/him/her). For the sake of consistency in pronominal reference in this document (and with readability in mind) I will use third-person pronouns in reference to Mani, and with Mani’s permission I will consistently use she/her (an uncomfortable but necessary compromise with the

English language). Mani has also indicated a preference for the use of her real name.

Mani was born of 'indeterminate sex' according to hospital records and as 'a hermaphrodite' according to the birthing nurse's words to Mani's mother in the birthing room (i.e. "Oh my God, it's a hermaphrodite"). The parents of this child named it Bruce Mitchell Laird, and raised their new baby as a boy for the first year. Doctors then did investigative surgery at age one and discovered that this little boy had a uterus. Based on this information, Mani's parents returned to their small, isolated, rural New Zealand community with a little girl (although 'feminising genitoplasty' surgery was not done until the age of eight). Mani later learned that an 'emergency' meeting had been called in the community when that little boy returned as a little girl, and it was agreed by all in attendance that word of this change would never be mentioned again.

Thus it was that Mani (then Margaret Laird) would grow up knowing (a knowledge pieced together from the continual interest of doctors) that there was something unusual about her body; something that had to remain a secret, even from her; something 'shameful'. Many years later, while in her forties, Margaret gradually made the decision to live as openly intersex and changed her name to Mani Mitchell, thus reclaiming the original birth name and incorporating an Indian Sanskrit name (Mani) which means 'both male and female'. By the time Mani came to meet the participants of this research project, and become a participant, 'she' had become established as a global and local spokesperson for intersex awareness.

My own friendship with Mani began in early 2007 shortly after I returned to New Zealand to enrol in a PhD programme. I was introduced to her at a public event after explaining to some people that I intended to study the use of language in relation to gender and sexuality. The man who introduced us stressed that Mani had often spoken of having an interest in such issues. She confirmed language and sexuality as a topic of great interest, stating that the English language poses many challenges related to the 'linguaging' of intersex bodies and identities. After many conversations about language, and later about my research efforts, Mani and I

became friends. When I approached her two years later about this research project, I realised that it was likely that she would seize the opportunity to speak to a group of school students and tell her story. Before long I asked Mani if a session with the students would be possible, adding that I would like to audio record the session and make it part of the broader research study. Mani agreed to this arrangement and we set about getting ready. We agreed to meet, and I sent Mani an e-mail with some of my thoughts about how the lesson should be framed. Figure 7.1 contains a portion of that e-mail.

**Figure 7.1 - E-mail from Brian to Mani, 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 2009**

*Foremost, I'd like the session to be as interactive as possible.*

*The session should unfold in such a way that the students are:*

- 1. positioned as people who possess legitimate knowledge about gender and sexuality*
- 2. positioned as people who have the wherewithal to make their own sexual decisions*

*I was thinking that a way to achieve these goals might be for you to put some problems to them that they then have to try to solve. These questions would relate to dilemmas faced by intersex people in our society (gendered and sexual dilemmas). Alternatively, perhaps they could do some sort of scenario completion. "If I were this person, I would..." Then you (as an intersex person) could listen to their responses and give your reactions. I thought this might allow us to get into more sensitive topics because it would remove the focus from you personally. They will definitely want to know more about you and your experiences of course, but I think there's time for both.*

My motivation in making these suggestions was partly to save Mani some time because I was aware of the busy schedule of an international activist and counsellor. However the numbered directives (1 and 2) were designed specifically in the interest of maximising the chances that Mani's approach might actively recognise the agency of the students in relation to sexuality. This intervention was



strategic, and it was done, after due consideration of my role as researcher, in the interest of gathering useful data for answering the research questions of this study. In the end it was decided that these directives were compatible with the established practices of this CoP, and so this e-mail was necessary in order to give Mani some insight into the approach which had been taken to sexuality education in this CoP to that point. Because Mani is an experienced counsellor, and I had often spoken to her about issues like agency and empowerment, I felt that these two directives would suffice in order to give her a clue about the usual tone of lessons. As outlined in section 7.1.4 below, Mani incorporated my suggestion of using a scenario completion exercise, employing a prompt phrase such as “If I were this person, I would...” As will become clear during analysis, Mani’s approach also placed the students in sexually agentive subject positions. The degree to which these positionings were a direct result of my e-mail to her (and our subsequent discussions) is unclear. However it is possible that they had significant influence, thus I have outlined them here in detail.

### **7.1.3 How did the students and teacher prepare for meeting and working with Mani?**

In this section I draw on ethnographic fieldnotes in order to describe the classroom activities and discussions which contributed to the students' background knowledge about intersex people. In the interest of thick description (see section 3.1.4), these classroom activities and discussions are told from the point of view of the participants as much as is practicable. By providing an account of their reactions to the class learning materials (and my own at the time), I aim to set aside my own retrospective conceptions as much as possible in order to facilitate an insider’s viewpoint for the reader.

The materials described below were taken by Mr. Johnson from both Tasker (2000) and the *Beacon Schools Project Planning Guide*. Thus the information contained in these materials is compatible with the stated educational purposes of these resources, purposes which include the 'busting' of gender binaries and a focus on the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality (see section 3.3.7).

Thus it was, that one week before meeting Mani, the students completed a reading which provided them with background information about the evolution of Western ideas of gender, sex, and sexuality. Before getting into the topic of intersex people, the article starts by briefly outlining major changes in perceptions of sexuality in western society, perceptions which were influenced by Roman culture, Christianity, and finally scientific discourse. By tracing this history, the article manages to outline a shift (since the times of ancient Greece) towards associating sex with morality and later identity. Mr. Johnson ended the discussion of the reading by relating this history to the idea that gender and sexuality are socially constructed. He made the point that this fact becomes more obvious when one examines these historical contexts and realises that our present society's dominant perceptions of gender and sexuality have not always existed, and in fact they are quite new perspectives. The next day we continued with the second half of the article, which is about 'sex' (defined as male and female). The article mentions the Aristotelian notion that 'male' was held to be the only 'true' sex. Females were seen to be 'defective' males, with "inverted genitalia".

Upon hearing this section read aloud by Mr. Johnson, Sophie said (loudly with broad intonation, head jutting down and forward sharply), "What?! What do you mean?" And Codey said, "Their genitals are inside out! Oh man!" and laughed. This caused a stir in the class, with laughter from many as well as consternation from others, and questions began 'rapid firing'. The students were clearly fascinated by all of this information.

Mr. Johnson then continued onward, to look at the Roman and Christian eras, in which the perception changed so that male and female were considered to be proper sexes (see section 2.5.3 for an explanation of this history). Finally, the article finishes with a brief outline of how scientific discourse has led us to our present-day notion that XX and XY chromosomes have the final word on the sexes. However, 1 in 100 people are not purely XX or purely XY, so in fact some people argue there should be five sexes instead of two (see also Fausto-Sterling 2000). Some of these people are born with genitalia which are not easily classified as male

or female, and our culture specifies that they have surgery so that their bodies are clearly one or the other. Returning to the classroom reading, when this section about the existence of intersex babies was clarified for the students, Codey said, "What? That's impossible!" and Aroha said, "No, they're called hermaphrodites!" Mr. Johnson pointed out that the article used the term intersex, which is a more current term in medicine. This information was clearly a revelation for most of them, as was the information about the existence of other chromosomal combinations besides XX and XY. The idea that there are only two sexes (i.e. male and female) does not stand up to the rigors of genetic science, and this fact was not lost on these students.

In my role as 'sexuality expert' in the CoP (see section 4.3.1), I was also providing some details along the way. I could see that there was some confusion about the difference between intersex at the chromosomal level and at the level of bodies. I explained that many of the people who are XXY or XYY do not even know about it because it does not show on their bodies. The only babies who get operated on at birth are those with genitalia that fall outside the binary classificatory norm. The students had a lot of questions about this, and wanted to express their opinions. Mr. Johnson asked, "Could an intersex person live in our society without the surgery?" Olivia said, "They wouldn't have a happy life because of discrimination and their own confusion about what they want; like to be with a man or a woman." Sophie agreed, pointing out that it's not going to be accepted socially. Caitlin said, "They need to be one or the other because otherwise they have to hide" and this would be an impossible life. Logan then disagreed, saying that if we started to leave their bodies alone, then soon there would be more of them around, and they would not feel so out of place. He felt that it's society that should change. Amber said that she could see his point, but added, "Their friends and family might accept them, but if they go on a date, then explaining it would be really hard." There were so many questions being asked that it was impossible to keep up with them. Finally the bell went, and Mr. Johnson asked "Do you want to

know more about this?” Several students called out “yes” as they put up the chairs and headed for the door.

In a subsequent lesson, having stimulated interest in this topic Mr. Johnson started off by saying that the students should split themselves into three groups. Those who consider themselves to be female on the one side of the room, those male on the other side, and those who are “in the middle” should go to the back of the room. For a few minutes, Josh stood at the back, but eventually said, “Nah, just kidding” and moved to the male group. Later, when Luana arrived late, Logan asked her, “Are you a male, a female, or neither?” Her eyebrows bunched and she said “What?!” (high pitch). Likely out of a sense of expediency, Mr. Johnson told her to sit on the female side. Logan pointed out that Mr. Johnson should have given Luana the three choices like everyone else. By failing to do that, he’d “wrecked it”. Mr. Johnson acknowledged that this was his mistake. Logan’s reaction to Mr. Johnson’s ‘pigeon-holing’ of Luana into the female category demonstrated that he understood the idea that male/female is a constructed binary that is easily reinforced through discourse. He noticed that Mr. Johnson had inadvertently done so.

What is important about these proceedings, and thus what merits their inclusion here, is that they provide evidence of a shared repertoire developing (see section 5.2) around the discussion of body dimorphism and intersex people. By orchestrating this three-way split, at the very least Mr. Johnson had made a spot for Mani to stand (in preparation for the class later seeing the DVD and meeting Mani). More importantly, he was ‘walking the talk’ of ‘binary busting’ as part of this unit of study (see section 3.3.7). In contrast, Allen (2005c) writes about a Statistics teacher she observed in a New Zealand secondary school who volunteered to use Allen’s student questionnaire data as part of a statistics lesson. One question had asked students to identify their gender, with options for male, female and ‘something else’. In anticipation of class discussion, the teacher proceeded to write only the male and female categories on the board and thus nullified the questionnaire’s creation of a space for other possibilities. Despite a momentary lapse in reference

to Luana, Mr. Johnson had managed not to preclude intersex as a possible physicality.

The following lesson, Mr. Johnson showed the class a DVD about Mani Bruce Mitchell's story. When the DVD began, the class became very quiet and focused. When Mani first appeared on screen sporting a beard, reactions in the room were restrained, but there were numerous audible intakes of breath. After a while, Paige and Sophie started softly chatting, but they were still looking at the video screen. Later Jay said to someone beside him, "Wow, that's freaky eh!" (in a calm voice at medium volume). When the film finished, after a few moments of silence Mr. Johnson said, "Any first responses?" Olivia was first to speak and said, "She seems comfortable to be a bit of both." Logan supported this interpretation, suggesting Mani wants to "be herself". Caitlin admitted being a bit confused, wondering aloud whether Mani wanted to be a man and not a woman. Other students explained that Mani did not want to be male or female, but both. I supported this interpretation, saying that rather than making a choice, "Mani just wants to 'be' the way Mani was born". Mr. Johnson also added that the choice of being raised as a girl had been made by Mani's doctors (and to a limited extent Mani's parents), not Mani.

When Mr. Johnson told the class that they would meet Mani on the following Friday, there was a lot of excitement and interest. Most were shocked to find out that she lives in New Zealand. Mr. Johnson asked them if meeting Mani sounded like something they wanted to do, and Matt said, "It's going to be awkward, eh!" and Aroha said, "I want to meet her right now, can we see her today?" Mr. Johnson then asked what they would like to say to Mani. Aroha replied, "I want to ask her lots of questions." Kate said, "I want to congratulate her for being herself." The lesson then ended abruptly as the bell rang, and students began to tidy up and leave. Ten days later Mani and the students met for the first time.

#### **7.1.4 Classroom activities (intersex awareness)**

From the start, it was agreed (between Mr. Johnson, Mani and myself) that Mani's past career as a primary school teacher and current career as a counsellor provided adequate qualifications for taking charge of this interactive lesson. Mr.

Johnson and I agreed that we would 'step back' and let Mani and the students take control of the lesson as much as possible. The only time we would get actively involved would be during the small groups, when it was our role to facilitate one discussion each. In this way, the speaking time of the students and Mani could be increased, and the 'agency' of the students could hopefully be maximised.

Mani started the lesson by talking about 'her' own experience once again, to remind the students about what they had heard and seen in the film about Mani's life, and to bring the story up to date. Then she engaged the students in a brief discussion about the already-established ground rules of this CoP, which were embodied in the korowai (e.g. the rule that what's said in the room stays in the room, etc – see section 5.2.1). Mani in fact encouraged them to tell others about what they learned in this lesson. The students were then given a chance to ask questions and a question box was made available so that students could put questions inside it at any time. These were answered at a later session which took place about ten weeks later. Next the class broke into small group discussions in which the class was divided into three groups. One group started with Mani, the second group with Mr. Johnson, and the third group with me. Each adult had a scenario that the students were to discuss (see Figure 7.2), and the groups would rotate through the so-called 'case studies'. Mani created these case studies, basing them on gendered and sexual dilemmas possibly faced by intersex people. Finally, the lesson ended with a 'roundtable' in which everyone sat in a circle and took turns sharing their thoughts about what they had learned and experienced.

The three case studies (Eloisa, Danny and Pauline) vary slightly in focus. The Eloisa scenario is most centrally about sexual attraction, intersex bodies and relationships. The Pauline scenario is only partly about attraction, and the Danny scenario focuses on the bullying of an intersex friend. Mani led the Eloisa discussions, I led the Danny ones, and Mr. Johnson led the Pauline ones. Equipment failure prevented retrieval of the Danny scenario data, and the discussions of Pauline (though interesting for other reasons) yielded little of interest in terms of sexual agency, at least from the point of view of adding anything new to the overall

analysis. Although there were moments of performance, ascription and avoidance of sexually agentive subject positions in the Pauline discussions, they comprise repetitions of themes covered more fruitfully in other chapters. On the other hand, partly as a result of Mani's presence, and partly because of the wording of the scenario, the Eloisa discussions yielded data rich with talk of sexual characteristics of bodies as well as exploration of non-binary sexual subjectivities. For this reason they merit a focus here.

## Figure 7.2

### Case study one

Eloisa Davies

An American exchange student.

Mixed race Latino heritage.

Identifies as intersex, as bisexual

You have been seeing each other for a few weeks.

Eloisa is a high energy, fun person.

She describes herself as androgynous and while you know at school she is a girl, she often is mistaken as a boy, she has short hair, a wiry athletic body and very little (almost no, make that no breast development)

She is articulate, has a sense of humour and you find yourself attracted to her.

As you start talking she tells you she has an unusual body, that she has

in her words a 'very large clitoris' – she asks you straight up – "*if we got serious, would that be an issue for you?*"

How would you respond?

What are the issues here?

### Case Study Two

Danny Peters

European

Tall – terribly shy – thin

Wears glasses

You know, because he disclosed once on a science class that he has Klinefelter syndrome. While every one else thinks Danny is stupid, you really like him, he lives in your street and you know he is good with animals and a very clever musician.

You come around a corner at school, no one is around, except Danny and three older boys. They have Danny backed in a corner and the three boys are teasing, and jostling Danny.

'Queer, fairy they yell'

'got no balls Danny'

'got no girl friend Danny'

The boys see you, they give Danny one last shove and move away, as you walk closer you see Danny has a bleeding nose and is crying.

How would you respond?

What are the issues here?

### Case Study Three

Pauline Callaghan

NZ Maori

Pauline is one of the people in class who sort of blends in.

Quiet, most people like her but you notice she does not have any really close friends.

She plays rugby and is good at it.

In summer she plays cricket and is known for her abilities with the bat.

Over the last few months you have been spending more and more time together.

You realise that maybe you are attracted to her.

One day while you are sitting alone she says to you.

*You know that film we saw about Mani, well that's about me as well.*

*I am intersex like Mani.*

*And I had surgery when I was little – I think... I don't know much... I have never talked about this with anyone ...*

Her voice cracks and she looks at you and throws her arms around you..

Sobbing she says – *do you think I am a monster?*

How would you respond?

What are the issues here?



## 7.2 Narratives and positioning

The scenarios that Mani created for the intersex awareness discussions have a narrative structure to them, and this structure influenced the unfolding of participant conversation. This fact has forced me to address the question of whether and to what extent this narrative leaning also influenced subject positionings around sexual agency. In addressing this question, it is necessary to trace some of the basic developments in narrative study over time.

The narrative canon has mostly been built upon structuralist notions of language, largely via the founding influence of Labov (1972) and his identification of the components of narrative. Despite the fact that Labov & Waletzky (1967) asserted that narratives can serve the personal interests of speakers in a social context, most of the aforementioned canon which sprang from their seminal paper neglected to pursue this aspect of their theory (Tolliver 1997). However, it was later taken up in discourse-based approaches to narrative in linguistics (see Holmes 1997; Tolliver 1997). Georgakopoulou (2007: 87) argues that a structuralist legacy remains, even in this discourse-based approach, and has led to a focus on regularities and patterns of storytelling at the expense of contingencies and improvisation, arguing further that analysts should keep an eye to “the speakers’ local performances, resistances, and (re)appropriations of structure.” It is this criticism which reveals compatibility between ‘narrative analysis’ and ‘poststructuralist discourse analysis’ as deployed in the present study, for it permits a view of narrative in which the localised positioning of subjects during the telling of stories can become the focus. Because of this compatibility, and because narrative plays a central role in the activities of this intersex awareness lesson, it was decided that a focus upon the analysis of narratives/stories (as a specific type of conversational interaction) could be fruitful for addressing sexual agency.

### **7.2.1 Narratives vs. small stories**

‘Small story’ analysis as developed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (Bamberg 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgakopoulou 2007, 2008) focuses on stretches of talk which clearly resonate as story-like tellings for both analysts and conversational participants, yet fail to neatly fit within the narrative canon, with its rigid and robust structures for what counts as ‘a narrative’. In line with the work of discourse analysts in general (cf Holmes 1997), they argue that instead of pushing aside certain narrations as underdeveloped and unworthy of analytical focus, analysts of talk-in-interaction need also to keep these other forms of storytelling under the microscope in order to capture what Georgakopoulou (2008: 601) refers to as “moments of narrative proclivity in everyday environments”. By using this term she seems to imply that even though these tellings might not be full-blown autobiographical narratives, there is much to be gained from analysing them *as* stories rather than treating them no differently from other conversational data. The key distinction identified is that a narrative orientation, or storytelling mode, separates the telling world from the taleworld and yet links them at the same time, and this has effects which differ from other conversational strategies in important ways, as outlined in the next section.

### **7.2.2 Narrative proclivity and identity**

From the point of view of identity construction, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou (2008) agree with narrative orthodoxy in espousing the idea that stories/narratives have a special role to play. As briefly mentioned above, this is because stories, unlike other types of talk, construct a taleworld while at the same time being told in the world of here and now. Stories which include at least an element of autobiography contain two versions of self. There is the self as talked-about, a character within the story. Then there is the self in the here-and-now, a teller who interacts with others during the telling. These versions of selfhood are navigated in tandem, and in dialog with each other, and it is precisely this separation which is productive for self construction, as speakers “navigate and finesse between” these levels (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 393), with an interweaving of the order

within the story and the emerging order between participants in a conversation (Bamberg 2004c: 333). Stories are also useful for constructing the other, the only difference being that the teller might not necessarily appear in the story as a character. However the interaction order of the here-and-now 'telling world' still becomes interwoven with the order in the taleworld to ascribe identities or positions to others.

When speakers adopt a narrative orientation during talk, the stories can take many surface forms and can be about recent events, unfolding ones, or importantly for this chapter, even future or hypothetical events (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgakopoulou 2008). In the activities which Mani designed for the intersex awareness lesson (described in section 7.1.4), hypothetical situations are presented in story/narrative form, inducting the listener or reader into the story for the purpose of stimulating reflection and discussion around sexuality in relation to intersex people.

### **7.3 Findings**

In the analyses that follow, I apply a tripartite model of narrative positioning analysis developed by Bamberg (2004c) in which three 'levels' of analysis are used to separate out elements of narrative interaction. At level 1, the analyst examines the ways in which characters of the story are introduced and placed in relation to one another using language (i.e. how the narrator talks *about* others via the taleworld). At level 2 the analysis moves to the level of interactants in the here-and-now, asking what interactive work is being done between the participants as a result of this story being told (i.e. how the narrator talks *to* others in the telling world). Finally, at level 3, the analyst shifts focus to look at how interactants create a sense of self by talking 'about' and 'to' others (i.e. in this case, how the narrator 'does gender' or 'does sexual agency').

### 7.3.1 Sexual agency by way of taleworld and telling: Exploiting the distinction

After spending some time addressing ground rules for discussion, and participating in a whole-class based question and answer session about Mani's experiences as an intersex person in New Zealand, the students broke into small groups as described in section 7.1.4. The analysis begins here because it is in these conversations that sexually agentic subject positions begin to emerge as part of interaction. However, these small group discussions cannot be separated entirely from what came before. Space and scope do not allow for a detailed analysis of the question and answer session which comprised the introduction to the lesson, but suffice it to say that during that preliminary discussion, Mani positioned the students as 'legitimate' listeners and speakers in relation to intersex bodies and identities. I mention this here as important contextual information for the sexual agency performances which follow.

In Extract 7.1 (edited - for full version, see Appendix C), the group of Liam, Rawiri, Ana, Ruby and Luana get started on the Eloisa scenario. Liam reads the scenario aloud in preparation for the activity, and the narrative embedded in the scenario begins the work of agency recognition in relation to the students, who in turn align to ascriptions of sexual agency.

#### Extract 7.1 – The Eloisa Davies scenario is introduced

- 22 Liam**      *eloisa davies::*  
                  *is that davies ↑ or //davis//*
- 23 Mani**      *//yup//*
- 24 Liam**      *davies davis*  
                  *an american exchange student*  
                  *mixed race latino heritage*  
                  *identifies as intersex ↑*  
                  *as bisexual*  
                  *oh okay*  
                  *you've been seeing each other for a few weeks*  
                  *eloisa is a (.) high energy fun person (clears throat)*  
                  *she describes herself androgga- (1)*
- 25 Mani**      *androgynous ↑*
- 26 Liam**      *androgynous ∪*  
                  *and while ∩ you know at school she's a girl she is*

*she often is mistaken as a BOY ↑*  
*she has short hair*  
*a wiry athletic body*  
*very little almost NO*  
*(1) make that NO breast development*  
*she is ((sounding out)) ar-tic-u-late*  
*has a sense of humour*  
*and you find yourself attracted to her*  
*as you start talking she tells you she has an unusual body*  
*and that she has (.) in her words a:: (.) very large (1)*  
**27 Mani** *clitoris*  
**28 Liam** *clitoris::*  
*she asks you straight up*  
*if we got serious would that be an issue for you*  
*(1) what's a clitoris*  
**29 Mani** *so the clitoris is:: the female part of the body ↑*  
*that's the sexual part*  
*so you've got the vagina ↑*  
*and then the clitoris is the (.) part in front of it where the eroticism*  
*the sensuality is (.) now*  
**30 Liam** *so as in like between the cervix and the (.) vagina*  
**31 Mani** *so you've got you've got the vaginal opening HERE ↑*  
*and the clitoris is here ((using fingers to make shapes))*  
*so in an intersex person ∪ tha-*  
*cause REAlly ∩ what a clitoris is is a baby penis*  
**32 Luana** *mmHM*  
**33 Mani** *okay ↑*  
*but in this person her clitoris is very large*  
*(1) okay*  
*so what she's saying to you in a VERy straight up HONest way*  
*is if we were having a relationship ↑ would this be an issue*  
*cause really what she's saying shorthand is*  
*i've got a very different BOdy*  
*MY body is not standard female*  
*an:::d if we got SERious and had a relationship*  
*is this gonna be a problem*  
*(1) pretty hard question for ANYone to*  
*to //to give to you// if you weren't prepared for it*  
**34 Liam** *//yeah yeah//*  
**35 Mani** *so what we're gonna do is*  
*is as a group talk about that*  
*so=*  
**36 Liam** *=okay since i read ↑*  
*someone else can respond*  
**37 Mani** *ABsolutely you ge-*  
*you //get to be// quiet for a while*  
**38 Liam** *//yeah//*

**39 Mani**        *so*  
**40 Liam**        *away you go Rawiri //((laughs softly))//*  
**41 Mani**        *//so//*  
                  *yeah*  
                  *and THAT'S fine*  
                  *cause what i- what i'm saying is*  
                  *i'm i'm not asking you to even imagine*  
                  *tha- that you might be lesbian or heterosexual*  
                  *we're just thinking about this from*  
                  *((soft 'thinking' voice)) WOW THAT'S different*  
                  *yeah what would all the issues be*  
                  *(5) cause that's what you guys have been talking about i- is*  
                  *reLAtionships an- and=*  
**42 Rawiri**        *=((softly)) yeah=*  
**43 Mani**        *and how you develop those an::*  
                  *when y- when you're starting to get serious*  
                  *and you're starting to get intimate*  
                  *an- and someone shares something with you*  
                  *HOW do y= HOW do you reSPOND to that*

### **7.3.1.1 Positioning Level 1: Characters and their positioning within the story**

Starting with a focus on the characters, in spite of Mani's central role as an intersex person to this point, she does not appear as a character in the taleworld. The story contains a central and mostly fictitious character (loosely based on an intersex friend of Mani's), Eloisa Davies, and a second generic 'you' character. The participants are asked to 'plug themselves into' this you character slot and imagine being part of the story in order to continue telling it. No other characters are mentioned or even referred to.

Eloisa is described as being American, mixed race and 'latino', bisexual, and a person with a great deal of energy and confidence (being articulate). Anyone listening to this story is positioned (vis à vis the generic you) as a subject in the taleworld who is attracted to Eloisa, and this positioning constitutes an ascription of a sexual subject position. Feeling attraction for Eloisa (turn 26) is not necessarily an agentive position, but in turn 28 it is revealed that the reason Eloisa broaches the topic of having an intersex body is because it is possible that things might 'get serious' in a way that involves Eloisa's clitoris and 'you' (turn 28 "Would that be an

issue for you”). In the final positioning, then, sexual agency is ascribed to the character of ‘you’ in the taleworld.

Depending upon the gender of the listener, this story might also position the generic ‘you’ as queer (i.e. someone whose sexual and/or gendered subjectivities fall outside of the narrow prescripts of normative heterosexuality). In turns 24-26 Eloisa is described as androgynous in appearance, and in turn 26 it is revealed that Eloisa passes as a girl at school (although sometimes mistaken as a boy). To a female listener being asked to step into this subject position, one in which attraction is felt for an apparent girl, the listener is positioned as queer. For a male listener entering this ‘you’ position, the publicly female sex of Eloisa permits a heteronormative reading, but feeling attraction for an androgynous person with “no breast development” (turn 26) positions the subject as ‘queerly straight’ in the sense that this attraction falls outside of a narrow, hegemonic version of heterosexuality, which is firmly grounded in a clear male/female body binary (Butler 1990; Motschenbacher 2010). This variegated queer positioning of the character ‘you’ is later addressed by Mani in mid-turn 41. Mani says “*i’m not asking you to even imagine that you might be lesbian or heterosexual*” and in this way draws a separation between the interlocutors’ ‘selves’ in the here and now and the taleworld ‘you’ subject position, which the listener is being asked to fill. That is, any possible queering of the subject is placed firmly in the taleworld and kept apart from the ‘selves’ in the room. In this way, Mani manages heteronormativity via a compromise; anyone who is not so comfortable with the positionings of this story in relation to self can just think of it as a story and play along. This separation of interlocutor selves and taleworld subjects moves analysis towards positioning level two.

### ***7.3.1.2 Positioning Level 2: What interactive work is being done between participants?***

This story was written by Mani in preparation for this lesson, so Mani is in effect the narrator despite the fact that the story is read aloud by a participant in

each group. Evidence that this is salient to the participants appears while Liam is reading aloud, as he defers to Mani for clarification of difficult terms, presuming quite plausibly that Mani will know the answers. For example, Mani clarifies the pronunciation of Eloisa's surname in turn 23, and in turns 25 and 27 Mani assists with the pronunciation of the words androgynous and clitoris. Then in turn 28, Liam calls on Mani's expertise by asking "What's a clitoris?" and Mani's explanation continues until turn 33.

Goffman's tripartite concept of 'production format' is useful here, in which speaking roles are divided into the author ('someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded'; 1981: 144), the principal ('someone who believes personally in what is being said and takes the position that is implied in the remarks'; 1981: 167), and the animator ('the talking machine, the thing that sounds comes out of'; 1981: 167). Al Zidjaly (2009: 187) provides the important insight that the placing of a subject position (whether self or other) in the role of primary author of a narrative constructs that subject position as agentive. Liam is the animator in the case of the read-aloud narrative about Eloisa, but Mani is the author and principal. Hence Mani is positioned as the one who really knows this story and therefore must be deferred to in relation to its details. By the end of the read-aloud portion, the listener is asked to take over all of the roles of author, principal and animator and continue telling this story of hypothetical events. In this way, then, the listener is positioned as taking over a (sexually) agentive role.

Liam positions himself in turn 36 strictly as animator of this story by saying "okay since i read↑ someone else can respond" thereby avoiding the agentive subject position. He then takes pleasure in positioning Rawiri as the author/principal/animator of the rest of the story; a story which involves sexual attraction and thus primary authorship is potentially a sexually agentive subject position. This move by Liam serves to highlight the challenging nature of the task because it frames this role as something to avoid. Mani aligns to this framing of the



task, giving Liam permission to listen for a while, and then says (as pointed out at the end of last section) that they don't have to imagine they are homosexual. There seems to be a suspicion on Mani's part that this is the source of Liam's reluctance. Here Mani also positions the listeners as people who might not want to 'imagine that [they] might be lesbian or homosexual'. Sitting behind this positioning is an assumption that being lesbian or homosexual is an unwelcome thing which they would need to imagine, and so in this way Mani's interlocutors are positioned by her as heterosexual.

In turns 29-31, Mani's frank but compassionate side discussion with Liam about intersex genitalia is a key moment in collective sexual agency construction. By responding to Liam's question in detail, describing the clitoris and its location on the body, Mani positions the participants as people who are unproblematically ready to listen to information about sex and sexualised body parts. Bourdieu's notion of legitimacy (Bourdieu 1991), wherein people carve out, or are granted, status as legitimate speakers and listeners is highly relevant here. Mani is granting these young people a sense of legitimacy in relation to intersex bodies and identities and indeed sexual relations in general. This legitimacy 'paves the way' for the students to perform 'agentive' sexual subject positions. This is because, by speaking frankly and openly about genitalia and sexual attraction, Mani positions the interlocutors as legitimate listeners to such topics. Then, by placing them in a sexually agentive subject position in the taleworld and asking them to talk about what they would do, Mani positions them (in the here and now) as legitimate speakers on such topics as well.

### ***7.3.1.3 Positioning Level 3: How do the participants 'do' sexual agency?***

In this section, although the focus will mostly be on the doing of sexual agency, further references to analytical levels one and two will also be necessary, as the students continue to talk 'about' the story characters and 'to' one another. Extract 7.2 (starting on the next page) follows closely after the discussion in Extract 7.1. After repeating the question prompt in turn 43 (i.e. *HOW do you reSPOND to*

*that*), Mani and the group spend a few turns discussing ‘difference’ and how it is dealt with generally. The students are quite reticent, and so after an eleven second pause, Mani chooses to step away from the group:

(11) so it’s probably hard for you guys talking with ME here so i’m just gonna pull away for a little bit↑ and you can talk and then i’ll come back

After the students are left to chat amongst themselves, a cacophony of hypothesising ensues as the students attempt to pick up the narrative in spite of being unsure exactly how they would react in this highly marked situation.

At this stage it is important to address the question of whether anything in Extract 7.2 qualifies as ‘narrative proclivity’ or ‘narrative orientation’ (see section 7.2.1). Although there is not a fully developed narrative, there are what Bamberg (2004c: 338) refers to as “...hints that point toward narration as the intended type of discourse activity.” The first contribution that provides one of these hints is Rawiri’s in line 2. He says “i would just like (.) uh I would agree↑” and snaps his fingers a few times to punctuate his point after struggling to articulate it. By expressing what he ‘would do’, Rawiri fills the ‘you’ position in this narrative of hypothetical events and attempts to take up the roles of author, principal and animator. In this way he aligns to the sexually agentive subject position of author. Ana then evaluates Rawiri’s proposed taleworld reaction (line 8), suggesting that perhaps peer pressure would get the better of most teenagers. Rawiri then changes tack (lines 7 & 12), continuing as author, principal and animator and joined by Ana in these roles as they co-construct shame and dissociation from Eloisa as the most likely responses (line 13). Until Liam closes off the discussion in turn 34, by admitting sincerely that he would find it hard to respond, no new narrative events are introduced. However the participants engage in extended elaboration and evaluation of this second proposed event (i.e. being ashamed and pulling away). Bamberg (2004c: 340) cites Labov & Waletzky (1967) as indicating that narrative events “...can be said to form the skeleton around the evaluative information...” and in the case of the current extract this is also true despite a preponderance of

evaluative talk (cf Bamberg 2004c). This stretch of talk parallels that of Bamberg's participants in that it is "relatively sparse" on events, with most of the talk oriented towards the evaluation of events in moral terms, in this case evaluating this barely introduced storyline.

### Extract 7.2

#### Staff One – (00:00 - 00:10)

- (1) Luana *i feel bad*  
(2) Rawiri *i- i-'m not* i don't KNOW man (.) i don't KNOW- I don't (.) aw  
(3) Ana *i'm NOT a person who would judge someone on what they LOOK like*  
(4) Liam I don't really CARE (.) cause i-  
(5) Ruby I wouldn't (.)  
  
i mean  
HOW would you respond

#### Staff Two – (00:10 - 00:20)

- (6) Luana *it's just*  
(7) Rawiri I would just (.) i would just like (.) uh I would agree↑ ((snapping fingers))  
(8) Ana but when it (.) like thing like (.) for us teenagers like you  
(9) Liam I wouldn't just  
(10) Ruby

#### Staff Three – (00:20 - 00:27)

- (11) Luana  
(12) Rawiri  
(13) Ana know how we've got boys and our girls and if we were intimate with this person we'd like we'll care more about what our friends will say?  
(14) Liam  
(15) Ruby  
  
i reckon we'll pull away

#### Staff Four – (00:28 - 00:36)

- (16) Luana *well um (.) really they they they shouldn't be like (.)*  
(17) Rawiri from that person and wouldn't even talk to- them yeah cause like we'd be ashamed hanging around with them↑  
(18) Ana *cause we'd be ashamed↑*  
(19) Liam  
(20) Ruby

**Staff Five – (00:36 - 00:44)**

(21) *Luana*      *cause everyone's just like (.) everyone else like human BEings like*

(22) **Rawiri**

(23) **Ana**

yeah

but LOTS of peo- LOTS of people don't see it that way

(25) **Ruby**

**Staff Six – (00:44 - 00:55)**

(26) *Luana*

*yeah↑*

*oh Yeah (.) FFF*

(27) **Rawiri**

(28) **Ana**

but if you think (.) like us NOW like (.) us now like (.) if::: let's just say that i had a crush on YOU ((indicates Luana)) but (.) i was ashamed

(29) **Liam**

(30) **Ruby**

**Staff Seven – (00:55 - 01:05)**

(31) *Luana*

*yeah*

*mmm*

(32) **Rawiri**

(33) **Ana**

to tell HER because she's one of my GIRLS cause i'm scared what she'll think of ME so it's it's just NORMAL it's LIFE (.) i mean we have our

(34) **Liam**

(35) **Ruby**

**Staff Eight – (01:05 - 01:07)**

(36) *Luana*

(37) **Rawiri**

(38) **Ana**

own different views on (.) if you were really in love with that person then you'd have a different take (.) on (.) this

(39) **Liam**

yeah (.) if you're really in

(40) **Ruby**

**Staff Nine – (01:07 – 01:13)**

(41) *Luana*  
(42) **Rawiri**  
(43) *Ana*  
(44) **Liam** love with them it wouldn't matter (.) it SHOULDn't matter anyway but (.) yeah  
(45) **Ruby**

yeah  
no  
but  
HUMANS  
(.)mos- most of the time it would-

**Staff Ten – (01:13 – 01:18)**

(46) *Luana*  
(47) **Rawiri** it's just that we're all  
(48) *Ana*  
(49) **Liam** MOST of the MOST of the time it (.) WOULD matter  
(50) **Ruby**

human BEINGS  
yeah ((snapping fingers and nodding))  
yeah  
MOST of the time it WOULD matter because you'd be afraid of

we're all human beings

**Staff Eleven – (01:18 – 01:26)**

(51) *Luana*  
(52) **Rawiri**  
(53) *Ana*  
(54) **Liam** what other people THINK  
(55) **Ruby**

yeah  
i think that's the main point here (.) shame yeah  
call her over  
just gossip that goes around  
yeah

**Staff Twelve – (01:26 – 01:33)**

(31) *Luana*  
(32) **Rawiri**  
(33) *Ana*  
(34) **Liam**  
(35) **Ruby**

myself personally i would find it a little HARD to respond to that really  
WHAT are the ISSUES

As part of this evaluative talk, Ana transitions out of the taleworld in line 18 and into the here-and-now, or telling world. She signals the transition to telling world (and here-and now selves) with the phrase “like (.) us now” and then proceeds to perform a sexually agentive subject position, positioning her ‘here-and-now self’ as (hypothetically) woman-desiring in order to illustrate the point that shame and secrecy can get in the way of attraction. In this way she ends the separation between the queer, sexually agentive subject positionings of the taleworld and her own subjectivity, a separation which Mani had constructed earlier (see section 7.3.1.1). This crossing over between taleworld and telling world continues as conversation switches back to ‘that person’ (i.e. Eloisa) and as a collective group, the participants continue to orient to the scenario’s positioning of young people as potential lovers and sharers of intimacy with others. The result is a collectively-achieved alignment with the scenario narrative’s positioning of young people as sexual agents. Thus the participants are provided with an opportunity to explore self-hood in relation to sexual agency and in relation to non-binary understandings of bodies and desires.

### **7.3.2 Sexual agency in the gaps: Tacit alignment and ‘calm’ analysis**

The following analysis focuses on a separate group’s discussion of the Eloisa scenario (Aroha, Amber, Jay, and Caitlin). The transcript begins after the activity has been read aloud, and these preliminary stages have unfolded in a similar manner to the initial proceedings for the previous group. The analysis here is comparatively brief because most of the analysis of positioning levels one and two (see sections 7.3.1.1 and 7.3.1.2) can be applied here in the sense that the positioning of characters are the same, with the generic ‘you’ character placed in a sexually agentive subject position, and a potentially queer one, due to its non-binary nature. One key difference here is that, this time, Mani has not drawn an overt separation between the interlocutors’ ‘selves’ in the here and now and the taleworld ‘you’ subject position. Thus the queer subject position has not been located firmly in the taleworld as it was with the previous group (see section 7.3.1.1). What difference this variance might have made (if any) is unclear; however, in contrast with the

previous group (who hesitated to engage at first), Aroha immediately responds (see extract 7.3 - edited - for full version, see Appendix C).

**Extract 7.3**

- 1 Aroha** *i would want to know what th- oh  
uh what she means by a very large clitoris  
does it mean because she's got a (.) like a penis or something ↑*
- 2 Mani** *yeah ↴ so for some intersex people the- the clitoris i- is quite large ↴  
like i- in some cases it can be REALLY large  
now this particular person  
cause i modelled this off someone i really know ↑  
and um her clitoris ↑  
is (.) as (.) large as some small male penises  
and she can actually PENE trate with it just like a GUY ↴*
- 3 Amber** *((falling tone)) //ooohh//*
- 4 Aroha** *//oh my gosh ↴//*
- 5 Mani** *yeah*
- .....
- 11 Amber** *(2) i guess you'd kinda be shocked at first  
yeah like just //XXXX//*
- 12 Mani** *//YEAH//  
cause we don't TALK about genitals very much DO we  
and we certainly don't talk about //special genitals//*
- 13 Aroha** *//is she cool like// (.) you know even in the shower?*
- 14 Mani** *MMhm*

Aroha speaks first (line 1), about how she would respond to Eloisa's disclosure. She places herself in the generic 'you' subject position of the story (via the phrase "I would"). Her frank question about what Eloisa means when she says she has a "very large clitoris" is a good example of a moment when a student tacitly aligns to an ascribed sexually agentive subject position. It is important to think about what Aroha leaves unsaid and, in so doing, how she creates a meaningful 'unsaid trace' (Kulick 2005). She neglects to distance herself from the subject position that Mani's scenario has placed her in (i.e. attracted to Eloisa as author of this continuing story). She makes no disavowal moves, but rather gets to the point and quite comfortably begins to talk about clarifying Eloisa's description of his/her genitalia, treating the words clitoris and penis as commonplace. Mani continues in



the same mode, and the taleworld is left behind as she reveals that Eloisa is based on a real person.

Aroha's conversational bearing in this example is likely partly a result of the established practices of this CoP, with its mutually negotiated approach of 'careful guilelessness' and calm analysis in relation to sex and sexuality (see section 5.2.4). However, it is also possibly a result of the separation between the taleworld and the here-and-now, with the hypothetical subject positions of the narrative already providing some distance between Aroha's 'self' and sexual agency. Finally, it is also possible that sexual agency performance for young women in this CoP is (at least sometimes) reasonably straightforward, with little need for hedging or repair work (an affordance perhaps enhanced by Mani's recognition of the students' sexual agency). What is clear is that she aligns to a sexually agentive subject position, and is therefore provided an opportunity to relate that subject position to her 'self' as part of sexuality education.

## **7.4 Summary**

In summary, the data in this chapter suggest that the use of narrative during inquiries into sex and sexuality could be having an influence upon the ways in which sexual agency is navigated by students. During the intersex awareness session, the students are able (in this CoP and under Mani's guidance at least) to align with taleworld ascriptions of sexually agentive subject positions, even when doing so involves 'imagining' stepping outside of the boundaries of binary gender, binary sexual orientation, and body dimorphism. In the case of Ana, she transferred a taleworld queer subjectivity to the 'here-and-now' of the telling world in order to relate hypothesis to reality as part of group discussion. In a separate discussion, Aroha aligns to a taleworld subject position which is both queer and sexually agentive, apparently with no hesitation, as evidenced by her silence in terms of hedging or disavowals.

The challenge which remains is how to distinguish between the various influences which might have facilitated the sexual agency performances of these students. It must be asked to what extent these alignments with non-binary, sexually agentive subject positions are a product of the narrative focus of the activity, to what extent they are a result of Mani's recognition of the participants' agency (in both the narrative taleworld and the here-and-now of interaction), and to what extent it is intersex awareness *itself* which prepared these young people to explore sexual agency. For, as asserted in the introduction to this chapter, it was awareness of the existence and experience of intersex people which brought into clear view for these students the socially constructed nature of gender and bodies. It could be argued that understanding of gender and sexuality as social processes permitted space for experimentation with the placing of the self in sexually agentive subject positions. These are speculations and questions which future research can hopefully address.

# Chapter 8

## *Online chat recordings: Anonymity, 'undercover' gender & sexual agency*

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### **8.1 Introduction**

Investigations of language use and computer-mediated communication (CMC) have frequently focussed on gender, partly as a response to the common idea that online interaction has an equalising effect on gendered power relations (Androutsopoulos 2006). Findings have varied, with some researchers reporting sharp gender differences between the language use of men and women online (e.g. Panyametheekul and Herring 2003) and others reporting more similarities than differences (e.g. Huffaker and Calvert 2005). However, Rodino (1997) points out that online interactions often provide analysts with the opportunity to focus on gender as 'doing' rather than seeing genders as pre-existing categories that influence language use.

To build on this reasoning, this chapter applies a queer approach to gender in online interaction, and one consistent with the queer approach taken to research methodology in this study (see section 3.1.6). By examining sexual agency performances in a 'gender filtered out' setting of anonymous (from the point of view of participants), text-only online chatting, analysis can potentially reveal the extent to which binary understandings of sex and gender normally influence sexual agency ascription and performance. This stance on gender is a consistent theme in this study. Thus, what is distinctive about this chapter's focus is not its stance on the analysis of gender and language in relation to sexual agency, but rather its calculated variation of the interactive environment of the students from the point view of gender.

In the end the data in this chapter do not give a clear indication of whether there was any benefit gained (in terms of sexual agency performance) from anonymity and the filtering out of overt gender indicators. What does emerge is that the wording of prompts from the teaching resources have an observable influence upon the ways in which sexual agency is ascribed and performed, with binary and non-binary constructions of gender and bodies leading to divergent ends.

### **8.1.1 Why anonymity and gender neutrality?**

Although CMC provides opportunities for anonymous conversation, one can always choose to forego anonymity. In considering the advantages and disadvantages for this study of the two possibilities, both pedagogy and fruitful data collection had to be considered. Reid & Reid (2007), in a comparison of online and face-to-face focus groups (with no sexuality focus), found that participants who showed a preference (although admittedly a slight preference) for the CMC mode over face-to-face discussion (about 50%) liked the anonymity that it provided and its lack of inhibition or intimidation (echoing the findings of Latane & Bourgeois 1996 and Valentine 2001 – see section 8.1.2). The same study also found that, in the case of highly sensitive topics, CMC's anonymity might result in higher levels of self-disclosure. Although they are careful to point out that further research is required on this point, from the point of view of research methodology, when taken together these findings lend some credence to the idea that sexuality discussion (and particularly the performance and ascription of sexually agentive subject positions) might be stimulated through the creation of an interactive forum in which the students could converse with a degree of anonymity (i.e. text-only CMC). Considering that the whole sexuality unit was based on discussion (albeit face-to-face), it was decided by Mr. Johnson that this extra stimulation was also likely to be educationally beneficial.

Amongst members of a CoP who spent a lot of time interacting face-to-face, it was also decided that concealing the gender of participants (at least initially)

could assist with the preservation of anonymity. The hope was also that gender concealment might detach participants (to some degree at least) from gendered expectations of what men and women can and cannot say and allow them to explore the discussion of sex, love and desire from a new perspective. It would be naïve to insist that they would be utterly removed from gendered bodies and expectations, for as Campbell (2004: 190) has asserted, when researchers have applied a critical eye to what people actually do in cyberspace, constructs such as gender and sexuality “...continue to be differences that make a difference in online social relations.” In other words, gender does not get completely left behind when we chat online, even in anonymous chatting, a fact made clear from the singling out of women for sexual harassment in some online chatting forums, even when they are using gender neutral names (see Herring 1999). Still, reconstructing the constraints of offline gendered expectations is a negotiation that must then take place. So although it is not the focus of this study to test the veracity of this idea, it was assumed that to some extent sexual agency might at least look a bit different in cyberspace, thus enriching this study and the educational experience of the students.

Teacher/student roles and the effects of adult moderation on adolescent discussions of sexuality online are other issues which were also relevant to the decision-making process. In a study by Bay-Cheng (2005) a comparison is made between the use (by adolescents) of electronic bulletin boards systems which focus on sexuality education. She compares adult-moderated versus non-moderated sites, and the findings suggest that the boards diverged in terms of the depth of discussions as well as the levels of critical discourse, community building and empowerment. The adult-moderated board came up short on these three counts whereas the non-moderated board often became a launching pad for debates and discussions that seemed to be foiled by the moderated format of the other board. It would be problematic to insist that Bay-Cheng’s single study provides definitive proof that reducing adult moderation of sexuality discussions leads to better sexuality education. However when amalgamated with the studies outlined above,

her findings led to the hypothesis that even in an adult-moderated session (i.e. teacher and/or researcher), to have at least partial anonymity might reduce the potentially stifling effects of adult moderation.

### **8.1.2 CMC and sexuality education**

During the planning of this research project, and while providing input into the planning of the classroom programme, my past experiences with the study of language, gender and sexuality in computer-mediated communication (King Forthcoming, In Press, 2006, 2009b, 2009a) predisposed me to this mode of communication as a viable way to create a forum for fruitful discussions of sexuality, both in and out of a school setting. Online text-only chatting (an example of CMC), shares many qualities with face-to-face conversation, and so its distinctive qualities should not be exaggerated (see Androutsopoulos 2006). However, early studies of CMC (e.g. Colomb and Simutis 1996) suggested that as a mode of interaction, it provides some extra social distance from stimuli that can have deleterious effects on classroom conversations that involve 'intellectually or emotionally threatening material' (Valentine 2001: 49).

Valentine (2001) looks at the use of CMC in a post-secondary Sociology class that focuses on sexuality. The professors were inspired to use an electronic bulletin board system as a course discussion tool after reading about the possible educational advantages of CMC. Latane and Bourgeois (1996) demonstrated that CMC can alleviate several conversation blocking social effects, including 'evaluation apprehension', or the withholding of ideas out of fear of social censure. At the planning stage of the current study, evaluation apprehension seemed to be a particularly important concern for a discussion-based unit about sexuality. As it turned out, as has been demonstrated in earlier chapters, numerous members of the CoP were in fact prepared to talk about sexuality in face-to-face situations. However, some members remained relatively reticent or had limited access to the shared discourses of sexuality (e.g. Lito – see section 5.2.4), and it is conceivable that some of the less inhibited ones (who did more of the talking) might have felt

yet more liberated in a CMC-based discussion, a feeling which could perhaps have led to further pushing of social boundaries around the discussion of sexuality, and thus more experiences with being placed in sexually agentive subject positioning by selves and others.

Educational researchers at the post-secondary level have noted that the first few sessions in a sexuality course are charged with tension (Allgeier & Allgeier 2000), and some topics are just too 'hot' for informed, multi-vocal face-to-face discussion (Valentine 2001). According to Valentine (2001), the main thing that the boards provided was an organised forum for discussion outside the classroom's boundaries. The discussions were not anonymous, but even so the students felt safer and freer in their online discussions of sexuality than they did in the classroom. For some, it was the only place where they felt comfortable discussing sex. For numerous students, after using the bulletin board their increased comfort with topics of sexuality online spilled over into the classroom, where they also gained confidence. For these reasons it was decided that online discussion would be put forward to Mr. Johnson and the students as a mode of communication for use during the discussion of love, sex and desire.

### **8.1.3 Class activity online – adapting community practice**

Important questions arise when taking a group of people from a CoP and placing them in an interactive environment considerably different from that in which localised practice formed. Foremost among these questions is whether or not they still comprise a CoP at all (see Johnson 2001). Do core and peripheral memberships still apply? Or, in the case of the CoP in this study, has it returned to being a community of alignment once more? With face-to-face identities concealed, do sustained mutual relations have any bearing anymore? These are particularly pertinent questions in the case of the present chapter because to transfer the CoP to an anonymous and gender-blurred setting is possibly to create a blank slate in terms of identities and negotiated meanings. For although 'virtual' co-presence still satisfies the conditions of engagement (see section 5.1.2), it is

conceivable that CoP members who find themselves sitting behind a 'veneer' of anonymity might also find that previous shared ways of doing and speaking have little application.

Then again, the notion that online identities are constructed in a rarefied way has come under considerable criticism. In an early (and seminal) book on online identities, Turkle (1995) made use of the term 'through the looking glass' as a metaphor for online identity and interaction, lending these concepts an air of 'other-worldliness' or mystique. Similarly, other early literature on cyberspace tended to romanticize a realm of bodily transcendence (Campbell 2004), burying in hype the fact that individuals actually tend to incorporate Internet technologies into their lives in ordinary ways. This means that online and offline experiences have a tendency to bleed into one another, and bodies are not 'left' offline. There is no radical disjuncture between experiences in the physical world and those found in cyberspace. Kendall (2002) and Campbell (2004) both found that participants in online interaction are generally expected to present themselves as they are, to be honest about their bodies and lives. This is not always done, but the predominance of such a view of online and offline identities discredits much of the utopian and dystopian literature on cyberspace, a literature that tends to create a suspicion that online inquiry cannot tell us much about social interaction outside of cyberspace (i.e. it is viewed as being too different to be relevant) (Campbell 2004). In summary, to reify online transcendence of offline reality has not been found to be a particularly tenable or useful position to take.

Thus in this chapter it will not be presumed that there is an acute disconnection between the development of this CoP and the interactions observed during CMC. This is because it is conceivable that shared discourses and localised practices can still be put to use by the members of an offline CoP once they have moved online and concealed their offline identities behind pseudonyms. Previously negotiated meanings are still available to be exploited. At the same time, the non-



binary possibilities of gender which are at least temporarily created by anonymity are worthy of investigation (see section 8.1.1).

## **8.2 Lesson commencement**

It can be seen from the classroom programme (see section 3.3.6) that this session took place roughly 75% of the way through the sexuality unit, and after several audio recording sessions had already been done. This online session was recorded on the final day of term two (in a four-term school year), and the participants left school at lunch time, logging in either at home or at the local public library, depending on their level of access to technology at home. This dispersal of the students was orchestrated in order to maximise anonymity because during preliminary group interviews, many had expressed enthusiasm at the idea of taking part in anonymous discussions of sex, love, and desire.

At the end of class on the day before the session, each participant was given a sealed envelope containing his or her *Windows Live* username and password, and they were strongly encouraged to keep their online identities secret. It was put to them that this would be better for them because they could then experience the session as intended. It was also mentioned that it would be better from a research perspective, too, because I wanted to observe them under anonymous conditions. In their packet was a list of rules (see Figure 8.1), written by me and approved by the teacher, some of these merit closer examination because they provide context, but more importantly because they begin to do the work of agency recognition in relation to sexuality for these young people.

**Figure 8.1 – Student instruction sheet**

### **Key points from students' online chat guide – Friday July 3<sup>rd</sup> at 2:00**

6. Type a greeting such as 'Hi' to signal that you're ready. Be sure not to reveal your real name at any time.
7. Mr. Johnson will read the transcript afterwards. He will not know your real identities, but Brian will know them.

8. Abusive behaviour (which we recognise is very unlikely) would need to be reported to Mr. Johnson, using real names.
9. The real names of *absentee* students will also be revealed to Mr. Johnson after the session is over. This information is for school attendance records only.
10. Please respect the korowai that we discussed in class, and follow it.
11. Every student must contribute at least 100 words of text to the conversation. That's about 5 long sentences.
12. We hope you will enjoy this opportunity to speak your mind about sexuality. As long as you respect the rights of others, you can feel free to express yourself creatively in this session.

Points one to five have been left out of Figure 8.1 because they were merely instructions on how to log on, and how to deal with some projected technical difficulties. Points six to twelve have been included here because they are related to expectations of participant conduct, and so provide useful information about how the students were positioned at the commencement of this activity.

From the perspective of subject positioning, it is in points nine, ten, and twelve (and to some degree, eight and eleven) where the participants are first positioned as students in this activity. This would be an unmarked positioning for them in the face-to-face classroom (and somewhat obvious), but in cyberspace, sitting at computers scattered around the neighbourhood, to position them as students took on elevated importance from the teacher's point of view. Mr. Johnson felt that there needed to be a clear indication that this was coursework. The message was that this discussion is a school activity despite their dispersal. Their positioning as students is also partly achieved via the reference in point ten to the agreed-upon code of behaviour from the face-to-face classroom of the CoP (i.e. the 'korowai' – see section 5.2.1). There are also references to the teacher's authority in eight and nine, and in eleven the participants are referred to baldly as students and reminded that a minimum level of participation is required of them. This reminder indexes teacher expectation and therefore maintains student/teacher roles.

However, in twelve they are acknowledged to be students who have the wherewithal to inhabit self-controlled sexual subject positions. They are positioned as legitimate ‘speakers of the mind’ in relation to sexuality. It must be said that I wrote number twelve hoping that it would liberate the participants somewhat during discussion, but at the time I was unaware of the importance of agency recognition as part of agency performance, particularly its importance in this context of ‘tired’ student and teacher roles, a theme which will be elaborated below.

Once everyone had logged in, started with small talk, and played with the chatting format a bit, Mr. Johnson typed the following instructions, adapted from Tasker (2000: 65), which is the teaching resource that inspired this activity (in fact the whole unit):

Today you are going to participate in a values clarifying exercise and analyse and justify your own positions on issues relating to love and desire. Please be honest, anonymous and thoughtful.

For each statement you will have to say if you Strongly Agree, Maybe agree, Maybe Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

Here the teacher addresses and positions them as students by relating this activity to the curriculum via the term “values clarifying exercise”, which has come up in the course before. He has taken these words directly from the activity in Tasker (2000). At the same time he positions them in such a way that their sexual agency is recognised within this school-oriented setting. They are to share their “own positions”, thus placing them as legitimate holders of ‘positions’ in relation to “love and desire” (i.e. sexual subject positions). Furthermore, they are in fact encouraged to be both “honest” about these positions and “thoughtful”, these two words indexing a self-controlled sexual subject position. In summary, this carefully crafted statement, drawn partly from the classroom resource and partly from the teacher’s own words, calls forth student subject positions for the participants, but positions which work against the tired role of students as recipients of information about sex

and sexuality. Rather these young people are to *provide* information on love and desire. The participants soon align to this positioning and perform sexual agency.

The teacher then began typing statements adapted from Tasker (2000: 66-67), timing their introduction according to his own judgment. During this session, the teacher interacted mostly as an observer, asking clarifying questions from time to time and encouraging the students to contribute. I was also logged in, but most of the time I was busy on the phone, helping students who were having technical problems.

As Mr. Johnson types the statements, the participants begin to agree or disagree with them and then discuss their reasons. An important consideration to remember here is that the students are anonymous to one another, and to Mr. Johnson, and their monikers (e.g. QQN or JCV) give away nothing about gender. They are conversing from within student subject positions, but they are student subject positions stripped of overt gender signifiers via the use of non-gendered code names. The only overtly gendered participants in the room are the teacher (via the title Mr.) and me (via the name Brian).

### **8.3 Findings**

The chat session lasted for approximately one hour and forty minutes. The extracts presented here appear in basically the same form as they appeared on the screens of participants. On their screens, contributions scroll past in real time, one after the other and in a list; a list which, if examined at the end of the conversation, shows no representation of how much time passed between each contribution. Although the 'chat log' from which I drew the transcript indicates the time gap between turns, I have chosen not to include it here because it is impossible to know what caused the gap. It could have more to do with Internet connection speeds than any hesitation on the part of interlocutors. The text-only discussion environment filters out other mediating modes such as facial expression and tone, so although there are numerous ways to represent emotion and prosody in text

(see Herring 2001), the participants are markedly reliant upon language during this activity.

### 8.3.1 Eliciting hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality

In line 1 of Extract 8.1 (edited - for full version, see Appendix D), the first statement that students are asked to respond to is worded in such a way that body dimorphism (see section 2.5.4) is immediately evoked via use of the words 'male' and 'female'. Statement 1 is worded in such a way as to suggest that males are more interested in sex than females, and that nature has something to do with this tendency. This connection with 'the natural' is significant in that it can be argued that it taps into a discourse that Cameron (2009) refers to as 'the new biologism', a discourse within science (and increasingly in general society) which although disclaiming strong biological determinism, links male and female sexual behaviour at least partly to the brain and evolution. Statement 1's characterisation of 'males' as 'hard-wired' for sexual interest is compatible with hegemonic masculinity's (hetero)sexual imperative (see section 2.5.2). The effect of this is to polarise opinion, with several students agreeing strongly with the statement while others (who respond slightly less quickly) are dissenting voices (lines 5, 7, 10, and 13). Although it is not until line 31 that heterosexuality is directly referred to by KUQ (i.e. girls wait for the 'right guy'), it could be argued that the focus on body dimorphism in the wording of Statement 1 evokes heterosexuality, thereby also evoking exaggerated gender differences (see McElhinney 2003).

#### Extract 8.1 - Statement 1 - Males are naturally more interested in sex than females

1	Mr. Johnson	Statement 1 - Males are naturally more interested in sex than females
2	KUQ	STRONGLY AGREE!
3	EYF	strongly agree.
4	CHQ	Strongly agree lol
5	QQN	disagree
6	LKE	Strongly agree LOL
7	HTX	disagree

8	VDA	disagree
9	GVK	Strongly agree.!
10	BFM	half n half
11	Mr. Johnson	Ok now the reasons
12	VDA	wait agree strongly
13	JKP	They both want it, Boys are just more open and not ashamed to be dirty :P
14	QQN	they just voice their interest more than females do
15	Mr. Johnson	You can write long answers
16	HTX	uhm some woman can be just as interested as males and some males may not even like sex that much
17	CHQ	males think alot more about sexual sides of relationships. rather then women look at the love side
18	KUQ	because guys want sex to feel loved, whereas girls dont need it to feel loved
19	EYF	men just seemed too be more interested than women.
20	GVK	because males seem to be more hornier than females & want it more often.
21	LKE	Guys think about it 24/7..... Girls not soo much, Hahahaha
22	QQN	girls think about it just as much but its seen as more acceptable for guys to talk about it openly
23	KUQ	haha i agree with that one
24	BFM	depends wat the male feels about that person
25	CHQ	Men find it cool to be able to say yeah, im getting some!
26	HTX	also its up to the individual aswell
27	CHQ	not all men,
28	Mr. Johnson	When you respond to someone write their letters e.g. HTX
29	JKP	Yeah, sometimes it depends on the guy, like if he has a big ego then yeah,
30	CHQ	i agree with JKB its kind of a cool factor,
31	KUQ	to a girl their virginity is more special to them, they want to save it for the 'right guy'
32	QQN	wat do u mean by cool factor CHQ?
33	EYF	& guys just seem too throw it around alot more than girls do. its more of a big deal too girls.
34	QQN	not all girls KUQ lol
35	CHQ	it s almost seen as cool to be sexually active for males, but not so

		much for females,
36	QQN	oh agree haha
37	Mr. Johnson	How does ego make a difference
38	JKP	they brag to their mates about bonking and how they wont ever see them again
39	GVK	they seem to think they are so cool to there mates and that.
40	BFM	being confident sexually
41	CHQ	i think also because girl relate sex to love and feeling strongly for someone, guys dont as much and see it just as action
42	LKE	Well the more guys with a big ego seem to think that they can get anyone at anytime? more naturally into sex etc
43	EYF	yeah guys seem too do it for fun but girls more serious CHQ

Although several participants are quick to strongly agree with this hegemonically masculine representation of males, CHQ and LKE (lines 4 & 6) punctuate their agreement with "lol" (laughing out loud), suggesting that the strength of their agreement is partly play and not to be taken very seriously (perhaps support for the idea that this is an exaggerated characterisation). Whether it is play or not, their agreement supports a hegemonically masculine construction of males. Later in Extract 8.1, QQN begins to insist that girls also have a lot of interest in sex, but guys are more likely to 'voice' that interest (line 14) because it is seen as more acceptable for them to do so (line 22). This idea is also put forward by JKP in different words (line 13), saying that males are not "ashamed to be dirty". They seem to agree with HTX, who asserts (line 16) that women can be very interested in sex and men not interested, thus discrediting the idea that men are 'naturally' more interested in sex. As the conversation goes on, opinions vary, but a consensus builds that it is not the level of *interest* in sex that differs between males and females but rather the social dynamics around expressing that interest. However, it must be said that interest in sex does not require agency, in that one can be passively interested and not act upon that interest. So although, in the balance, interest in sex is collectively constructed as universal, agency in relation to sex remains obscure.

Then in line 35, CHQ makes the statement that it is seen as 'cool' for males to be sexually *active* whereas for females it is 'not so much', a move which places males in a sexually agentive subject position while questioning sexual agency for females. Finally, in line 42 CHQ reinforces this stance on sexual agency by suggesting that guys see sex as 'action' whereas girls do not (rather it is something to be 'felt'), and this places girls in a non-sexually-agentive subject position. Thus it can be seen that in this discussion about males and females, although *interest* in sex is available to all, only males are ascribed sexual agency. The picture changes later in the conversation (see Statement 5 below) when the notion of *disinterest* in sex is raised, with a rather different wording in the statement; a wording which 'makes a difference' to the interaction that follows.

### 8.3.2 Agency in disinterest

In turn one of Extract 8.2 (edited - for full version, see Appendix D), Mr. Johnson types statement five, a statement which implies that continuous interest in sex is the most 'natural' state. This reference to nature again evokes 'new biologism' (see last section) evoking the notion of 'hard-wired' sexual interest, but this time not just for males.

#### Extract 8.2 – Statement 5 - It's unnatural to not be interested in sex

1	Mr. Johnson	Statement 5 - It's unnatural to not be interested in sex
2	KUQ	disagree
3	EYF	disagree.
4	HTX	disagree
5	JKP	disagree.
6	GVK	disagree
7	BFM	disagree
8	VEDA	disagree
9	CHQ	yeah a relationship is about beeing open and sdharing everythngng with each other
10	KUQ	everyones ready for sex at different times in there life even if it means never
11	EYF	not everyone is ready for sex at the same times. takes longer for



		some people to become more interested in it.
12	BFM	sex might not be important at the time
13	QQN	disagree, like gerald off shortland street lol
14	JKP	ASEXUAL :)
15	CVQ	shot lol QQN
16	CHQ	its totally fine? if thats how you feel then it ok?
17	KQM	agree with EYF
18	RLI	same
19	Brian	Yes, Asexual is the right term
20	BFM	wats asedual?
21	HTX	somepeople may feel that they have more important things to do in their life at this time then to go out haveing sex with everyone
22	BFM	asexual
23	CVQ	its up to you HTX
24	JKP	yeah agree with HTX , everyones diffrent. :) to some people sex is important, others not really,
25	QQN	BFM - someone who isnt interested in sex
26	BFM	sweet
27	CHQ	Sex isnt important it should be somthing you decide in your own time that you are ready for
28	HTX	and just because one is intreted in sex it dosnt mean that they are diffrent or 'unatural'

Turn 9 is a comment related to a previous topic, and is merely overlapping into this extract. The students unanimously reject the idea that continuous interest in sex is the only natural state, and they problematise a direct association between biology and sexual behaviour by pointing out that social factors play a role. In turn 14, KUQ asserts that in fact some people are never interested in sex, and in turn 16 BFM asserts that sex can be unimportant at certain times. QQN then makes reference to a character Gerald on a popular New Zealand television program (Shortland Street), a character who self-identifies as 'asexual', an identity which represents disinterest in sex. HTX finishes the extract with an assertion in turn 25 that "some people may feel they have more important things to do...than to go out having sex with everyone". In these statements, a collective performance of agency

is achieved, and it is constructed around the idea that being disinterested in sex is unremarkable, and so the (hetero)sexual imperative of hegemonic masculinity is not aligned to. There is an uncharacteristic level of agreement here, and this consensus positions young people (as members of the collective marker 'everyone') as people 'in control' of their sexuality. To be an agent is to act, yet lack of interest in sex is not positioned here as passivity or inaction. As HTX points out, agentic actors might have 'more important things to do' and so frames the (social) prioritising of other activities over sex as an agentic move.

It is also important of course to keep an eye to what is not being said, or the 'unsaid traces' within discourse (Kulick 2005). Gender and age have not been placed in the foreground because gender has been 'bracketed' (i.e. set aside) via the aliases, and age has been bracketed via wording of the initiating statement. In this sense a non-binary approach is enabled by anonymity and the teaching resource, but more importantly the participants also maintain this gender-neutrality in their comments. They persist in using terms like "some people" and "everyone" rather than commenting separately about males and females, which is something they quite often do in other parts of this online discussion. In the present case gender is left out, and so sexual agency via self-control is extended to boys, a group that often performs a version of hegemonic masculinity in these types of discussions (in this study and others) by portraying themselves as 'always ready for sex' (e.g. Allen 2005d; Chambers, Tincknell, and Van Loon 2004). As Ben's case demonstrated in Chapter 6, this version of masculinity is not always performed in this CoP, even in homosocial (i.e. single-gender) discussions amongst boys. However, it could be argued that in this stretch of anonymous conversation, it is partly because Statement 5 does not evoke body dimorphism that this form of sexual agency is extended to men (see Chapter 9 for more on agency in relation to not having sex). This is because the exaggerated gender constructions of heterosexuality are not evoked (see section 8.3.1).

### 8.3.3 'Young people' as sexually agentive

Extract 8.3 (edited - for full version, see Appendix D) is once again demonstrative of a collective performance of youth sexual agency, but for contrasting reasons to Extract 8.2. There is a lot of agreement once again, but this time young people are constructed as people who should explore sex and have fun with it, whereas older people “have sex for a reason” (line 15).

#### Extract 8.3 – Statement 6 - Young people are more interested in sex than older people

	Mr. Johnson	Statement 6 - Young people are more interested in sex than older people
1	KQM	agree
2	QQN	agree
3	JKP	Maybe agree.....
4	HTX	agree
5	HTX	maybe
6	GVK	agree
7	RLI	agree
8	BFM	agree
9	ZQW	oops late but yup agree
10	KQM	<b>older people will be more mature than younger people</b>
11	KUQ	not sure, as you get older people have sex for a reason. whereas young people have it for fun/pleasure!
12	CVQ	to statement 6 its 50 50
13	KQM	<b>yea exactly</b>
14	CHQ	young people do it more often
15	BFM	old people might not feel as sexual anymore
16	GVK	so they can experience it
17	RLI	<b>i think that young people talk about it more than older people would</b>
18	JKP	Yeah, when your young sex is like 'part of growing up' you want to be adventurous etc whereas when your older, you can still enjoy it? but i guess its seen differently?
19	QQN	because we are like growing up n its a new thing, like a

		little kid who has a new toy when he grows up he will become less interested in it lol
20	EYF	its more new for younger people. more experimenting.

Instead of constructing themselves as potentially having better things to do than have sex, this time the participants construct themselves as people who should be experimenting with sex. In line 25, QQN suggests that sex is like a “new toy” to young people and aligns more firmly to a collective performance of sexual agency by changing the pronoun of choice to ‘we’ instead of ‘they’ (e.g. line 20) or ‘people’ (lines 13, 15, 18, and 23). To make this linguistic move during a discussion of sexual experimentation by young people indexes an agentive sexual subject position for all of the young people chatting in this conversation (i.e. the collective we). It is again highly significant that this performance of sexual agency has a pan-gender quality. Young women are often not positioned as subjects who enjoy sex and experiment with it (e.g. Allen 2003a; Averett, Benson, and Vaillancourt 2008; Chambers et al. 2004; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Mendoza-Denton 2008), but here the subject position of ‘sexually agentive young people’ is reworked to include them.

When the aliases are replaced with gendered names it is interesting to see that these sexually agentive performances were being done by both males and females, with boys taking up positions of self control in relation to sex (e.g. Caleb, Matt and Ben in Extract 8.3, lines 11, 16, and 21 respectively) and girls taking up active, fun-oriented sexual subject positions (e.g. Caitlin, Olivia, Sarah, Kate, Aroha and Hannah in Extract 8.3, lines 16, 19, 21, 25, 26, and 27). In the context of this CoP, mobilising sexual agency via reference to self control is not a marked strategy (see sections 6.2.3 and 9.2.3). In the case of the girls, although there are plenty of examples in the data of girls performing sexual agency (see sections 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 7.3.1, 7.3.2, and 9.2.1), referring to sex as a pleasurable and fun activity whilst including girls in that agentive subject position is a marked strategy for performing sexual agency. Another interesting and significant difference is the lack of

mitigating strategies such as hegemonic femininity performance. In other words, there seems to be no compulsion to avoid the slut stigma by drawing upon ideals of femininity while performing sexually agentic subject positions (as Luana and Paige do in sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 respectively). Although this might be partly a result of the framing of 'young people' as the subject instead of girls or women, it could also be argued that the anonymous, gender-obscured environment contributed to the ability of young women to experiment with the performance of sexually agentic subject positions.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that it is impossible to be certain that the anonymous gender-obscured chatting environment is what brought about the differences identified. This is primarily because another key difference emerged; that between the indexing of male/female dimorphism in discussion prompts versus its avoidance via prompts which frame young people collectively as 'people'. It might well be that the latter strategy would be an effective way, also during face-to-face activities, to at least sometimes provide an opportunity for body dimorphism and its male/female fixation to be left in the background. For, as the data here demonstrate, the male/female body binary has a tendency to evoke heterosexuality and thus stimulate an 'exaggeration' of gender difference which is arguably common in heterosexual interactions (McElhinney 2003: 23). This effect of exaggerated gender difference is consistent with findings in a social psychology study of negotiating behaviour (Kray, Thompson, and Galinsky 2001) in which gender stereotypes were evoked, as was a 'superordinate' identity category shared by male and female participants (e.g. professional identity). Evoking the superordinate identity had the effect of "levelling the playing field" (Kray et al. 2001: 955) in terms of gendered power relations, and men and women worked more cooperatively. When gendered stereotypes were either implicitly or explicitly evoked, advantage would swing in either direction (i.e. favouring either males or females) depending on the stereotype referred to. Thus it could be argued that continuous reference to body dimorphism and its accompanying regime of gender

binarism and stereotypes is likely to create the type of polarisation observed in the current study.

This is not to imply that gender and body differences should always be obfuscated in the interest of including girls in sexual agency performance (i.e. we're all 'just people' in the end). To do so would be to obscure gendered power relations and deny young women the opportunity to learn to navigate sexual agency performance in the face of hegemonic, normative gender ideals – thus also denying them the opportunity to resignify gendered subject positions, rendering them more sexually agentic.

## **8.4 Summary**

In this chapter the focus has been on computer-mediated communication in which the participants chatted under aliases with no overt indication of their genders. When the term 'people' was used in the prompt and aligned to by the participants, and body dimorphism was not overtly mentioned, girls (and boys) were collectively ascribed a sexually agentic subject position as members of the category young people, a group for whom sex should be a fun activity. In contrast, evoking body dimorphism in the prompt (via the male/female binary) led to complicity with hegemonic masculinity, as males were collectively constructed as 'hard-wired' for sexual interest and sexually agentic whereas sexual agency for girls was absent. This alignment was performed in what could be described as a 'ritualised' way, done without hesitation and treated as humour by some and later mitigated. By focusing on body dimorphism, and thus male/female difference, the exaggerated 'battle of the sexes' responses elicited stood in the way of agency construction for girls and women. This response sits in contrast with a later prompt (i.e. Statement 5) which also referred to sexual interest but without evoking the male/female binary. In the latter case, sexual disinterest is framed as sexually agentic, a subject position accessible to all.

Observing the participants chatting under aliases with gender obscured has created an opportunity to observe the effects of salient gender and bodies upon the performance of sexual agency in this CoP. Although there are many similarities with the face-to-face performances analysed in other chapters, the difference outlined in the previous section (i.e. girls taking part in the collective construction of sex as fun and pleasurable) suggests that providing young people with some opportunities to discuss sexual desire in an anonymous, text-only, online chatting environment could permit exploration of sexually agentive subject positions which are more fraught in a face-to-face setting. This is particularly true for students who tend to be reticent in classroom discussion. For example, in the conversations analysed above (and those not included here) several students' voices came into evidence far more persistently than in the face-to-face environment (e.g. Matt and Sarah). Some might be tempted to argue that this online environment is a highly stylised or rarefied one and that subjectivities performed online are unlikely to transfer to 'the real world'. However, research does not support such a view; rather, 'offline' and 'online' activities "interpenetrate" (Leander and McKim 2008: 218). In other words, they flow into one another and there is no radical separation between online experience and offline experience; both are fundamentally 'real' to participants (see Miller and Slater 2000). Thus the experiences of these students would not have remained online but rather would have remained with them.





# Chapter 9

## *Unsupervised recordings: Young women, heteronormativity, and sexual agency*

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### 9.1 Introduction

Language and gender scholars have long been interested in how language use articulates with the status of women in society (see section 2.3). Far from being an issue of the past, there are still vital questions to be answered concerning the ongoing interaction of gendered power relations with language. In order to encourage a revival of this incomplete investigation, Holmes (2007) calls for the return in language and gender scholarship to a central focus on women. In response to this call, this chapter takes as its central focus the problematic elements of access to sexually agentive subject positions by young women.

Indeed there are many questions in relation to young women and (hetero)sex (i.e. sex between a man and a woman) which remain unaddressed or understudied in academia, and as Holland et al. (2000) assert, the sexual agency of women who have sex with men is certainly among the most important of those questions. The sexual safety of young women participants in the Holland et al. (2000) study appeared to be compromised by a version of conventional femininity which demands performances of an inactive, unknowing sexual subjectivity. In other words, girls were inclined to avoid appearing sexually agentive in order to appear more feminine, and according to the researchers, this tendency increased the likelihood that they would participate in unprotected sex, thus placing them at greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

In the data analysed in the current chapter, there are some similar themes identifiable in the sense that the participants manage to construct sexually agentive subject positions for girls, but whether these positionings are as active and desiring

as those of men who have sex with women remains unclear (see 9.1.1 below). Baxter (2003: 32) argues that there are plenty of examples in her own data of girls taking up active subject positions in relation to men or boys; thus it is no longer sufficient to theorise females as "universal victims of patriarchy." However, she is careful to point out that there are still inequalities in "the ways in which power is negotiated through gender relations." Thus, despite "breakthrough moments of resistance and empowerment", women and girls remain in positions of relative powerlessness.

### **9.1.1 Young women and heteronormative subjectivity**

Despite many changes in the way sex has been articulated in relation to young people in New Zealand, including the eroticisation of young men's bodies in the media as well as the portrayal of women in popular culture who actively seek sex, Jackson & Cram (2003) confirm that there are still many sexual double standards at work. Girls and women still risk being labelled 'slags' or 'sluts' for taking part in (hetero)sex while boys and men are labelled 'studs' (cf Lees 1993). These are familiar themes within the discourses of heteronormativity, in which men who have sex with women have (relatively) unproblematic access to active, desiring, agentive subjectivities whereas the access to similar subjectivities by women who have sex with men can be more fraught. This is a theme which is supported by the findings of the present study to some extent (i.e. girls are seen to 'manoeuvre' more than boys while performing sexual agency - see Chapter 6) but also problematised in the sense that the sexual agency of boys can be seen to be fraught at times because of discourses of sexual compulsiveness, which need to be placed at a distance during sexual agency performance because they tend to work against rationality as a characteristic of masculinity. Compulsiveness also implies being out of control, and this is arguably not a very agentive state.

Allen (2003b: 236) frames the "carving out" of agency by women (in the arena of heterosex) as "mediated power" which tends to be derived from the contestation and negotiation of the hegemonic power of men, or 'hegemonic

masculinity' (Connell 1995), even within monogamous heterosexual relationships. As Allen (2003b: 243) puts it, "...while male power is not monolithic and may indeed allow some young women access to agency, it enjoys a constant presence." In other words, the agency of women in relation to (hetero)sex is usually housed in their 'management of' or responses to men's agentive sexual desires and thus mediated by those desires. Thus it can be argued that women's agency is 'derivative' of men's active, knowing sexuality. In this way it is evocative of the general (i.e. non-sexual) agency of children in Samoan families (observed by Duranti 2004 and outlined in section 2.8.2), who do indeed gain the agency to speak in the presence of adults, but only via their parents. Therefore, in line with this reasoning, women's agency in relation to sex with men is agency of a type, but not equal to the sexual agency of men.

As outlined in section 2.5.2, hegemonic masculinity maintains its power partly through complicity on the part of heterosexual women. It is this notion of women's complicity with hegemonic masculinity that is highly pertinent to the data in this chapter, for the notion that women can be complicit in maintaining the power of masculinity tends to complicate the emergence and identification of sexual agency in relation to girls.

Empirical research in New Zealand (see Allen 2003b; Jackson and Cram 2003) and the United Kingdom (Frith and Kitzinger 1998; Pichler 2007) supports a picture of derivative sexual agency for women who have sex with men. Young women in these studies who are positioned (in conversation) as heterosexual (or at least as women who have sex with men) are also positioned as sexually agentive, but primarily in the sense that they have decision-making power in response to men's sexual and/or romantic advances, and can actively choose who to have sex with and/or date, when and under what conditions. Although this is indeed sexually agentive rather than wholly passive, the derivative pattern of agency identified above still appears to hold. As will be outlined below, this pattern of girls being positioned as sexually agentive via (hetero)sexual/(hete)romantic decision-making

also emerges in the present study, but it is not always clearly derivative of men's sexual agency. Despite having to wait to 'be asked' before going on dates or embarking on potentially long-term relationships, girls who take up man-desiring subject positions in a conversation between young women friends (in the context of a recorded class activity) are ultimately positioned as making the final decision about whether or not to 'go for it'. This positioning resignifies the latent passivity in dominant discourses of women's heterosexuality (see analysis in section 9.2). By giving themselves the final say in such matters, they manage to access agency in relation to sexual decision making, and in one case manage to subvert the idea that girls passively wait to 'be asked'. Leading on from this analysis, sexual double standards and notions of passive female sexuality (and the navigation of these ideologies) are issues which also permeate the concept of *virginity*, another social construct which takes a central position in the conversations analysed in this chapter.

### 9.1.2 Virginity

Because it is understood in multifarious ways, a description of what is meant by virginity is essential. In the present study, virginity bears no relation to the physical state of the hymen in women. To begin with, the idea that a hymen can be either 'intact' or 'ruptured' has been roundly discredited in medical research (see Anderst, Kellogg, and Jung 2009; Goodyear-Smith and Laidlaw 1998; Heger, Ticson, Velasquez, and Bernier 2002; Kellogg, Menard, and Santos 2004; Nazer and Palusci 2008; Underhill and Dewhurst 1978), and these studies remain unchallenged in the medical literature (Cooper and Nylander 2010). Moreover, a 'hymen-centric' view of virginity would conceal broadly circulating discourses via which membership in the category 'virgin' fails to be restricted to females who have yet to experience penile-vaginal penetration. This criterion would erase male heterosexual virginity as well as non-heteronormative virginities for people of any sex or gender (Carpenter 2002). Finally and foremost, the data analysed in the current chapter demonstrate that these young people in New Zealand speak of virginity in ways that allow for

broader category membership criteria than 'pre-coital' females (or even pre-coital males for that matter). For this reason, virginity is described in this study as 'sexual inexperience' (cf Holland et al. 2000).

For most of the twentieth century in the United States at least (and arguably throughout the anglosphere), notions of virginity tended towards a binary stereotype in which women saw sexual inexperience (i.e. virginity) as something precious (based on Judeo-Christian traditions, which venerate virginity - see Carpenter 2001) whereas men saw it as a stigma (Carpenter 2002). Research in the Social Sciences has demonstrated that these discourses still circulate, and yet the picture has become (or conceivably always has been) more complicated than this binary would suggest, with considerable gender ambiguity around the definition and interpretation of virginity (Carpenter 2001).

However, as Frith and Kitzinger (1998) have argued in relation to discourses of 'emotion work' in heterosexual relationships, it is possible that this 'change' is rooted more in shifting researcher perceptions than in any actual changes in participant behaviour. That is, in line with the approach taken in the present study, rather than treating data as "...a transparent window on to people's beliefs and behaviours" (Frith and Kitzinger 1998: 317) researchers have begun to treat participant statements about virginity as conversational work, inseparable from identity performances. This shift of analytic focus has led to a more nuanced picture of how gendered subjects interact with the socio-cultural construct 'virginity'.

From the point of view of the research questions of this study (see section 3.2), much can be learned about sexual agency via the analysis of participant talk about virginity in relation to self and other. Although 'virgin' is often framed as a sexually *passive* subject position, the talk of these young women constructs it as sexually *agentive* in the sense that agency (i.e. the discursively mobilised capacity to act) is required if one is to *choose* virginity (or choose whether to 'lose' it, when, and with whom). Once again the picture is not so clearly one of 'mediated' or

'derivative' access to sexual agency, and in fact both girls and boys are positioned as having access to sexual agency through this style of active, knowing virginity.

### **9.1.3 Classroom activity - dilemmas of love and desire**

The recordings used as data in this chapter were made late in the sexuality unit, two weeks after the online conversation analysed in the previous chapter, on the first day the class reconvened after a two-week break between terms two and three. Mr. Johnson informed the students of which activity they were to discuss and then sent the self-chosen groups away with audio recorders to complete the activity on their own so as to avoid direct adult supervision. During planning this was thought to be a useful approach because even though the audio recording element would to some extent preserve my 'presence' as adult researcher, the students knew that these conversations would not be heard by Mr. Johnson. By removing the teacher role and allowing them to separate off into friendship groups, it was hoped that their discussions of love and desire might take on a different form from discussions recorded in the more traditional classroom setting. Part of the applied logic was that via modification of the audience, perhaps the emergence of sexually agentic subject positionings would be promoted.

On the day, they were directed to the appropriate page and told to choose one scenario and discuss it at length while the audio recorder captured their discussion. They were also asked to do this in isolation from other groups and their teacher. Upon reflection, it seems that the students were told very little before they engaged with this learning activity, and this fact influenced their navigation of the dilemmas they were required to discuss. There was an acute sense of pressure for Mr. Johnson at this point because classes were going to be missed in the coming week due to other school activities and it was time to move on with the curriculum. It was also clear that the students would need the whole hour if they were to complete the audio-recording exercise. In the press to get started, key (and challenging) terminology had not been explained to them (e.g. the word 'paradigm', which they did not even know how to pronounce), and as a result even the most

able readers struggled to understand certain parts of the activity. In highlighting the relative lack of guidance with this particular activity, I intend no criticism of Mr. Johnson as a teacher, for had I requested a different presentation he would have accommodated my wishes. Rather, the goal is to contextualise the data accurately. For in fact, as researcher, I was content to watch as the day-to-day logistics of the classroom programme unfolded and Mr. Johnson adapted any plans we might have made. The reality of sexuality education, like all secondary school subjects, is that instructions are not always complete and there are myriad interruptions and false starts as the school continues to operate as what Wenger (1998) refers to as a "constellation" of communities of practice. Furthermore, consistent with the practices that had developed in this particular CoP (as identified in section 5.2.1), a lack of preamble was normal at the commencement of most activities, and this day was no exception.

In spite of Mr. Johnson's especially hands-off approach on this day, and in spite of a two-week break, the students knew what they had to do as members of the CoP, and they got started. In order to traverse unexpectedly difficult vocabulary, the members of each group collectively interpreted the activity in their own way. For this reason, the details of the dilemmas as they were written on the paper (taken from Tasker 2000) will not be outlined here. Instead, these details will emerge much more usefully during analysis via the transcripts of the recorded sessions. Suffice it to say that the first sentences of the students' paper framed the coming scenarios as 'dilemmas of love and desire'.

## **9.2 Findings**

### **9.2.1 - Being asked and going for it - Caitlin, Aroha and Ata**

The first group whose discussion will be the focus of analysis is that of Caitlin, Aroha and Ata. Their interaction merits attention in this chapter because other research has found that girls in a homosocial group (i.e. exclusively girls) are more likely to engage in agentic talk about sexuality (e.g. Allen 2003a: 223). In

addition, a grouping of only girls is marked in the set of recorded data for the present study, so their interaction merits examination in case differences (or conspicuous similarities) can be observed in performances of sexual agency in this social context. As previously mentioned (section 9.1.3 above), the female exclusivity of this group is problematised by my 'presence' as a researcher and man who will later listen to and analyse the recordings. However in the face-to-face conversation, there were only girls present.

In extract 9.1 below (edited - for full version, see Appendix E), the group in question has chosen to locate themselves out in the schoolyard, separately from the other groups, as instructed. After turning on the recorder, they spend two minutes orienting to their environment by setting up a paper wind-screen for the microphone and choosing which scenario to focus on. As they talk, a cool New Zealand winter breeze flutters in the microphone and a low-flying plane passes over. Fulfilling one of her usual roles as a core member of the broader class CoP, Caitlin focuses the group on the task at hand and reads the chosen scenario aloud.

**Extract 9.1 – Caitlin, Aroha, and Ata 1 - *GO for it***

- 1 Caitlin**     *DILEMmas*  
*NOW what do i do:::*  
*you and your best friend are both attracted to the same person*
- 2 Aroha**     *((quietly groaning))*
- 3 Caitlin**     *that person has just contacted you and ASKED you to go on a date*  
*you KNOW that your best friend is a shy (.) UNconfident person ∪*  
*who is easily made (.) to feel worthless*
- 4 Aroha**     *((paper rustling)) WHAT'S the issue or dilemma*  
*(1) the obviously the*  
*you have to choose you have to choose (.)*
- 5 Ata**         *your best friend or*
- 6 Aroha**     *or*
- 7 Ata**         *your //other//*
- 8 Aroha**     *//your// best friend or or the this potential //boyfriend ∪//*
- 9 Caitlin**     *//yeah she doesn't// wanna UPset her best friend*  
*who's already GOT problems with um //like//*
- 10 Aroha**    *//but then//*



- 11 Ata**            *yeah=*
- 12 Caitlin**       *=self worth and stuff like that*
- \*\*\*\*\*
- 29 Caitlin**       *y'know they can't decide is because (.) they-  
she wants to do what  
(.) y'know SHE wants to do ∪  
which is go out with the guy and have fun=  
=but she also wants to like be //xxxxxxx//  
//she doesn't// want to like (.) upset her friend  
that (.) THAT never works  
just whoEVER the f- (.) first person gets asked ∪ should GO for it  
(2) //ANYway anyway//  
//WHOSE rights are// being considered*

The wording of the 'dilemma' is gender neutral, and it has likely been written this way by design so that the same activity can be addressed to people of varying genders. It also has the potential effect of permitting same sex attraction to become the topic of discussion if so desired. However the girls in this recording read the target of attraction as male. The use of the word 'attracted' in the wording of the dilemma (turn 1 - "*you and your friend are both attracted to the same person*") is significant because it creates a sexual subject position for the listener. In drawing this connection between attraction and sexual subjectivity, the intention is not to imply that being 'attracted to' someone always involves erotic desire. However, even if one were to insist that an attraction could be based purely on desire for friendship, such a stance begs the question of why the solicited rendezvous is referred to as a 'date', a term which indexes romance, and thus sexuality (see Regan 1998 for an analysis of the inextricable relationship between romantic love and sexual desire in western society). Indeed even across cultures the relationship between sexual practices and romantic love displays a great deal of variation, but what is not problematic is that there is always a relationship between the two, even if the relationship is prohibitive of sexual contact between lovers or prohibitive of love between sexual partners (De Monck 1998: viii). Thus the word 'attracted' ascribes sexuality to the listener regardless of the degree to which the

listener's interpretation of that word draws upon discourses of either romance or sexuality.

Although the question itself positions the listener as a sexual subject, the positioning is neither clearly sexually agentive nor clearly sexually passive, for although attraction can be sexually charged, it need not be active. However Aroha in turn 4 introduces the idea of needing to make a choice - of choosing a certain course of action in relation to being asked on a date, and this is where the notion of sexual agency in response to an advance from a man is first raised. This move constructs an agentive, 'choosing' sexual subject position rather than a position of being a passive subject who waits to be asked and then goes with the flow. This agency is further extended in turn 32 when Aroha says that whoever gets asked first should just 'go for it'. Arguably this is a reworking of the passive sexual subject position of girls 'waiting to be asked' because although she has indeed been 'the asked' rather than 'the asker' (the latter ostensibly a more agentive position) she might now 'go for it' a phrase which indexes the active taking of opportunities. Although the scenario positions the listening student as the person in this sexual subject position, Caitlin in turn 9 suddenly refers to this sexual subject as 'she' and so removes the sexual agency from those present and places it onto a hypothetical girl figure. This position is maintained throughout extract 9.1 and well into extract 9.2 (below - from later in the same conversation), but then in line 55, Ata forces a reverse shift (edited transcript - for full version, see Appendix E).

**Extract 9.2 - Caitlin, Aroha, and Ata 2 - *if she got the guy he's HERS* ♪**

- 45 Caitlin**     *you and your BEST friend are both attracted to the same person  
you've just found out that the person has contacted your best friend  
(.) to ASK for a date  
THERE you go ♪  
(1) you are distressed by the strength of  
(.) of your own feelings of anger and jealousy*
- 46 Aroha**     *k hehe (laughing a bit)*
- 47 Ata**        *um::: and then the questions are ♪  
(1) identify the issue ↑ (papers rustling)*

(2) dilemma  
**48 Aroha** th- the::::  
**49 Caitlin** the //GUY she li:::kes//  
**50 Ata** //she's jealous//  
**51 Aroha** //this gi:::rl//  
 this girl has to (2) she has to try to be supportive of her frien:::d ∪  
**52 Caitlin** and not jealous=  
**53 Aroha** =AND not jealous ∪  
 (.) uh but also like  
 (3) she has to um:::~  
 (2) wel- like (.) she HAS to get over her ow:::n:: problems ↑  
 y'know ↑ ((high rising))  
**54 Caitlin** and she needs to realise that //y'know//  
**55 Ata** //it's// YOU  
**56 Aroha** AHHH (laughing)  
**57 Ata** SAY it's YOU  
**58 Aroha** (paper rustling) it IS you (.) guys  
**59 Aroha** say if YOU liked someone and Hannah  
 (.) liked him and the boy asked Hannah out instead of you ∪  
**60 Caitlin** i'd BE upSET ∪ ∪ but then=  
**61 Aroha** =you would want Hannah to go for it ↑ or:::  
**62 Caitlin** I'D want her to go for it yeah ∪ ∪  
 cause if HE feels the same way about HER  
 you can't stop (.) //them ∪//  
**63 Aroha** //you// say that now  
 but if it really happened you'd be //completely gutted//  
**64 Caitlin** //i WOULD be// gutted ∪ but it's like  
**65 Ata** move on  
**66 Caitlin** yeah you've gotta move on ∪  
 you can't stop (3) let her be unhappy because of you ∪ ∪  
 ((pitch up)) cause what would YOU  
 what would YOU do Aroha ∪  
**67 Aroha** (4) well  
 (1) i would ACTually (1) let the person GO for it  
**68 Caitlin** exac- yeah ∪  
**69 Ata** same ↑  
**70 Aroha** did you say SAME ∪  
**71 Ata** yeah same yeah if she got the guy he's HERS ∪  
**72 Aroha** (.) i'd bloody punch her in the face ∪ ((laughter))

Despite the wording of this second dilemma, which once again places the listener directly in a sexual subject position, in turn 49 Caitlin again shifts to the hypothetical 'she', thus removing those present from that subject position. However, in lines 55 and 57, Ata changes the focus of the conversation back to those present, effectively pointing out the positioning in the question by saying "*it's YOU*". This move is further solidified by Aroha in turns 59 and 61 because she positions Hannah (a close friend of Caitlin's from this class) as 'the girl' who has been asked first. This is an interesting shift because it forces Caitlin to put herself directly in a sexual subject position (i.e. attracted to the same person as Hannah), a move which she likewise applies to Aroha in turn 66. Both Caitlin and Aroha say that they would tell the friend to go for it. This stance is agentive in the sense that they are exercising self control in relation to sexuality by refusing to allow jealousy and anger to usurp 'good sense'. What is yet more relevant here is that, even though the listener has not been asked on a date in this scenario, there is still a sense of agency via decision making. Aroha says she would "*let the person GO for it*" and the use of the word 'let' implies an active role rather than a passive one. That is, Aroha performs an active, knowing sexual subject position by implying that, as a result of her own desires, she could conceivably *forbid* her friend from 'going for it' but would choose not to take that course of action.

Finally, any lingering sense that the girl subject in this scenario is sexually passive is erased by Ata's statement in turn 71, in which she suggests that "*if she got the guy he's HERS*". In this way, Ata positions the girl as 'the getter' even though she was 'the asked' and not 'the asker', discrediting the notion that girls *passively* wait to be asked on dates with boys (cf Tainio 2002). Rather, being asked is framed here as the result of active, knowing sexuality on the part of the girl, who has become the pursuer and the man the pursued, which is a reversal of the roles traditionally demanded by hegemonic masculinity (see Baker 2008: 7). Furthermore, she is granted ownership of the boy (i.e. "*he's HERS*"). There is a sense that the girl has somehow engineered this result, an interpretation which is supported via consideration of what Ata did *not* say. For example, she did not say

"if the guy chose her, he's *HERS*". The heterosexual/(hete)romantic subject position of 'being asked' has been resignified because the act of asking (the boy's role) is framed as being a direct result of the girl's sexual agency rather than being framed as the starting point. Eckert (2006) has identified this type of heterosexual social engineering amongst pre-adolescent girls, suggesting that it starts out as an agentive activity for them but soon becomes subordination. This insight again raises the question of whether this is merely a 'breakthrough moment' in the sexual agency of girls rather than a sustained performance.

The other question which remains is whether this resignification of the 'being asked' subject position merely *permits* sexual agency for women in the face of hegemonic masculinity (i.e. it is derivative of men's sexual agency)? Or whether the issue of who asks whom has been revealed to be an over-simplification of (hetero)sexual agency. For in fact, it could be argued that Ata has turned this whole question of 'derivativeness' on its head, revealing that the sexual agency of men as 'the askers of women' is in fact equally derivative of women's sexual agency as 'the getters of men', with agency exercised on both sides. Sexual agency might look different for girls and boys as part of opposite-sex attraction, but this might not always mean that girls only gain sexual agency via their management of the sexual agency of men. The following section delves further into this idea by focusing on discussions of virginity and how sexual agency is framed in connection with this historically feminised (thus hegemonically feminine) gender construct.

### **9.2.2 - The happy virgin**

Changing course slightly, but remaining on the theme of passivity vs. agency in relation to the (hetero)sexuality of girls, a separate dilemma in this activity positions the listener as "a virgin" who feels some pressure to become "sexually active" despite being happy as a virgin. As another homosocial grouping of girls, Hannah, Sarah, Paige, and Olivia engage with this activity in Extract 9.3 (edited - for full version, see Appendix E), and they do so with a sense of humour. Orchestrated

largely by Hannah, their playful banter orients to the positioning of self and other in the subject positions of 'virgin' and 'sexually active'.

**Extract 9.3 - Hannah, Paige, Olivia, and Sarah - *BANGin any guy they see* ↻**

- 1 Hannah** *okay*  
*so SARah*  
*you're still a VIRgin ↻*  
*(.) HMMmm*
- 2 Sarah** *^ah!*
- 3 Olivia** *((laughing))*
- 4 Hannah** *and you're quite HAppy about that ↻*  
*(.) it's PART of the scenario ↻(.) AND you're HAppy about that*
- 5 Sarah** *//okay// can you (.) //get on ↻//*
- 6 Olivia** *AH //stop it// (laughing)*
- 7 Paige** *(laughing)*
- 8 Hannah** *YEAH:::: ↻*  
*(.) okay*  
*so YOU'RE still a VIRgin right ↻*  
*(laughing) and you're QUITE happy about that*  
*howEVER all your frien::ds ↻*  
*(1) (creaky voice) oh ((laughing from group))*  
*seemed okay:: ↻*  
*SO:: ↻*  
*I'M still a virgin ↻ and i'm quite HAppy about that*  
*howEVER all my friends seem to be sexually active*  
*and i feel //like// i'm getting L::EFT behind*
- 9 Olivia** *//AY-yeah// ((laughing from group))*
- 10 Hannah** *okay what's my dilemma*  
*((higher pitch)) i'm FEELing a little bit //behind//*
- 11 Sarah** *//yeah// (.) yeah you feel behind and you //like (.) feel//*
- 12 Hannah** *//i just// wanna DO it y'know*
- 13 Paige** *maybe PRESSured// yeah*
- 14 Hannah** *to SORTa get it out of the way*
- 15 Sarah** *you feel pressured by //xxxxxxx//*
- 16 Hannah** *//i have to// do it to be COOL y'know like all my FRIEN::::DS*  
*(laughing)*
- 17 Olivia** *maybe*

.....

- 26 Hannah** *okay*

- for each stakeholder describe their perspective their values and  
(.) well ((rapid speech)) MY value and belief could be  
that i don't wanna lose my virginity ↑  
or i wanna lost it with someone special //but//*
- 27 Paige** *//yeah//*
- 28 Hannah** *with all my friends going around BANGin any guy they see ↷*
- 29 Olivia** *HA ↷ ha (laughing)*
- 30 Hannah** *maybe i should just sorta do it as well*

In the wording of the activity, the subject position 'virgin' is set off against the 'sexually active' friends of the listener, implying that virgins are at least sexually inactive (but not necessarily passive, a positioning which would preclude agency). What is interesting from the point of view of this chapter is how, during their banter, these girls shift in and out of the 'sexually active' subject position, treating it as problematic for selfhood, yet at the same time constructing the position 'virgin' as a sexual one which requires an active, knowing sexuality in order to be maintained. A key difference between this discussion and the previous one (with Ata, Aroha, and Caitlin - see 9.2.1) is that this virginity-oriented sexual agency is not connected directly to the management of male sexual agency. The derivative quality of the mediation of hegemonic masculinity simply has little obvious role to play here, as Hannah deploys self-determination in her reasoning.

In turn 1, Hannah is reading aloud the scenario, but she chooses to insert Sarah's name into the narrative, positioning her as a hypothetical virgin. The hypothetical nature of this positioning is thrown into doubt, however, by her closing utterance for the turn. She pauses perceptibly after saying to Sarah that she is still a virgin and then says "HMMmm". Sarah reacts to this by making a 'how dare you' noise " ^ah!" suggesting perhaps that she has taken Hannah's utterance to represent a questioning of her virginity; however, other interpretations are possible, and the meaning of her response remains ambiguous as Hannah moves on. Hannah then points out that her 'happy virginity' is part of the scenario, but suddenly in turn 8 she realises that in positioning Sarah as the virgin, she has ended up positioning herself as sexually active. This realisation forces a turnaround in

which she places herself in the virgin position and later in turn 28 positions the others in the group as 'banging any guy they see'. It is through this turnaround that we see, even during playful banter, that for a girl to position herself as sexually active (and thus potentially sexually agentive) is something to avoid.

It is in this avoidance where we see some complicity with hegemonic masculinity because sexual activity, and so sexual agency, is framed as the privilege of boys who are ready and willing to be 'banged' by any girl who sees them (to borrow Hannah's phrasing). Finally, Hannah also constructs a binary in which 'virgin' and 'sexually active' sit as polar opposites. Sexually active is interpreted to mean having sex with multiple partners (i.e. banging any guy they see), and there is no allowance made for the possibility that the friends might have only had sex once, or, multiple times with one partner. This conversational move is indicative of the whore/virgin binary in which non-virgins are constructed as whores or sluts regardless of the circumstances of their actual experiences with sex (see Bamberg 2004c; Skapoulli 2009; Zavella and Castañeda 2005). Granted, Hannah's statement is much softer in tone than any use of the terms whore and slut would be, but the effect of her utterance is still to set up this binary.

It is in Hannah's subsequent reflections on virginity that sexual agency for girls ceases to be complicated by complicity with hegemonic masculinity. Virgin is a highly sexualised subject position because, as De Monck (1998) points out, prohibition of sexual contact still serves to ascribe sexuality to a subject (see section 9.1.1 above). As pointed out earlier (see section 9.1.2), even though virgin has tended to be framed as sexually *passive*, it is constructed in the talk of these young women as sexually agentive by way of the agency required if one is to *choose* and *maintain* virginity. As an extension of this point, in turn 26 above, Hannah suggests that she can choose to be selective about with whom to 'lose' her virginity (*MY value and belief could be that i don't wanna lose my virginity ↑ or i wanna lost it with someone special*), and furthermore, she frames sexual *activity* as the passive choice in this context (turn 30 - *maybe i should just sorta do it as well*). This is an active,



knowing virginity which locates sexual agency in strategic, temporary abstinence from sexual contact. This finding parallels Pichler (2007), a study which has identified romantic discourse around virginity as sexually agentive:

...it seems to me that this romantic discourse, in which first time sex with a loving/loved partner is constructed as a special and worthwhile event, does not highlight the passivity of girls, as some researchers have maintained (Lees 1993; Walkerdine 1984). This romantic discourse allows for a greater degree of individual agency and power than a discourse of premarital chastity...because it encourages the girls to make their own choice about when, where, and with whom they want to have sex. (Pichler 2007: 83)

As with Hannah's take on virginity a 'discourse of self-determination' for girls emerges in Pichler's data. As will be seen in the next section, this active, knowing virginity is also evoked by Kate, Callum and Logan in their separate effort to respond to the same dilemma; however they apply it to a boy. This boy's navigation of virginity does not end up looking very different, thus throwing into doubt the assumption that virginity and abstinence are complicit with hegemonic masculinity.

### **9.2.3 - Virgin as a boy**

The third (and final) group whose discussion will be the focus of analysis is a mixed gender one composed of Kate and Callum (a long-term couple) and Logan. This section departs slightly from the stated focus of this chapter in the sense that the participants are not all girls, and additionally the focus of their discussion is on the experiences of a hypothetical boy. However, there are numerous elements of their discussion which directly parallel the findings from Hannah's group and so relate directly to this chapter's focus on sexual passivity and/or the performance of inactive, unknowing sexual subjectivities for women who have sex with men. In Extract 9.4 (edited - for full version, see Appendix E), the participants have located themselves in Logan's car, out in the car park. Kate has read the scenario aloud and in turn 20 reads the first question.

**Extract 9.4 - Kate, Callum, and Logan 1 - he may lose his friends because he is a virgin**

- 20 Kate**      *yeah (2) um  
three C (.) within each perspective whose (.) rights are being  
COMPromised*
- 21 Logan**    *the virgin=*
- 22 Kate**      *=the virgin  
because he's feeling*
- 23 Callum**    *it's not a he ∪ is it ↑*
- 24 Logan**    *//it's a// herMAPHrodyte*
- 25 Kate**      *//or she ∪//  
(5) um:::  
(5) what are the short term and long term implications  
consequences  
for each stakeholder perspective in relation to both individuals and  
communities considering the following aspects  
SOCial  
(1) he may lose his friends ↑ because  
THEY may lose their friends*
- 26 Callum**    *no ∪ HE ↻*
- 27 Kate**      *(3) he may lose his friends because he is a virgin  
and all his friends aren't virgins  
and they all want to go and have sexual activities and he'll be left  
behind*

In turn 25, Kate makes a change from referring to the virgin as a gender-neutral 'they' (in previous lines - refer Appendix for full transcript) to saying 'he'. Despite some protest from Callum in turn 23, she sticks to this choice and it remains 'he' throughout the discussion, with both Callum and Logan eventually cooperating. This is an interesting example of resignification of the term virgin, for it produces a discussion in which a boy is positioned as 'a virgin and happy about it' (to apply the wording of the dilemma). This positioning sits in opposition to the observed tendency for virginity to be a stigma for boys in western society (see 9.1.2 above). In addition, boys are framed here as people who can find sexual agency in abstinence. This parallels the 'male agency through self-control' theme observed in 6.2.3. Extract 9.5 (edited - for full version, see Appendix E) continues this theme.

**Extract 9.5 - Kate, Callum, and Logan 2 - if it's you out there virgin boy DON'T do it**

- 44 Callum** all //right//  
**45 Kate** //all/ right  
**46 Callum** personal reflection come on guys ∪  
**47 Kate** (2) um basically i feel sorry for this guy cause  
 (1) he's felt (.) he feels the pressure to have sex  
 because he doesn't wanna be left behind  
 but then again=  
**48 Callum** =he should do it when he feels like it  
**49 Logan** w-  
**50 Kate** it's //his personal choice//  
**51 Logan** //are we getting his opinion// on it ↑  
**52 Callum** no he just feels like he  
 (.) he's (.) no he's happy that he's a virgin  
 but he feels he has to lose his virginity because his friends=  
**53 Logan** =well:::: STUFF his friends  
 he should stay a virgin if it's //how he feels ↑//  
**54 Kate** //if it's// you out there (.) virgin boy (laughs)  
 DON'T do it (laughing)

As Hannah does for girls in extract 9.3, Kate in turn 50 frames virginity for boys as active and knowing - as 'doing' rather than being - when she says "it's *his personal choice*" (i.e. he has a capacity to act independently). Logan backs this up in turn 53 when he suggests that the boy who is happy as a virgin should think foremost about what he wants: "well:::: *STUFF his friends he should stay a virgin if it's //how he feels ↑//*". Logan's use of the verb 'stay' suggests an agentive holding of a position, not a passive state.

In the end, virginity for boys is framed here in a very similar manner to how it was framed for girls by Hannah's group. So perhaps these two groups have demonstrated that the active, sexually-knowing virgin is a sexually agentive subject position which applies equally to males and females, and is not in complicity with hegemonic masculinity. Then again, perhaps the reason the male and female virgin positions co-exist so well is because the male position might be 'subordinated' masculinity (see section 2.5.2). However, there is no sense in the data that the

participants see it as subordinate, and so I would like to suggest that, in this CoP at least, perhaps active virginity is indeed a non-derivative sexually agentive subject position for both boys and girls.

### 9.3 Summary

In summary, in this chapter examples have been highlighted in which girls position themselves and other girls as sexually agentive. This is achieved via resignification of subject positionings such as 'virgin' and 'being asked' in the context of dating. Another example was highlighted in which we saw that sexually agentive subject positions for boys and girls could be constructed in a very similar manner, and unproblematically as part of the immediate interaction.

A central quandary is whether or not sexually agentive subject positions for women who have sex with men are always somehow derivative of the sexual agency of those men and so by extension complicit with hegemonic masculinity. Eckert (2002: 108) describes the experiences of Angela, a participant whose active pursuit of a boy and subsequent sexual encounter with him were more about “accomplish[ing] social work” in her peer network than they were about desire. At least in the narrative of events that Eckert imparts, Angela comes across as irrefutably sexually agentive and quite independently of the boy (although *who* first approached *whom* remains untold). Another example from the present study is Ata's positioning of girls (in an opposite-sex-attraction scenario) as both asked and pursuer, and positioning of boys as both asker and pursued. Can this positioning not simply be viewed as an example of sexual agency for girls? To *presume* that it is complicity, or a mere 'breakthrough moment' in the ongoing relative powerlessness of women (Baxter 2003: 32; see also Eckert 2006 [1996]), would be to reify hegemonic masculinity, yet further bolstering its power, and thus in itself comprise an act of complicity (cf Bing and Bergvall 1996).

What is certain is that this is a question which requires further investigation and consideration, for as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have pointed out while

reflecting on Connell's original development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity (see Connell 1995), the theory has always presumed that gender hierarchies are subject to change, since gender relations are historical (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). If it is indeed a worthy goal of sexuality education to foster access by girls to sexually agentive subject positions, then the possibility that this access has changed for the better (at least in some contexts) must be explored.



# Chapter 10

## *Conclusion*

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### **10.1 Summary of thesis**

This thesis has investigated the performance of sexual agency in a secondary school sexuality education classroom in New Zealand. Chapter 1 provided the rationale for undertaking this research, locating a need for close sociocultural linguistic analysis of precisely how agency is negotiated in relation to sex and sexuality in classroom talk by adolescents. The research questions framed the investigation's focus, asking about the linguistic and discursive processes which young people employ in order to perform sexually agentive subject positions, ascribe them to others, and align with, rework or resist such ascriptions during a classroom-based sexuality education programme. The answers to these questions serve to fill a research gap which overlaps the fields of *language and sexuality/gender* and *sexuality education*. This gap persists because the discursive construction of *a capacity to act* in relation to sexuality remains under-described despite the fact that the development of such a capacity is seen (in both of these fields) to hold significance in the socialisation of young people. Chapter 2 outlined terms and concepts used during discourse analysis, with a focus on performativity and agency as well as a detailed description of the particular poststructuralist perspectives on gender and sexuality adopted for this study.

Chapters 3-5 form a progression from the identification of a tripartite approach to research (i.e. linguistic ethnography, poststructuralist discourse analysis, and queer inquiry) to 'thick description' of the research site and participants in order to work towards giving the reader an insider perspective on this CoP. Chapter 4 provided a detailed description of the research setting and participants from the researcher's point of view, relying on fieldnotes in order to capture an evolving understanding during participant observation of the participants' personalities and roles. This level of description was undertaken in

order to contextualise the research as much as possible and provide background to the analyst's interpretations of each person's spoken contributions. Chapter 5 outlined the emergence of a CoP in this classroom, providing detailed evidence that it was indeed a CoP rather than presuming so. Nested within this exploration of the nature of this community was further description of norms of behaviour that developed as part of localised practice, information which again supports contextualisation as part of research credibility and reliability.

Chapters 6-9 represent the analytical body of the thesis. Each chapter contained a detailed description of the lesson from which the analysed recording was drawn and of the roles and influences of participants (teacher, students and researcher). In Chapter 6 gender was uncoupled from bodies during analysis, revealing that the doing of masculinities and femininities interacts very closely with performances of sexually agentic subject positions. Students drew upon hegemonic masculinity and femininity while reworking sexually agentic subject positions in order to create a better 'fit' between sexual agency and their multiple identities. Chapter 7 turned attention to a lesson in which the students explored intersex awareness with guest facilitator Mani Mitchell, and narrative was seen to provide distinctive affordances for the exploration of sexually agentic subject positions. The positioning of the students by Mani also recognised their agency, thus stimulating the negotiation of sexually agentic subject positions during discussion. In Chapter 8, the focus shifted to computer-mediated communication in an online, mostly anonymous chat session in which overt gender markers were removed. During this chat session it was revealed that references to body dimorphism (i.e. male/female as a binary) produced exaggerated ascriptions of sexual agency to men and boys (therefore engaging in complicity with hegemonic masculinity). However, when sexual subjects were generalised (e.g. as 'people') sexual agency was extended to girls via a discourse of sex as 'a fun activity' for all young people. The contrast between these two positions creates a paradox, raising many questions for future research. Finally, Chapter 9 focused on girls and sexual agency, looking at discussions of 'being asked' on dates as well as discussions of



virginity. Analysis reveals positioning of both girls and boys as sexual agents, but via active, knowing virginity and what I term 'strategic abstinence'. In this chapter it was also revealed that positioning girls as 'asked' and boys as 'askers' in relation to (hetero)sexual/(hetero)romantic dating scenarios does not preclude agency for girls. By positioning 'the asked' (i.e. the girl) as the pursuer, these girls throw into doubt the assumption that sexual agency is only about 'who asks whom'.

## 10.2 Implications and limitations

The implications of the findings of this study fall under four categories. There are methodological implications, mostly arising from the insights gained via the application of a queer approach to inquiry. There are implications for sociocultural linguistics, particularly for the study of language and gender/sexuality, and these arise from insights gained into the nuances of interaction between sexual agency as a construct and gendered identities. There are theoretical implications arising from the fruitful application of performative agency in this study, suggesting that agency is indeed, at least partly, *in* language as opposed to outside of it. Finally there are numerous implications for learning communities in which sexuality enjoys a sustained focus. These implications are explained in more detail below.

The limitations of this study are located chiefly in its focus on gender and sexuality to the exclusion of ethnicity. Although it was observed that the ethnicity of participants was not foregrounded at any time during my time as a participant observer (see section 3.3.9), this is partly a result of my focus as researcher. In fact Tasker (2000), the resource which formed the basis of this classroom programme, contained a unit called *Sexuality and Cultural Differences*, but this unit was not included in the classroom programme. This was a mutual decision made by myself and Mr. Johnson during course planning because there was not enough time to cover everything, and the activities which seemed most likely to generate sexual agency performances were not part of that section. Thus an opportunity to observe the articulation of sexual agency with the ethnic self-identifications of the students

was lost; and the opportunity was a considerable one considering the multicultural environment of Matangi College. Hopefully future research can take this articulation point between sexual agency and ethnicity as its focus.

The issue of ethnicity leads to another limitation of this study, one which results from the ethnographic approach applied. As Hymes (1996) has pointed out (see section 3.1.2), partiality is always going to be an aspect of this type of research. Thus it is also possible that, despite my years spent immersed in this particular suburb's cultural mosaic, that I (as a Canadian/New Zealander of European ethnicity) simply did not have 'the ears to hear' and 'the eyes to see' the influences that ethnic self-identifications might have been having on sexual agency performance (or avoidance). The hope is that by presenting the data in published form, others who are equipped with a different gaze might be able to identify such moments and bring them to light.

### **10.2.1 Methodological implications**

The queer approach to research which has formed a partial focus of this study has generated some insights which might have remained obscure in the absence of a critical stance on heteronormativity. This is because the inclusion of heteronormativity critique as part of the tripartite research design led to suspicion of body dimorphism as an explanation of the biological reality of human physiological variation. This suspicion of the body binary (i.e. male/female as 'only two' – see section 3.1.6) led to the inclusion of intersex awareness as part of the sexuality education program, an inclusion which generated an extended opportunity for students to engage with sexually agentive subject positions during discussion, and from a non-binary point view, thus contributing useful data to the field of language and sexuality/gender. This commitment to heteronormativity critique also contributed to insights gained during analysis of the online chatting sessions. Applying heteronormativity critique as part of discourse analysis of these computer-mediated discussions generated insight into the discursive connections between hegemonic masculinity and the male/female binary, a connection

mediated by sexual agency, and at the expense of women. Thus the inclusion of a queer approach to inquiry permitted some analytical distance from the taken-for-granted male/female binary and facilitated identification of its influence on discourse.

### **10.2.2 Implications for Sociocultural Linguistics of gender/sexuality**

In relation to the fields which Bucholtz and Hall (2005) integrate under the umbrella term Sociocultural Linguistics, there are a number of implications. First of all there is evidence in this study that subject positions which are frequently viewed as passive and perhaps not even sexual (e.g. virgin, 'the asked' as opposed to 'the asker', the person disinterested in sex) can be constructed during interaction as both sexual and agentive. The virgin (of any bodily description) who is 'constituted for action' in relation to sex, or the 'asked' as pursuer, or the abstinent subject with a capacity for sexual 'action' all raise an important question about sexual agency performances of young women in particular. By resignifying these subject positions as sexually agentive and available to all, it appears that it is possible for young women to be positioned as sexually agentive within heteronormative interaction. For analysts to single-mindedly attach agency to 'askers on dates' or 'makers of sexual advances' would appear, at least in the context of this CoP, to result in an oversimplification of (hetero)sexual agency. One counter-argument could be that these performances which seem to turn heteronormativity on its head are simply reworkings of old gendered scripts (e.g. the wily woman and the duped man) and thus merely breakthrough moments for girls in a web of subordination. However, as academics analysing transcripts we must be prepared to consider the possibility that heteronormativity, being historical and thus open to change, might have been reworked in spite of its hegemony via reiterations of subject positions and thus now provides a more egalitarian space for sexual agency. Future research can hopefully shed light on this possibility.

The finding in this study that abstinence from sex can be a way to construct sexual agency is bound to be contested, especially within a USA context where

*abstinence-only* sexuality education has been so deeply controversial and problematic (see Fine and McClelland 2006). In fact it is with some reservation that I have taken analysis in this direction, for my own biases have tended to sit against the idea that abstinence is an empowering discourse for young people. However, as the data clearly took analysis in that direction, I soon realised that there is a key difference between 'abstinence only' teaching paradigms and the version of abstinence which has emerged in this study. The sexual agency of the sexually abstinent (and/or sexually disinterested) subject was, in this case, constructed by the participants *themselves* rather than being imposed upon them by educational ideology. Also, to impose abstinence as the *only* choice for young people is to foreclose upon agency in relation to sexuality; for agency lies in the *discursive construction* of a capacity to act rather than a compulsion to follow instructions. Also, the 'ideally non-sexual' positioning (Allen 2007c), which has been identified as a problematic double bind for young people (see section 2.2), is called forth by abstinence-only rhetoric whereas in this case the strategically abstinent young person is constructed as sexual, and this is another key difference.

Setting aside educationally-imposed messages of abstinence for a moment, one of the advantages for young people in developing a sense that sexual agency is possible via *strategic* and *transitory* abstinence (i.e. preference and choice based) is that it can be a way to reconcile sexual agency with other aspects of their identities (e.g. religious identities). If abstinence is constructed via discussion and interaction as one sexually agentic subject position amongst many (as it was in the data here), then it can be a useful way for young people to position themselves as sexual (with the capacity to act upon it) whilst finding ways to simultaneously position themselves as sexually 'out of action' at specific times for specific reasons. I take the position that this scenario is very different from an imposed message saying that all young people should abstain from sex (i.e. ideally be non-sexual).

Another insight from the data in this study is that sexual compulsiveness is not in fact always sexually agentic; thus, hegemonic masculinity (with its sexual

imperatives) can stand in the way of sexual agency rather than bolstering it, particularly with versions that de-emphasise rationality. This means that sexually agentive subject positions for boys are not fully straightforward either because of the need to mitigate discourses of 'hard-wired' readiness for sex, which tend to construct boys (and men) as out of control sexually. This is because within the 'discursively constructed capacity to act' is a sense that 'to act' is not to glide or 'waft' along, passively controlled by one's urges. Rather, to act is to be in control. Thus exaggerated versions of masculinity, like their corresponding femininities, will have a deleterious effect on sexual agency development via passivity. The implication here is that analysts of language must not presume that sexual agency performance for boys and men is entirely unproblematic, and in fact hegemonic masculinity's shadow can create performances of passive compulsion in relation to sex, or at least the 'spectre' of sexual compulsion might need to be disavowed or avoided if young men are to perform sexually agentive subject positions.

Another area with implications is that of the influence of the male/female binary on the unfolding of discourse. References to body dimorphism (i.e. the male/female binary) evoked exaggerated characterisations of men and women, both of which can create limitations in the development of sexual agency, whereas avoidance of reference to body dimorphism tended to circumvent these 'battle of the sexes' responses. This was true even in a text-only, anonymous, gender-stripped context (see chapter 8). Although based on a small amount of data, one implication of this trend is that it supports Butler's insight that the male/female body binary is one of heteronormativity's 'stabilising mechanisms' (see section 3.1.6). A more central issue from the point of view of this study is that as part of these exaggerated characterisations, sexual agency was entirely denied women whilst it was ascribed to men. On the other hand, when male/female bodies were not foregrounded and the discussion was about 'people' in general, women were included in sexually agentive subject positions. This is a paradox which has implications for the study of language and sexuality, for it suggests that analysts need to be aware that direct reference to binaries during conversation might be

stimulating 'ritualised' or 'formulaic' alignments with hegemonic masculinity and femininity. These are alignments which might rapidly break down once binaries are pushed aside and attention turns to 'superordinate' categories (such as 'people' or 'doctors'). Thus a queer approach, with its suspicion of binaries, can assist discourse analysts to detect the effects of binary thinking (see also section 10.2.1).

### **10.2.3 Theoretical implications**

The framing of agency in poststructuralist, performative terms in this study has been productive, generating many useful examples of how the capacity to act in relation to sex and sexuality is constructed discursively. Analysis has demonstrated that alignment with and/or resignification of the sexual subject positions encountered by students permits them to rework sexual agency to suit their interactional needs at the time. This demonstration of students "capitalis[ing] upon the space between word and effect" (Magnus 2006: 84 - see section 2.7.3) has theoretical implications because until recently reductive readings of performativity theory, which neglect Butler's recent thinking on the topic, have led some to discount performativity in relation to agency. Framed as 'ambiguous' and 'external' (Vitanova 2010) as well as 'unsituated' and 'blind to complexity' (McNay 2004), performative agency has too often been passed over in favour of other formulations of agency in which agency is seen to exist as an entity outside of language. The findings of this study support the idea that in fact the use of language is itself an agentive act (see Bucholtz and Hall 2005) and that agency is 'in' language (Duranti 2004). Thus it is during talk about sex and sexuality that students (indeed everyone) can begin to compose themselves as sexually agentive subjects who have multiple identities in tune with that composition. The 'flipside' of this point is that any lack of access to sexual agency is also located in language, with normative discourses precluding sexually agentive subject formation. It is thus via repeated recrafting of problematic discourses that agency can be located, a process which might be enhanced via agency recognition by others (including teachers and developers of classroom resources).

#### 10.2.4 Classroom implications

Thus it is by framing sexual agency as the formation of *sexually agentive subjects* that a way forward can be identified in sexuality education. Providing sexuality education students with a forum in which to spend ample time talking about sexuality can allow for the development of a self who has the capacity to act sexually and be in control of those actions. These are also selves who have been given the opportunity to ‘juggle’ elements of their subjectivities which pose problems in the process, and sort out a way to reconcile those elements with sexual agency. In other words, it allows them the intellectual and social space to sort out what it means to have the capacity to act in relation to sexuality and how this capacity fits with (or forms a poor fit with) other aspects of selfhood such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, class, ethnicity, or religious belief.

It could be argued that many classrooms are not conducive to this type of discussion, and so questions might be asked as to why this exploration of sexual agency needs to take place in classrooms instead of in other adult-supervised settings or through life experience. However, as this study has demonstrated, classrooms can be organised in such a way that a gradual development of mutual trust occurs and localised community practice can be negotiated around how to have constructive discussions about sexuality. This model provides some social safety and guidance which everyday life (as well as classrooms which are not learning communities) frequently cannot offer. Another reason that classrooms are appropriate locations for the formation of sexually agentive subjects is that measured intervention is possible on the part of educators. This study has revealed that the positioning of students (indeed anyone) as sexually agentive can be done in multiple ways to suit localised contexts, and it is possible for teachers and the designers of learning resources to ‘engineer’ these positionings. In support of this assertion, the concept of ‘ego-affirming’ agency (Duranti 2004), which I’ve referred to in this document as agency recognition, has consistently been in evidence during interactions in this study. Agency recognition, via learning resources or the

intervention of teachers, can lead to repeated subject positionings through which a sense of self as sexual agent accrues. When participants have their sexual agency recognised by teaching resources or the words of others, it sets in motion responses to that positioning (whether alignment, disavowal or resignification), and it is through these responses that sexual agency can be discursively performed and related to other aspects of self. Thus the types of discourses the teacher or resource operates from are critical to student possibilities.

### **10.3 Concluding remarks**

As outlined in section 2.7, the stylistic acts that we 'do' through language are oriented to future selves more than to our current concepts of what we are (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 320). It is through these stylistic acts that young people might become the assured sexual selves they need to be in order to navigate the risks involved with sexual activity (for these are real), but also to access the pleasures of sexuality as part of a healthy life. If the girls who were identified as 'at risk' in Holland et al. (1998 - see opening paragraph of thesis) had worked out how to initiate talk with men about condoms, yet still manage to avoid the 'spectre' of pariah femininities (e.g. 'slut'), then their ability to be agentive about safe sex might have been less problematic. From this point of view, the hope is that this research has made a contribution to a more detailed understanding of just how sexual agency plays out in conversation, particularly in a classroom setting. By applying a poststructuralist understanding of language and meaning, the findings have demonstrated that relinquishing a didactic approach to sexuality education and embracing a community-based, discussion-oriented paradigm can result in reconciliation between sexual agency and the circulating discourses which complicate its realisation. Pedagogical implications remain within the purview of Education scholars, but the sociolinguistic dynamics of sexual agency are perhaps one step closer to clarity, providing more tools for future investigations.



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# APPENDICES

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## Appendix A - Transcription Conventions

- // Slashes indicate overlapping speech.
- word- A hyphen indicates abruptly cut-off speech.
- (1) Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time of silence in seconds.
- (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a tiny gap, less than 1 second.
- :: Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. The length of the row of colons indicates the length of the prolongation.
- WORD Capitals indicate especially emphasized sounds compared to surrounding talk (including "I").
- ( ) Single parentheses contain prosodic contributions - e.g. (laughter).
- (( )) Double parentheses contain author's descriptions rather than transcriptions.
- ↑ Indicates rising intonation in the preceding syllable.
- ↶ Indicates falling and then rising intonation in the preceding syllable.
- ↷ Indicates rising and then falling intonation in the preceding syllable.
- ^ Represents a glottal stop



# Appendix B - Chapter 6 Transcripts

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## Extracts 6.7 and 6.8 - Full Transcript

Codey, Ben & Isaac – *When did you choose your sexual orientation?*

- 1 Codey**      *question thirteen*  
*when did you choose your sexual orientation*
- 2 Ben**      *what does that mean (2)*  
*I:: do not know*
- 3 Codey**      *(laughing) //hey MISTEr//*
- 4 Ben**      *((to Isaac)) //he doesn't// even KNOW man*
- 5 Codey**      *WHY is that STUPID question there*
- 6 Ben**      *what does number thirteen mean*
- 7 Mr. J**      *eh↑*
- 8 Codey**      *is //it saying do you wanna be a h-//*
- 9 Ben**      *//when did you choose your// sexual orientation*
- 10 Mr. J**      *how easy would it be if you wanted to change your //sexual-//*
- 11 Codey**      *//NO//*
- 12 Isaac**      *number thirTEEN*
- 13 Mr. J**      *oh*  
*i thought you'd DONE thirt- OH thirteen*  
*when did you choose your sexual orientation*
- 14 Ben**      *yeah what does //that mean//*
- 15 Codey**      *//that MEAN//*
- 16 Mr. J**      *so when did you deCIDE*  
*if you were heterosexual or you were homosexual*
- 17 Codey**      *OH sexual orienTation=*
- 18 Ben**      *=oh yeah yeah yeah*
- 19 Codey**      *when did you deCIDE //that you were either straight gay//=*
- 20 Isaac**      *//on the day i was BORN niggah↑ ((short laugh))//*
- 21 Ben**      *=or heterosexual*
- 22 Codey**      *so now (.) what is your answer*
- 23 Ben**      *well:::*
- 24 Codey**      *(laughs)*
- 25 Ben**      *i wouldn't have a clue*  
*i'm still a growing man↑*  
*//so:://*
- 26 Codey**      *//HA HA//*
- 27 Isaac**      *(laughing)*
- 28 Codey**      *((calling out to room)) he //could be// GAY guys*
- 29 Ben**      *i don-*  
*i i don't know↑*

**30 Codey** (laughs)  
**31 Ben** i i'm st- i'm still //experiencing// changes man↑  
**32 Codey** //true haha//  
**33 Ben** farg  
 jeez  
 but i'm pretty sure i'm heterosexual man  
**34 Codey** awh  
 so //Ben's heteroSEXual// (laughs)  
**35 Ben** //i'm like a hundred per cent-//  
**36 Isaac** what does that mean  
 what does that mean  
**37 Codey** um exactly what he SAID  
 now YOUR turn (1)  
 YOUR turn Isaac  
**38 Isaac** MY turn↑  
 how easy would it be for you //if you wanted to-//  
**39 Ben** //don't you wanna answer// the QUESTION ma::::n  
**40 Codey** answer man  
**41 Ben** you gotta answer the QUEStion man↑↑=  
**42 Isaac** i DID  
**43 Codey** no you DIDn't  
**44 Isaac** (laughs) myehh:::  
**45 Ben** come ON man  
**46 Isaac** i ANswered (2)  
**47 Codey** ((more gently)) just ANswer it  
**48 Ben** go  
 hurry up you gotta answer it man  
**49 Isaac** ((reading aloud)) when did you choose your sexual orientation  
**50 Codey** you understand the QUEStion eh  
**51 Isaac** yeah (1)  
 I don't know↑  
**52 Codey** ((raises voice)) you don't know whether you're gay or straight  
**53 Ben** (laughing)  
**54 Isaac** no i KNOW that i'm (1)  
**55 Codey** well I CHOOSE //whether you're gay or// straight  
**56 Ben** //you're not gay//  
 you KNOW about that right↑  
**57 Isaac** yeah  
**58 Ben** so if somebody just came up randomly touching you like that  
 would you punch him in the head↑  
**59 Codey** when did you choose that you  
 when did you choose that you like girls  
**60 Isaac** hm↑  
**61 Codey** when did you choose that you like women since you're not gay  
**62 Isaac** when i was growing up  
**63 Ben** when did you choose your sexual orientation

**64 Codey**      *(3) when i was:: SIX years old man*  
**65 Ben**        *six years old=*  
**66 Codey**      *=no no (1) FOUR years old*  
**67 Ben**        *four years old*  
                   *WHY four years old*  
**68 Codey**      *because i liked (2)*  
                   *i liked girls*  
**69 Ben**        *well how did you know you liked girls back from four*  
**70 Codey**      *aw cause=*  
**71 Ben**        *=when i was four i was-*  
**72 Isaac**      *cause he watched TV and he*  
**73 Codey**      *when i watched this Janet Jackson video and i liked her*  
                   *i thought she was*  
**74 Isaac**      *((singing like Janet Jackson))*  
**75 Codey**      *i don't know*  
                   *(1) i found her INTEResting*  
**76 Ben**        *(laughing)*  
**77 Codey**      *i wanted to BOND to her*



# Appendix C - Chapter 7 Transcripts

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## Extracts 7.1 and 7.2 - Full Transcript

- 1 Liam**            *what's THIS piece of paper for (1) awwwww ((sotto voce)) my ass is sore↑ (.) been sitting too long*
- 2 Mani**            *there's one for you↑ (.) okay so there's um THREE exercises (.) so we'll just focus on the first one (.) so that's case study one=*
- 3 Rawiri**           *=yeah*
- 4 Mani**            *so (.) my suggestion is (3) that one person reads it out↑*
- 5 Liam**            *are we reading out↑ (1) uh the case study↑ or:::*
- 6 Mani**            *yeah the case study and then theres s- some things to think about an- and talk*
- 7 Liam**            *//oh okay*
- 8 Mani**            *//okay↑*
- 9 Luana**           *((softly)) FUCK //that's a piece of DIRT*
- 10 Liam**           *//we're doing case study one, everybody*
- 11 Mani**           *all right i'll sit in with you guys*
- 12 Liam**           *okay*
- 13 Rawiri**           *(3) who's gonna read*
- 14 Luana**           *Liam*
- 15 Liam**           *hm↑*
- 16 Rawiri**           *'sup Liam (.) ((laughs gently))*
- 17 Luana**           *Liam↑*
- 18 Liam**           *so:: which part am i reading↑ the //whole thing*
- 19 Rawiri**           *//the whole thing=*
- 20 Luana**           *=case study one*
- 21 Mani**           *eloisa*
- 22 Liam**           *elois davis:: (.) is that davis↑ or //davis*
- 23 Mani**           *//yup*
- 24 Liam**           *davies davis an american exchange student mixed race latino heritage identifies as intersex  
as bisexual (.) oh okay (.) you've been seeing each other for a few weeks  
eloisa is a (.) high energy fun person (clears throat) she describes herself  
androgga- (.)*
- 25 Mani**           *androgynous↑*
- 26 Liam**           *androgynous (.) and while you know at school she's a girl she is (.) she often is mistaken as a BOY she has short hair a wiry athletic body very little almost NO (1) make that NO breast development (.) she is  
((sounding out)) ar-tic-u-late (.) has a sense of humour and you find*

- yourself attracted to her (.) as you start talking she tells you she has an unusual body and that she has (.) in her words a:: (.) very large (.)
- 27 Mani** clitoris
- 28 Liam** clitoris:: (.) she asks you straight up if we got serious would that be an issue for you (1) what's a clitoris
- 29 Mani** so the clitoris is:: the female part of the body↑ that's the sexual part so you've got the vagina↑ and then the clitoris is the (.) part in front of it where the eroticism the sensuality is (.) now
- 30 Liam** so as in like between the cervix and the (.) vagina
- 31 Mani** so you've got you've got the vaginal opening HERE↑ and the clitoris is here ((using fingers to make shapes)) (.) so in an intersex person tha- (.) cause REALLY what a clitoris is is a baby penis
- 32 Luana** mmHM
- 33 Mani** okay↑ but in this person her clitoris is very large (1) okay so what she's saying to you in a VErY straight up HONest way (.) is if we were having a relationship↑ would this be an issue (.) cause really what she's saying shorthand is i've got a very different BOdy (.) MY body is not standard female an:::d if we got SERious and had a relationship (.) is this gonna be a problem (.) pretty hard question for ANYone to (.) to //to give to you if you weren't prepared for it
- 34 Liam** //yeah yeah
- 35 Mani** so what we're gonna do is (.) is as a group talk about that so=
- 36 Liam** =okay since i read↑ (.) someone else can respond
- 37 Mani** ABsolutely you ge- you //get to be quiet for a while
- 38 Stuart** //yeah
- 39 Mani** so
- 40 Liam** away you go Rawiri //((laughs softly))
- 41 Mani** //so (.) yeah and THAT'S fine cause what i- what i'm saying is (.) i'm i'm not asking you to even imagine tha- that you might be lesbian or heterosexual we're just thinking about this from ((soft 'thinking' voice)) WOW THAT'S different (.) yeah what would all the issues be (5) cause that's what you guys have been talking about i- is reLAtionships an- and=
- 42 Rawiri** =((softly)) yeah=
- 43 Mani** and how you develop those an:: (.) when y- when you're starting to get serious and you're starting to get intimate an- and someone shares something with you HOW do y= HOW do you reSPOND to that (3) who would find it EAsy for a start off ((Ana raises hand))
- 44 Liam** i don't=
- 45 Mani** =so what would you (.) what would YOU say ((points at Ana)) (6)
- 46 Ana** THAT wouldn't be a problem↑
- 47 Mani** so for you it WOULDn't be a problem (.) and so y'know and that would start the converSAtion wouldn't it because that's what you'd say (.) it's NOT a big deal we'll work that out (.) that's cool (1) thank you for telling me↑



**48 Rawiri** ((softly)) yeah::: ((nervous exhalation and half-laugh))  
**49 Mani** and i guess (.) y'know if you think about it (.) at school a- are the- is there anyone at school who IS different↑ that YOU know↑  
**50 Rawiri** uh::: ((looking up and left))  
**51 Ana** mm  
**52 Mani** a- a- are the- is there anyone who:: say is (.) has difficulties HEARING or is in a wheelchair↑  
**53 Liam** yeah there's two //in a in a wheelchair  
**54 Luana** //uh we've got two students in our school that are (.)  
**55 Liam** in wheelchairs  
**56 Luana** in wheelchairs↑=  
**57 Mani** //yeah  
**58 Luana** //but then (.) like (3) what (.)  
**59 Ana** not wheelchairs that you push but like the ones that you //XXXX  
**60 Liam** //the eLEctrical ones //cause (.)  
**61 Mani** //the eLEctrical ones yup↑=  
**62 Liam** =their bones are (1) like really (.) weak or something (.) //their MUScular stuff XXXX or something  
**63 Mani** //okay so for many of us that is the first time we need to deal with difference↑ is around PHYSical difference and people in wheelchairs are often one of our more usual experiences (11) so it's probably hard for you guys talking with ME here so i'm just gonna g- (.) pull away for a little bit↑ and you can talk and then i'll come back  
**64 Ana** ((softly)) okay  
**65 Liam** oh okay (25:40) ((for conversation from 25:40-27:17, refer to Extract 7.2 in Chapter 7))  
  

.....

**66 Mani** so you've been able to talk↑  
**67 Rawiri** //yeah (.) yeah  
**68 Mani** //so wha-  
**69 Liam** yeah=  
**70 Mani** so what's come up  
**71 Rawiri** um:::  
**72 Liam** oh=  
**73 Ana** =we've (.) um:::  
**74 Ruby** you can't change a person from who they are  
**75 Mani** you can't change a person from who they are (.) yeah so::: it's up to you whether or not you're gonna be comfortable with it↑ //or uncomfortable=  
**76 Ruby** //yeah  
**77 Liam** =yeah  
**78 Mani** AWESome (.) okay  
**79 Rawiri** ((sharp intake of breath and loud sigh))  
**80 Ana** what are the ISSues here

**81 Luana** we just talked about //that  
**82 Liam** //what does it mean by ISSues  
**83 Ana** is it the fact that she's //got a  
**84 Liam** //could it be factors as to why she's XXXX XXXX  
**85 Ana** //clee-TOR-iss↑ ((sounding it out))  
**86 Mani** yeah so her large cliTORis:: (.) her androgynous- basically if you went out with this person people wouldn't know if she was a girl or a boy↑ (.) if they thought (1) if you were going out with her and people thought she was a girl they'd think you were doing a heterosexual thing↑ (.) and that woul- (.) some people would be cool with that↑ (.) if people thought she was a boy↑ then people would think that you were (.)  
**87 Liam** a HOMO//sexual  
**88 Ana** //gay  
**89 Mani** //gay  
**90 Ruby** oh yeah  
**91 Mani** so so s- it's INTEResting (.) y'know and how these change things (.) //now it might change how you feel yourself↑ (.) it would certainly change how people TREATed you↑ (.) it would change how people treated HER↑ (.) yeah (.) so that's why i used it as an example (.) um just to give you a LITtle idea of how (.) for (.) some intersex people it's not simple  
**92 Ruby** //mmm  
**93 Rawiri** yeah=  
**94 Mani** =but y'know I would say- an- and (.) i've based this on somebody i know↑  
**95 Ruby** yeah=  
**96 Mani** =and she's like that she's just a (.) FIREball and if people can't deal with it that's like she'd just find that very FUNny↑  
**97 Ana** mm  
**98 Rawiri** hm! ((smiling))  
**99 Mani** y'know like↑ ((laughs)) get OVer it //this is who i am↑  
**100 Ana** mm  
**101 Mani** //like yeah yeah yeah  
**102 Luana** //yeah=  
**103 Mani** =so this person is not embarrassed and not ashamed very in your face↑  
**104 Liam** //yeah  
**105 Mani** //and she's been like that all the way through  
**106 Luana** ah=  
**107 Mani** =amazing supportive parents↑ (.) just comes from that mindset that PHH (.) this is who i AM (.) deal with it dude  
**108 Rawiri** hmhm (laughing gently)  
**109 Mani** yeah  
**110 Luana** where's she from  
**111 Mani** um she:: lives in america↑=  
**112 Rawiri** =//ooh  
**113 Luana** //ah

**114 Ana** //ah  
**115 Mani** and when i say latino↑ so latino people are people that come from south america  
**116 Luana** ah  
**117 Mani** so:: um i think her:: mom is from chile and her dad is from venezuela (.) so  
//mixed south american  
**118 Luana** //ah  
**119 Ana** mmmm=  
**120 Liam** =yeah  
**121 Mani** here↑ a person like that would probably be mistaken as maori  
look //very //  
**122 Ana** //oh//  
**123 Mani** right in a minute we're gonna swap  
((addressing whole room)) OKAY so what we're going to do now is SWAP  
so if we can just go round this way↑ so if that group goes over there↑  
this group comes over to here  
**124 Luana** do we leave our //papers↑ ((to Liam))  
**125 Mani** take your bits of paper with you=  
**126 Liam** =take em with us

### Extract 7.3 - Full Transcript

**1 Mani** so we're doing //case study one  
**2 Caitlin** ((chair clangs)) //what are you DOing ((some laughter))  
**3 Mani** so who would like to read this one out  
**4 Ata** Caitlin  
**5 Caitlin** okay (.)  
**6 Mani** eloisa  
**7 Caitlin** eloisa davis (.) an american exchange student (.) mixed race latino youth  
(.) identifies as intersexual in- INTERsex sorry ((laughing voice)) AND is  
bisexual (.) you have been seeing each other for a few weeks (.) elo- eloisa  
is a high energy fun person (.) she describes herself as (.) //an:::drog-  
**8 Mani** //androgynous↑  
**9 Caitlin** (.) and while you know at school she is a girl she often is mistaken as a boy  
(.) she has short hair a wiry athletic body and very little almost no↑ make  
that NO breast development (.) she is (1)  
**10 Mani** articulate↑  
**11 Caitlin** has a sense of humour and you find yourself attracted to her (.) as you  
start talking she tells you (.) she has an unusual body (.) that she has a (.)  
in her own wor- in HER words a very large clitoris (.) she asks you straight  
up (.) if we got serious would you be- would that be an issue

**12 Mani** okay so we're with somebody:: who's from america she's here on  
 exchan::ge she's VERY confident very comfortable:: (.) fun:: person  
 STRAIGHT up (.) an- y'know you've been sp(.)pending some time hanging  
 out↑ (.) and this is what she says (.) SO (.) how would YOU respond↑  
 what are the issues and what are the issues for her  
**13 Amber** mm ((sigh))  
**14 Aroha** i would want to know what th- oh (.) uh what she means by a very large  
 clitoris is it means because she's got a (.) like a penis or something↑  
**15 Mani** yeah so for some intersex people the- the clitoris i- is quite large (.) like i-  
 in some cases it can be REALLY large (.) now this particular person cause  
 i modelled this off someone i really know↑ (.) and um her clitoris↑ is (.)  
 as (.) large as some small male penises and she can actually PENE trate  
 with it just like a GUY  
**16 Amber** ((falling tone)) //ooohh  
**17 Aroha** //oh my gosh  
**18 Mani** yeah (.) so she has a very unusual body↑ u::m many of us have had and  
 i'm one of these people↑ had surgery to make mine smaller↑ cause  
 people (.) DOctors think //that's gross↑ and that women can't do that↑  
**19 Aroha** //awwww  
**20 Mani** this particular person↑ didn't have surgery (.) so she's GOT a clitoris↑  
 and it WORKS↑ she enjoys using it↑ and basically she's saying (.) well↑  
 thank God i'm here↑ you have to deal with THIS  
**21 Jay** wo-h-h-ow  
**22 Mani** that's what she's saying  
**23 Jay** oh yeah↑  
**24 Amber** (2) i guess you'd kinda be shocked at first //yeah like just XXXX  
**25 Mani** //YEAH (.) cause we don't TALK about genitals very much DO we (.) and  
 we certainly don't talk about //special genitals  
**26 Aroha** //is she cool like (.) you know even in the shower↑  
**27 Mani** MMhm (1) so do you know some people like that↑ you know people who  
 are very confident very out there and sort of rush things along a bit↑  
**28 Amber** NOOooo  
**29 Mani** ((laughing))  
**30 Caitlin** don't gimme that look (laughing)  
**31 Aroha** NOT me ((short laugh)) what are you saying  
**32 Mani** so this is the sorta person that we're dealing with (.) so SHE'S not  
 uncomfortable with her different body but she's asking y'know would YOU  
 be (.) uncomfortable (1) i'm just gonna leave you guys to talk for a  
 minute↑ and then i'll come back  
**33 Aroha** what would you- (.) but does that mean like (.) that she-  
 .....  
**34 Mani** //got a question here↑  
**35 Aroha** //yeah this=  
**36 Jay** =does it mean there are XXXX for //ANYthing

**37 Aroha** //does does this mean that SHE can be penetrated as WELL or not  
**38 Mani** yes it DOES  
**39 Aroha** OH (.) how does //tha-  
**40 Jay** //HOW:::  
**41 Aroha** HOW:::  
**42 Jay** how does it WORK  
**43 Mani** she's got a um:: see you know how the female body works //so here's a vagina↑  
**44 Caitlin** //yeah  
**45 Mani** and she als- it's NOT a- great big huge like a //male penis  
**46 Amber** //no ((small laugh))  
**47 Mani** but she has something that can have //like an erection  
**48 Jay** //what is it=  
**49 Ata** =what does it LOOK like  
**50 Jay** well  
**51 Ata** ((laughs))  
**52 Mani** what does it look like (.) it looks like a- a very small penis (.) so if you could imagine (.) a pen:::is like on a smaller child (.) yup↑  
**53 Caitlin** okay  
**54 Mani** and as i say this is one of my friends and she's very out and cool about her body and y'know talks about it //quite- quite a lot  
**55 Ata** //yeah she's cool  
**56 Jay** mmhm  
**57 Ata** that's good  
**58 Mani** so yup↑ that's how it can work (.)  
**59 Jay** that's cool  
**60 Mani** w- when i say she can penetrate th- anOTHer PERson not herSELF (.)//some people get  
**61 Aroha** //yeah that's what ((laughs)) //Caitlin  
**62 Caitlin** //((shrill)) well THAT'S what you made it OUT to be //i said WHOA (.) STOP there ((laughs))  
**63 Aroha** //no i said she's ((laughs))  
**64 Mani** that's a fantasy and that's actually im- physically impossible=  
**65 Aroha** =yeah=  
**66 Mani** no one can do //that  
**67 Amber** i was gonna SAY (.) GOD  
**68 Jay** (1) laughing  
**69 Mani** ((to room)) okay let's come together finish what you're talking about and we'll come back in- in a big group again ((noise of moving groups))



# Appendix D - Chapter 8 Transcripts

## Extract 8.1 - Full Transcript

From	Message
JKP	Okie dokie, lets get this show on the road [HAHAHA]
QQN	<b>are we starting now</b>
JKP	yes.
Brian	Yes, it's time to start.
Mr. Johnson	For each statement you will have to say if you strongly agree, Maybe agree, Maybe disagree or strongly agree
Mr. Johnson	Brian do you want to start
Brian	I'm still working on finding those people
BFM	agree
EYF	sweet.
KUQ	sweet
GVK	Okaay.
Mr. Johnson	OK ill start it
Brian	Yes please
Mr. Johnson	Statement 1 - Males are naturally more interested in sex than females
KUQ	STRONGLY AGREE!
EYF	strongly agree.
CHQ	<b>Strongly agree lol</b>
QQN	<b>disagree</b>
LKE	Strongly agree LOL
HTX	disagree
VDA	disagree
GVK	Strongly agree.!
BFM	half n half
Mr. Johnson	Ok now the reasons
VDA	wait agree strongly
JKP	They both want it, Boys are just more open and not ashamed to be dirty :P
QQN	<b>they just voice their interest more than females do</b>
Mr. Johnson	You can write long answers
HTX	uhm some woman can be just as intrerested as males and some males my not even liek sex that much
CHQ	<b>males think alot more about sexual sides of relationships. rather then women look at the love side</b>
KUQ	because guys want sex to feel loved, whereas girls dont need it to feel loved
EYF	men just seemed too be more interested than women.
GVK	because males seem to be more hornier than females & want it more often.
LKE	Guys think about it 24/7..... Girls not soo much, Hahahah
QQN	<b>girls think about it just as much but its seen as more acceptable for guys to talk about it openly</b>

From	Message
KUQ	haha i agree with that one
BFM	depends wat the male feels about that person
CHQ	<b>Men find it cool to be able to say yeah, im getting some!</b>
HTX	also its up to the individual aswell
CHQ	<b>not all men,</b>
Mr. Johnson	When you respond to someone write their letters e.g. htx
JKP	Yeah, sometimes it depends on the guy, like if he has a big ego then yeah,
CHQ	<b>i agree with jkb its kind of a cool factor,</b>
KUQ	to a girl their virginity is more special to them, they want to save it for the 'right guy'
QQN	<b>wat do u mean by cool factor chq?</b>
EYF	& guys just seem too throw it around alot more than girls do. its more of a big deal too girls.
QQN	<b>not all girls kuq lol</b>
	RLI has been added to the conversation.
CHQ	<b>it s almost seen as cool to be sexually active for males, but not so much for females,</b>
Brian	You there RLI?
QQN	<b>oh agree haha</b>
Mr. Johnson	How does ego make a difference
JKP	they brag to their mates about bonking and how they wont ever see them again
Mr. Johnson	Brian KQM is still waiting
GVK	they seem to think they are so cool to there mates and that.
BFM	being confident sexually
CHQ	<b>i think also because girl relate sex to love and feeling stronly for someone, guts dont as much and see it just as action</b>
LKE	Well the more guys with a big ego seem to think that they can get anyone at anytime? more naturally into sex etc
Brian	okay, Ill find KQM
EYF	yeah guys seem too do it for fun but girls more serious CHQ
RLI	hi :)
CHQ	<b>welcome!</b>
GVK	i agree EYF
KUQ	and sometimes it doesnt depend on been a guy or girl it can be to do with religion or family beliefs
QQN	<b>maybe the guys that are more confident rather than a guy who isnt talk about sex more than the others'</b>
JKP	I agree too :D
Mr. Johnson	welcome rli, and chQ - get involved
Mr. Johnson	Does a guy who is confident need to talk about it.
JKP	not a confident guy but a cocky one
KUQ	no they just talk about it so they look good infront of there mates
EYF	no thay dont. they chose too talk about it too show that they are the man and getting some.
BFM	nope but he can ask
CHQ	<b>Yes! yeah its really to do with the person and what surrounds them eg frends and family</b>



From	Message
QQN	<b>i think that it helps boost their confidence exspecially talking with their matezs</b>
GVK	too look good infront of their mates usually, so they can be called the man.
HTX	same as JKP its the ones that think that they are all that will talk about it
HTX	i also thinks it depends on who there friends are
CHQ	<b>If a guy really respects a girl they wdnt be talking about thir sexual relations with there mates</b>
KUQ	but then again some girls talk about it aswell
LKE	yeah, if the guy really likes the girl, then he'd keep their personal stuff to himself. )
RLI	girls dont reali go into detail about it
EYF	guys talk about it more too try be cool. but girls do talk about it aswell
GVK	yeah girls do talk about it too, they can get quite open with their mates.
RLI	i think guys are more open about it
LKE	girls i find when talking about sex more ask for advice rather than brag about how good/bad it was?
CHQ	<b>well same to them then? if they are in a relationship it should realy be kept between them unless they have decided otherwise?</b>
KUQ	guys dont really go into full detail with there mates, its more just telling them that they 'scored' or whatever. but for girls they can talk more openly about it with there mates
QQN	<b>but sometimes you need to talk to ur mates about it koz it might be something you dont want to talk to ur partner with</b>
	KQM has been added to the conversation.
JKP	If you cant talk to your partner about it maybe you shouldnt be having sex with them
CHQ	<b>as long as it is kept confidential then its ok, its when the frends go round spreading it that makes it worse</b>
HTX	agree QQN but not when it is going in to to much detail to make you think diffrently towards the other person in that relationship
Brian	Welcom KQM..join the chat
GVK	girls mainly do talk to their girls about it and like try get advice from then aswell, some can tell detail and be open and then some wont. its up to every individual really.
Mr. Johnson	You guys are keeping it going really well, please keep asking people to clarify

## Extracts 8.2 and 8.3 - Full Transcript

From	Message
CHQ	<b>Peolpe take sex in alot of differnt ways.</b>
EYF	yeah it means different things to different people.
JKP	<b>Agree.</b>
HTX	agree
QQN	<b>for some relationships it could be a way of pleasing ur partner even if you dont realy enjoy it that much</b>

From	Message
QQN	<b>but think they could lose them if they dont have sex</b>
	GVK has been added to the conversation.
HTX	qqn agree
CHQ	<b>it can be like that but i shdnt! you should be totaly comftable with your partner before you decide to have sex</b>
LKE	<b>thats a screwed up relashionship : </b>
Brian	Computer troubles GVK?
GVK	yes
CVQ	agreed jkp
QQN	<b>im not saying thats how it is for alot of relationships but there are some that could be like that</b>
	VDA has been added to the conversation.
Brian	Welcome VDA
KUQ	can we have a new statement.. this ones getting a bit personal
CVQ	amen
VDA	hallo
LKE	<b>oh yeah, totally, but i mean, thats sorta relashionship is just wrong, you'd end up feeling love is nothing, and isnt special, very very sad :(</b>
Mr. Johnson	Statement 5 - It's unnatural to not be interested in sex
KUQ	like i said personal
LKE	<b>i mean sex isnt speacial.</b>
VDA	my computa playn upp kikd me off b4
KUQ	disagree
EYF	disagree.
HTX	disagree
JKP	<b>disagree.</b>
GVK	diagree
BFM	disagree
VDA	dissagree
Brian	THat's okay VDA...just join in
CHQ	<b>yeah a relationship is about beeing open and sdharing everythgng with each other</b>
KUQ	everyones ready for sex at different times in there life even if it means never
EYF	not everyone is ready for sex at the same times. takes longer for some people too become more interested in it.
BFM	sex might not be important at the time
QQN	<b>dissagree, like gerald off shortland street lol</b>
JKP	<b>ASEXUAL :)</b>
CVQ	shot lol qqn
CHQ	<b>its totaly fine? if thats how you feel then it ok?</b>
KQM	<b>agree with eyf</b>
RLI	same
Brian	Yes, Asexual is the right term
BFM	wats asedual?
	GVK has left the conversation.
HTX	somepeople may feel that they have more important things to do in their life at

From	Message
	this time then to go out haveing sex with everyone
BFM	asexual
	GVK has been added to the conversation.
CVQ	its up to you htx
JKP	<b>yeah agree with HTX , everyones diffrent. :) to some people sex is important, others not really,</b>
QQN	<b>bfm- someone who isnt interested in sex</b>
BFM	sweet
CHQ	<b>Sex isnt important it should be somthing you decide in your own time that you are ready for</b>
HTX	and just because one is intreted in sex it dosnt mean that they are diffrent or 'unatural'
EYF	i agree.
HTX	isnt*
CVQ	espically when you are in a relationship when you are having sex, to going into a relationship where sex is not important
GVK	agree HTX
Mr. Johnson	Statement 6 - Young people are more interested in sex than older people
KQM	<b>agree</b>
QQN	<b>agree</b>
JKP	<b>Maybe agree.....</b>
HTX	agree
HTX	maybe
CHQ	<b>do you think that would be a hard thing to do cvq?</b>
GVK	agree
RLI	agree
BFM	agree
ZQW	oops late but yup agree
	zqw has been added to the conversation.
KQM	<b>older people will be more mature than younger people</b>
Brian	Define old :P
CVQ	um no i dont chq
KUQ	not sure, as you get older people have sex for a reason. whereas young people have it for fun/pleasure!
CVQ	and to statement 6 its 50 50
KQM	<b>yea exactly</b>
CHQ	<b>young people do it more oftern young as in teenage</b>
BFM	old people might not feel as sexual nemore
GVK	so they can experience it
CVQ	is that how you feel chq?
Mr. Johnson	cvq, chq feel free to continue coz you were clear what you were talking about
RLI	i think that young people talk about it more than older people would
LKE	<b>Yeah, when your young sex is like 'part of growing up' you want to be adventurous etc whereas when your older, you can still enjoy it? but i guess its seen diffrently?</b>
QQN	<b>because we are like growing up n its a new thing, like a little kid who</b>

From	Message
	<b>has a new toy when he grows up he will become less interested in it lol</b>
EYF	its more new for younger people. more experimenting.
CVQ	wht do you mean mr?
Mr. Johnson	We started a bit late do you mind if we finish about 10 past
JKP	<b>Thats fine :)</b>
QQN	<b>no i dont mind</b>
GVK	suree.
KQM	<b>sure</b>
EYF	yeah thats cool.
RLI	i dont mind
CHQ	<b>is waht how i feel cvq?</b>
ZQW	swet
HTX	i guesse as you get older you understand that love is just having sex where growing up and experincing sex is somethig completly new
CVQ	sweet as mr
Mr. Johnson	CVQ I started a new scenario and you two kept talking thought that was good
HTX	isnt**
HTX	sorry
Mr. Johnson	HTX - does that change the importance or the reason it is important
HTX	no i dont think so
CHQ	<b>mr, are we ment to keep talking through or not&gt; lol</b>
Mr. Johnson	Yeah course
JKP	<b>New Scenario :)</b>

# Appendix E - Chapter 9 transcripts

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## Extracts 9.1 and 9.2 - Full Transcript

- 1 Caitlin** *DILEmmas  
NOW what do i do:::  
you and your best friend are both attracted to the same person*
- 2 Aroha** *((groaning))*
- 3 Caitlin** *that person has just contacted you and ASKED you to go on a date  
you KNOW that your best friend is a shy (.) UNconfident person ∪  
who is easily made (.) to feel worthless*
- 4 Aroha** *((paper rustling)) WHAT'S the issue or dilemma  
(1) the obviously the  
you have to choose you have to choose (.)  
your best friend or*
- 5 Ata** *or*
- 6 Aroha** *or*
- 7 Ata** *your //other//*
- 8 Aroha** *//your// best friend or or the this potential //boyfriend ∪//*
- 9 Caitlin** *//yeah she doesn't// wanna UPset her best friend who's already  
GOT problems with um //like//*
- 10 Aroha** *//but then//*
- 11 Ata** *yeah=*
- 12 Caitlin** *=self worth and stuff like that=*
- 13 Aroha** *=but then like the two  
you know how it's like two neither things ↑  
one of them is like*
- 14 Caitlin** *yeah*
- 15 Aroha** *ei- you- you don't want to upset your best FRIEND  
but the other one is YOU miss out (.) going on a date with someone  
YOU like ↑ so*
- 16 Ata** *yeah=*
- 17 Caitlin** *=yeah*
- 18 Aroha** *who are the STAKEholders*
- 19 Caitlin** *what are stake//hold-//*
- 20 Ata** *//indi//viduals  
the girl (1) the best friend*
- 21 Aroha** *for each stake-*
- 22 Ata** *and the (.) //dude//*

- 23 Aroha** //WHA::T//  
 (1) i thin- nah i think it's only an indiVIDual one here ∪
- ((interlude as plane flies over and they worry that the recording is being compromised))
- 24 Caitlin** so the stakeholders (.) are::  
 meaning who's got to deal with the dilemma ∪
- 25 Aroha** which is //the girl//
- 26 Ata** //the girl//=
- 27 Caitlin** =the girl yup
- 28 Aroha** the main //girl//
- 29 Caitlin** //so// with each stakeholder ∪  
 their perspective and values and beliefs that underpin each perspective  
 so ∩ ∪
- 30 Aroha** YOU know:::: ∪  
 they just said like  
 (.) are both attracted to the same PERson  
 it could be a bloody GIRL and girl ∩ for all WE know
- 31 Caitlin** so it doesn't MATTer xxxxxxx what we're talking about
- 32 Aroha** (small laugh)) i'm just saying //just saying//
- 33 Caitlin** //okay anyway// UM  
 so::: the reason that they don't really want to //xxxx//
- 34 Aroha** //coughing//
- 35 Caitlin** y'know they can't decide is because (.) they-  
 she wants to do what (.) y'know SHE wants to do ∪ which is go out  
 with the guy and have fun=
- 36 Aroha** =but she also wants to like be //xxxxxxxx//
- 37 Caitlin** //she doesn't// want to like (.) upset her friend
- 38 Aroha** that (.) THAT never works  
 just whoEVER the f- (.) first person gets asked ∪ should GO for it  
 (2) //ANYway anyway//
- 39 Caitlin** //WHO'S rights are// being considered  
 um::: she's considering:::: (.) her friend's rights ↑ and her OWN  
 rights ↑  
 to be able to like go out with a guy ↑ and free will ∪ y'know being  
 able to (.)
- 40 Aroha** yeah and like (.) cause  
 (3) her FRIEND really (1) i dunno  
 (1) can i have a look at this ↑ ((paper rustling))

**41 Ata** (3) i'm tired  
**42 Aroha** (2) WHO'S rights are //being conSIDered//  
**43 Caitlin** //aren't you freezing ↑//  
**44 Ata** sort of  
**45 Aroha** yeah she IS kinda //considering// her ow-  
**46 Ata** //what are we answering ↑//  
**47 Aroha** and then (.) maybe in a way ∩∪  
**48 Caitlin** well cause she's THINKing about it she's IN a dilemma but she  
 doesn't KNOW what to do  
 so she's //xxxxx thinking of herself//  
**49 Aroha** //maybe in a way// she's also considering this PERsons rights ↑  
 (.) cause like  
**50 Caitlin** the GUY ∩  
**51 Aroha** he could get like (.) he could b- obviously he wouldn't want to be  
 between like a (.) a fight with the two friends ∩∪  
 (1) so by maybe choosing NOT to go with him or (.) y'know ∪  
 it could keep him OUT of that ↑  
 (2) within each perspective whose rights are being COMPromised  
 (.) the GIRL'S rights  
 the girl that has to make the decision  
**52 Caitlin** yup  
**53 Aroha** has been compromised  
 (2) she has-  
 (1) why::: ∩∪ because she wants to go out with this person ∪ but  
 she-  
 she feels like she can't ↑ because of her friend ↑  
 i guess (.) that's her rights ∪ isn't it ↑  
**54 Ata** mhm  
**55 Aroha** (2) THIS is SO much STUFF ∩∪  
 (2) SHIT a brick ∩ (laughing)  
**56 Ata** (laughing)  
**57 Caitlin** what are the short term and long term implications ∪ or  
 consequences ∪  
 for each stakeholder perspective in relation to both individuals and  
 //communities xxxxx//  
**58 Aroha** //THIS could BE ∩// the man:::  
 this could be like the person that=  
**59 Caitlin** =she spends the les- the rest of her life with  
**60 Aroha** yeah ∩ and if her friend is gonna stand in the WAY of that ∪  
 //what a bitch ∩//

**61 Caitlin** //well// the thing is ((rapid speech)) in a relationship it's it's gotta go both ways  
the girl has to like the guy and the guy has to like the girl  
and if that guy doesn't like the other girl then you can't s- y'know you kinda can't  
(.) cause SHE likes him too  
//if it went// the other way around the friend would WANna go out with him so

**62 Aroha** //exactly:://

**63 Caitlin** (2) you've gotta  
(.) but THEN i think she should just talk to the friend then

**64 Ata** yeah

**65 Caitlin** work something out

**66 Aroha** (1) yeah::: (.) but I don't //think it's a// good solution

**67 Caitlin** //but that takes//  
all right anyway shut up  
we xxxxx xxxxx xxxx ((wind bowing in mic))

((discussion of skipping to the next scenario takes about 30 seconds))

**68 Caitlin** you and your BEST friend are both attracted to the same person  
you've just found out that the person has contacted your best friend  
(.) to ASK for a date  
THERE you go ∪  
(1) you are distressed by the strength of (.) of your own feelings of anger and jealousy

**69 Aroha** ke hehe (laughing a bit)

**70 Ata** um::: and then the questions are ∪  
(1) identify the issue ↑ (papers rustling)  
(2) dilemma

**71 Aroha** th- the:::

**72 Caitlin** the //GUY she li:::kes//

**73 Ata** //she's jealous//

**74 Aroha** //this gi:::rl//  
this girl has to (2) she has to try to be supportive of her frien:::d ∪

**75 Caitlin** and not jealous=

**76 Aroha** =AND not jealous ∪  
(.) uh but also like  
(3) she has to um:::  
(2) wel- like (.) she HAS to get over her ow:::n:: problems ↑



- y'know ↑ ((high rising))
- 77 Caitlin** and she needs to realise that //y'know//
- 78 Ata** //it's// YOU
- 79 Aroha** AHHH (laughing)
- 80 Ata** SAY it's YOU
- 81 Aroha** (paper rustling) it IS you (.) guys
- 82 Aroha** say if YOU liked someone and Hannah (.) liked him and the boy asked Hannah out instead of you ↪
- 83 Caitlin** i'd BE upSET ↪↪ but then=
- 84 Aroha** =you would want Hannah to go for it ↑ or:::
- 85 Caitlin** I'D want her to go for it yeah ↪↪  
cause if HE feels the same way about HER you can't stop (.)  
//them ↪//
- 86 Aroha** //you// say that now but if it really happened you'd be  
//completely gutted//
- 87 Caitlin** //i WOULD be// gutted ↪ but it's like
- 88 Ata** move on
- 89 Caitlin** yeah you've gotta move on ↪  
you can't stop (3) let her be unhappy because of you ↪↪  
((pitch up)) cause what would YOU  
what would YOU do Aroha ↪
- 90 Aroha** (4) well  
(1) i would ACTually (1) let the person GO for it
- 91 Caitlin** exac- yeah ↪
- 92 Ata** same ↑
- 93 Aroha** did you say SAME ↪
- 94 Ata** yeah same yeah if she got the guy he's HERS ↪
- 95 Aroha** i'd bloody punch her in the face ↪ ((laughter))

### Extract 9.3 - Full Transcript

- 1 Hannah** okay  
so SARah  
you're still a VIRgin ↪  
(.) HMMmm
- 2 Sarah** □ah!
- 3 Olivia** ((laughing))
- 4 Hannah** and you're quite HAppy about that ↪  
(.) it's PART of the scenario ↪(.) AND you're HAppy about that

- howEVER ((down pitch monotone)) especially me and Paige at the  
xxxxx fest ∪ //we might be gay ↷//
- 5 **Sarah** //okay// can you (.) //get on ∪//
- 6 **Olivia** AH //stop it// (laughing)
- 7 **Paige** (laughing)
- 8 **Hannah** YEAH:::: ↷  
(.) okay  
so YOU'RE still a VIRgin right ∪  
(laughing) and you're QUITE happy about that  
howEVER all your frien::ds ∪  
(1) (creaky voice) oh ((laughter from group))  
seemed okay:: ∪  
SO:: ↷  
I'M still a virgin ∪ and i'm quite HAppy about that  
howEVER all my friends seem to be sexually active  
and i feel //like// i'm getting L::EFT behind
- 9 **Olivia** //AY-yeah// ((laughter from group))
- 10 **Hannah** okay what's my dilemma  
((higher pitch)) i'm FEELing a little bit //behind//
- 11 **Sarah** //yeah// (.) yeah you feel behind and you //like (.) feel//
- 12 **Hannah** //i just// wanna DO it y'know
- 13 **Paige** maybe PRESSured// yeah
- 14 **Hannah** to SORTa get it out of the way
- 15 **Sarah** you feel pressured by //xxxxxxx//
- 16 **Hannah** //i have to// do it to be COOL y'know like all my FRIEN::::DS  
(laughing)
- 17 **Olivia** maybe
- 18 **Hannah** okay identify who are the stakeholders  
it's definitely the individual ∪ y'know †
- 19 **Paige** and and um social
- 20 **Hannah** soClety
- 21 **Paige** yeah that's the //one//
- 22 **Sarah** //no// SOcial::
- 23 **Hannah** it says soClety::
- 24 **Sarah** really ∪
- 25 **Paige** it can be social
- 26 **Hannah** we're gonna turn it into social †  
okay  
for each stakeholder describe their perspective their values and (.)  
well

- ((rapid speech)) MY value and belief could be that i don't wanna lose my virginity ↑  
or i wanna lost it with someone special //but//
- 27 **Paige** //yeah//
- 28 **Hannah** with all my friends going around BANGin any guy the see ↷
- 29 **Olivia** HA ↷ ha (laughing)
- 30 **Hannah** maybe i should just sorta do it as well
- 31 **Olivia** ah sorry ↑
- 32 **Hannah** THEN ↷↷  
i lose my values and beliefs and //what i really FEEL:://
- 33 **Olivia** //just ANY guy doesn't matter// right ↑
- 34 **Hannah** okay  
then within each perspective whose rights are being considered why and how  
well (.) i'm not really considering my own rights am i  
am i ↑
- 35 **Sarah** //no//
- 36 **Paige** //no//
- 37 **Hannah** no right (.) //so//
- 38 **Olivia** //well// cause you're sorta worried about what other people think and what other people xxxxx
- 39 **Hannah** exactly:::
- 40 **Sarah** but then your values and beliefs CAN be ↷ that you wanna be forty and have //it then//
- 41 **Hannah** //YEAH ↷//  
forty year VISION ↷  
yeah ↷
- 42 **Sarah** so YOU might
- 43 **Hannah** you might be
- 44 **Paige** so why would you go against your beLIEFS ↷  
just to fit in with your friends ↷
- 45 **Hannah** (exaggerating tone) oh ↷ yeah ↷ (laughing)  
okay so in each perspective whose rights are being huh ↑ (1) oh are being COMPromised ↷  
MINE are being compromised ↷  
((someone starts scratching the microphone grill))
- 46 **Sarah** xxxxxxxxxxxx
- 47 **Olivia** xxxxxxxxxxxx
- 48 **Hannah** all right so um (.) what are the short term and the long term implications SHORT term ↷  
i could be li-

- okay LONG term i could be really affected like  
(.) //that's me GONE ↯//
- 49 **Sarah** //you could xxxxxxxx//
- 50 **Hannah** i'm //gone ↯//
- 51 **Olivia** //you could go and// BANG someone get pregnant //and then//
- 52 **Hannah** exactly and i didn't WANT it  
i don't wanna (.) //have it//
- 53 **Paige** //you might// end up with a::: sexual disease ↯=
- 54 **Hannah** =exactly i //could have an// s t l on the WA:::Y:: ↯
- 55 **Olivia** //yup ↑ (.) yup ↑//
- 56 **Sarah** or and s t (.) D ↯=
- 57 **Hannah** =or i could have a herpe ↑
- 58 **Sarah** ((laughing a bit))
- 59 **Hannah** all right
- 60 **Paige** or genital warts
- 61 **Hannah** now //where appropriate ↯//
- 62 **Sarah** //i heard a story//
- 63 **Hannah** als-
- 64 **Paige** what ↯ (high rising)
- 65 **Olivia** she's got herpes (breaks into short laugh)
- 66 **Sarah** NO i heard a STOrY //i said//
- 67 **Paige** ((high pitch)) //DON'T// do that //plea:::se//
- 68 **Sarah** //i'm not// going to
- 69 **Hannah** okay  
wait till i press stop
- 70 **Olivia** (1) well we're not allowed ↯
- 71 **Paige** no (.) quick
- 72 **Hannah** okay (2) oh
- 73 **Paige** you //were going//
- 74 **Hannah** //WHERE// appropriate also take into account the following para-  
dijims  
trust TRUTH vs loyalty (3) euuh ↯↯
- 75 **Olivia** loyalty //to her//
- 76 **Hannah** //individual//  
(.) virginity ↑
- 77 **Sarah** feelings ↑
- 78 **Hannah** oh=
- 79 **Olivia** =yeah //xxxx//
- 80 **Hannah** //individual// vs community ↯
- 81 **Olivia** i'm LOYAL to my virginity okay ↯
- 82 **Hannah** hehehe i'm SO putting that on BEEbo

- 83 **Olivia** AH! (laughing)  
 84 **Sarah** what'd she say ↑  
 85 **Olivia** i'm loyal to my virginity  
 86 **Hannah** see how many COMments i get eh ↷  
 87 **Olivia** (laughing)  
 88 **Hannah** i reckon that'd be pretty cool  
 89 **Paige** everyone would be like (.) //OH (.) kay ↷//  
 90 **Hannah** //should i// just make up this huge big story about me and my virginity on BEEbo and see how many coins i get  
 91 **Olivia** yeah (laughing a lot)  
 92 **Hannah** nah i thing i'd be the biggest loser EVER and no one would ever //talk// to me again  
 93 **Olivia** //yeah//  
 you'd get all these random like ADS from guys or something  
 94 **Hannah** no one can SEE my page  
 95 **Olivia** oh yeah true=  
 96 **Hannah** =unless they ADD me but  
 97 **Paige** REALLY ↷

## Extracts 9.4 and 9.5 - Full Transcript

- 1 **Callum** well we have the virgin ↑  
 2 **Kate** (1) yup ↷  
 (2) the friends ↷  
 (2) cause they're all like NON virgins  
 and they're the ones that are //xxxxxxx//  
 3 **Logan** //sexually Active//  
 4 **Callum** are they in a relationship ↑  
 5 **Kate** um (.) it doesn't say that they're in a relationship (.) it just says they're sexually active  
 6 **Callum** okay  
 7 **Kate** (heavy sigh)  
 8 **Logan** (5) so WHAT'S their VALues and beLIEFS ((mocking tone))  
 9 **Callum** (3) um (1) they:: uh (.) are happy being virgins ↑  
 10 **Kate** //they//  
 11 **Callum** //they// don't feel the NEED to be more=  
 12 **Kate** =yeah  
 13 **Callum** have sex ↑  
 14 **Kate** mm

- (2) so they believe that (1) it's all right to be a VIRgin  
except the dilemma is that they feel left beHIND
- 15 Callum** cause their friends aren't virgins
- 16 Kate** SO within each //perspective//
- 17 Logan** //just jump on the HIGHway// I say ∪
- 18 Kate** (laughing a bit) whose rights are being considered why and how  
(7) i don- (.) i don't KNOW ∩  
whose rights are being
- 19 Callum** (1) whose rights are being conSIDered ∪  
the person who wants to be a VIRgin because they feel that they  
can't be because their friends (.) aren't
- 20 Kate** yeah (2) um  
three C (.) within each perspective whose (.) rights are being  
COMPromised
- 21 Logan** the virgin=
- 22 Kate** =the virgin  
because he's feeling
- 23 Callum** it's not a he ∪ is it †
- 24 Logan** //it's a// herMAPHrodyte
- 25 Kate** //or she ∪//  
(5) um::  
(5) what are the short term and long term implications  
consequences for each stakeholder perspective in relation to both  
individuals and communities considering the following aspects  
SOCial  
(1) he may lose his friends † because
- 26 Callum** THEY may lose their friends
- 27 Kate** no ∪ HE ∩  
(3) he may lose his friends because he is a virgin and all his friends  
aren't virgins and they all want to go and have sexual activities and  
he'll be left behind
- 28 Callum** (2) oh yeah it says xxxxx be left behind
- 29 Kate** yeah (.) ecoNOMic
- 30 Callum** i guess he can't make no money on the streets yo ∩
- 31 Kate** HEALTH and public safety
- 32 Callum** no ∪ we're gonna do ecoNOMic
- 33 Kate** YOU just SAID it ∩
- 34 Callum** okay

**((there's a gap while they spill out of the car in hysterics because Callum  
passed wind))**

- 35 Callum** *but they're not in a relationship*
- 36 Logan** *((mock counselling voice)) OH=*
- 37 Callum** *=she just wants to (.) IT just wants to go and do it with (.) ANYone like what their friends are doing*
- 38 Logan** *((mock counselling voice)) OH well he may as well he's got NOTHING to lose ↴  
(2) except his pride*
- 39 Kate** *(bursts out laughing)*
- 40 Logan** *and his virginity*
- 41 Kate** *and his respect ↴ (laughs)*
- 42 Logan** *no cause reMEMber if the GUY does it it's oKAY::: ↴  
(3) and girls are sluts*
- 43 Kate** *(2) thanks Logan ↑ thank you for saying that now i feel REAL good about myself*

*((getting back into the car post-flatulence takes some time))*

- 44 Callum** *all //right//*
- 45 Kate** *//all/ right*
- 46 Callum** *personal reflection come on guys ↴*
- 47 Kate** *(2) um basically i feel sorry for this guy cause  
(1) he's felt (.) he feels the pressure to have sex because he doesn't wanna be left behind  
but then again=*
- 48 Callum** *=he should do it when he feels like it*
- 49 Logan** *w-*
- 50 Kate** *it's //his personal choice//*
- 51 Logan** *//are we getting his opinion// on it ↑*
- 52 Callum** *no he just feels like he  
(.) he's (.) no he's happy that he's a virgin but he feels he has to lose his virginity because his friends=*
- 53 Logan** *=well::: STUFF his friends  
he should stay a virgin if it's //how he feels ↑//*
- 54 Kate** *//if it's// you out there (.) virgin boy (laughs)  
DON'T do it (laughing)*





# Appendix F – Ethics Approval

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## MEMORANDUM

Phone 0-4-463 5676

Fax 0-4-463 5209

TO	Brian King
COPY TO	Professor Janet Holmes, Supervisor
FROM	Dr Allison Kirkman, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	October 16, 2008
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	<b>Ethics Approval: No 16069, Linguistic negotiations of young people's sexual agency in sexuality education.</b>

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 7 March 2011. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Allison Kirkman

Convener