“All consent is to me, is not stopping them”: A Qualitative Study of How Young Women Negotiate Consent to Heterosex

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) (Honours)

at

The University of Waikato

by

HEATHER R PERRY

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2015

Abstract

Sexual consent is a topical and valuable issue to research because acquaintance sexual violence remains a stubborn problem on university campuses as well as elsewhere. Sexual consent is defined in many ways within the literature and in public discourses. Most campaigns to address acquaintance sexual violence and consent draw on the miscommunication hypothesis in assuming that women need to communicate more clearly and men need to listen more carefully; however, some research has shown that men are quite capable of interpreting even the subtlest of consent cues and that verbal direct consent or non-consent is not normative sexual behaviour for young people. Empirical and theoretical research lends support to the role that gendered discourses play in consent understandings and behaviours.

This study used a qualitative approach to contribute to the growing research into what has shaped young women's understandings of consent to heterosex and how young women normatively communicate and interpret consent in their own heterosexual relationships. Six young women attended one of two group discussions focusing on consent. Discussions were recorded and transcribed and the data was analysed for research-consistent and novel themes using inductive thematic analysis. Three themes were interpreted verbatim from the data, all consistent with previous research: (a) '*Consent just seems like a more female thing*', (b) '*If you want them to, you let them*', and (c) '*It's complicated, cos it just depends really*'. Recommendations for future research are made.

Keywords: sexual consent, gender, feminism, coercion, heterosex

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Neville Robertson for his support and guidance during this project and for trusting me.

I would also like to thank the young women who generously volunteered their time to take part in this project. I acknowledge and respect their candour and I hope I honoured their contributions.

Lastly, I would like to thank my husband and daughters without whom this project would not have been realised: they know why.

Table of Contents

Abstract i
Acknowledgments ii
Introduction 1
Defining Sexual Consent 1
New Zealand's legal definition of consent. 2
Miscommunication: The Dominant Hypothesis 3
Miscommunication: men's inaccurate perception of women. 4
Miscommunication: women display 'token resistance'. 6
Interpreting Consent 7
Consenting, Wanting, and Ambivalence 8
Social Coercion 9
Discourses of Heterosex and Consent 10
Consent Evolves: Communicative Consent 11
Communicative consent at Antioch College. 12
Victorian law reform and communicative consent. 12
Conclusion 13
Method 14
Methodology 14
Procedure 15
Recruitment. 15
Participants. 16
Analysis of data. 16
Ethical Considerations 17
Findings 18
'Consent Just Seems Like a More Female Thing' 18
'If You Want Them To, You Let Them' 22
'It's Complicated, Cos It Just Depends Really' 24
Conclusion 30
Limitations 31
Future Implications and Directions 33
Appendices 41

Introduction

It is hard to accurately assess prevalence rates for sexual violence due to underreporting among other factors; however, some research suggests that about 50% of women experience some form of unwanted sexual contact and that young adults between the ages of 18-24 are especially vulnerable with a risk of rape four times any other age group (MacPhillips, Berman, Olo-Whaanga, & McCully, 2002). Despite the common perception that sexual violence (including rape) usually occurs between strangers, the overwhelming majority of sexual violence occurs between acquaintances and intimate partners (MacPhillips et al., 2002). Young women at university are therefore especially at risk of acquaintance sexual violence. Unfortunately very little research has been done in New Zealand university-age populations and so we are reliant on the insights gained from the relatively small field of research produced overseas. Also, given the centrality of consent to understanding acquaintance sexual violence among young people it is interesting to note that there is limited understanding of what sexual consent actually means and a paucity of research into how young people define it (Beres, 2014).

Defining Sexual Consent

Lim and Roloff (1999) define consent as a "knowing and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity" (p. 3). Because consent is a "frame of mind" (Chappell, as cited in Lim & Roloff, 1999) a person's consent must be inferred from their behaviour. Similarly, Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) discuss the distinction between consent as a mental act and consent as a physical act and how both definitions are problematic. As a mental act consent is problematic because it is not possible for someone to ever be certain of another person's consent; as a physical act

– i.e. a verbal or nonverbal expression of agreement – consent is equally problematic because nonverbal expressions can be ambiguous.

As well as being a frame of mind, consent has a socio-cultural context as a legal concept. Legal definitions of consent become relevant when consent to sexual relations is being contested. Legal definitions generally comprise both capacity and communication (Beres, 2014). Definitions of capacity vary globally but typically include age as well as mental capacity to consent, which could be permanently limited by intellectual functioning (or deterioration) or temporarily by intoxication, etc. The legal definition of communication is similarly varied and ranges from any expression of agreement without regard to coercion through to an expression of agreement only in the absence of coercion (Beres, 2014).

New Zealand's legal definition of consent.

At the time of writing there is not currently a positive legal definition of consent in New Zealand. The Crimes Act 1961 gives a non-exhaustive list of circumstances that should not be considered as demonstrating consent – this is sometimes referred to as a negative definition of consent (Ministry of Justice, 2008). This list includes:

> (1) A person does not consent to sexual activity just because he or she does not protest or offer physical resistance to the activity.
>
> (2) A person does not consent to sexual activity if he or she allows the activity because of—
>
> > (a) force applied to him or her or some other person; or
> >
> > (b) the threat (express or implied) of the application of force to him or her or some other person; or
> >
> > (c) the fear of the application of force to him or her or some other person.

> (3) A person does not consent to sexual activity if the activity occurs while he or she is asleep or unconscious.
>
> (4) A person does not consent to sexual activity if the activity occurs while he or she is so affected by alcohol or some other drug that he or she cannot consent or refuse to consent to the activity. (Crimes Act 1961, s.128A)

This leaves the determination of the existence of consent up to juries in trials to decide. Usually judges direct juries during summing up to consider whether the consent was freely given by someone who fully understood the circumstances (Ministry of Justice, 2008).

Miscommunication: The Dominant Hypothesis

The miscommunication hypothesis is considered the most dominant explanatory model of acquaintance sexual violence for lay and professional people alike (Crawford, 1995). The model proposes that men and women have fundamentally different communication styles and that this difference leads to inevitable misunderstandings in consent. Sexual violence between acquaintances is therefore constructed as an extreme example of 'miscommunication'. Miscommunication in the literature is generally reported as either men mistaking the signals because they perceive women as more interested in sex than they really are or women confusing the signals by giving 'token resistance' to sex by saying 'no' when they really mean 'yes' (Beres, 2010). This conceptualisation of the problem is seen in early campaigns to address sexual violence that emphasise the need to clearly say 'no' to unwanted sex and in more contemporary campaigns that emphasise the need to hear a verbal 'yes' before proceeding. The assumption in the model is that some men just do not realise when their partner does not want sex and therefore 'accidental' sexual violence occurs. The model is appealing in part because of its

apparent liberal and egalitarian explanation for the high occurrence of acquaintance sexual violence (Hansen, O'Byrne, & Rapley, 2010).

Miscommunication: men's inaccurate perception of women.

Men's consistent overestimation of women's interest in sex has been confirmed in much research but there is some debate about whether this overestimation reflects a perceptual difference or a labelling and/or behavioural difference (Lindgren, Parkhill, George, & Hendershot, 2008). Similarly, Jozkowski, Peterson, Sanders, Dennis, and Reece (2014) found differences in how men and women communicate and interpret consent: men were more likely than women to rely on nonverbal strategies and indicators to give and interpret consent; women were more likely than men to rely on verbal strategies to give and interpret consent. Although they did not find that men are incapable of interpreting nonverbal consent or non-consent the authors suggest these findings could lend support to the miscommunication hypothesis. Similarly, Humphreys and Herold (2007) found that there was not a behavioural difference in "consent discussions/ awareness" (p. 313) between men and women but that women more frequently emphasised the importance of consent than men; however, the finding that men place less importance on consent and prefer nonverbal consent/non-consent information does not necessarily indicate that 'miscommunication' is occurring.

Some research has found that men are quite capable of describing and interpreting even the subtlest of verbal and nonverbal non-consent communication (Beres, 2010; Beres, Senn, & McCaw, 2014; McCaw & Senn, 1998; O'Byrne, Hansen, & Rapley, 2008; O'Byrne, Rapley, & Hansen, 2006). McCaw and Senn (1998) found "considerable similarities across gender" (p. 615) in participants' depictions of behavioural cues to communicate consent and non-consent. More

recently, using New Zealand participants and an adapted version of McCaw and Senn's measure, Beres et al. (2014) obtained consistent findings. The authors suggest that the miscommunication hypothesis has been popular because it implies that sexual violence can be reduced through campaigns to improve communication without the controversy and challenges that arise when "the gendered and intentional nature of sexual violence is named" (p. 774).

Recent research has replicated the finding that men seem capable of interpreting subtle consent and non-consent cues and taken this further by exploring the rhetorical functions of invoking the miscommunication hypothesis when sexual violence is linked to consent (O'Byrne et al., 2008; O'Byrne et al., 2006). In focus groups young men first discussed their knowledge and understanding of how sexual refusal normatively occurs. In doing so they displayed what the authors described as a "clear awareness of the fine-tuned nuances of the normative interactional management of sexual refusal" (O'Byrne et al., 2008, p. 176). However, when the discussion turned to the issue of rape the young men began to undo the shared knowledge they had displayed: together they constructed claims 'not to know' how women perform sexual refusal. In this regard they were "claiming to be cultural dopes" (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999, p. 310) by feigning ignorance of expressions of refusal that are parallel to those normatively used in other social interactions on a daily basis. O'Byrne et al. (2006) posit that in light of these findings the routine appeal to the miscommunication hypothesis to explain sexual violence among acquaintances "is at best, empirically unfounded and, at worst, provides an exculpatory warrant for the self-interested declarations made by rapists who claim 'not to know'" (p. 150). They also propose that campaigns to address sexual violence that focus on men 'hearing' refusals (or women more clearly offering them)

are misguided and damaging because it seems men already possess the ability to 'hear' and because the miscommunication hypothesis is therefore a 'rape myth'.

Miscommunication: women display 'token resistance'.

This component of miscommunication is suggested to be motivated by either 'playing hard to get' as part of seductive game-playing or as a means of ensuring that the woman is not seen as promiscuous (Beres et al., 2014). Early research did seem to confirm that women use the token 'no' (Allen, 2004; Muehlenhard, 2011; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988; Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1998; Shotland & Hunter, 1995) and the token 'no' has been persuasively linked to the extent that a woman believes the male she is refusing endorses the sexual double standard (Muehlenhard, 2011; Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988). However, Shotland and Hunter (1995) questioned token resistance suggesting that the studies' findings were flawed because there was evidence that many of the women meant 'no' when they said 'no' but then later changed their minds or meant 'maybe' when they said 'no'. They suggested that "memory consolidation" (p. 234) accounted for why the women failed to report a change of intention or an ambivalence when questioned by researchers.

Using a qualitative methodology, Muehlenhard and Rodgers (1998) supported this problematisation of the model, finding that most of their participants' narrative descriptions did not actually fit the current conceptualisation of token resistance. Later research explored whether token resistance should more properly be conceptualised as a form of sexual compliance (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010) and whether a dichotomous model of wanting and not wanting is too simplistic to fully capture sexual desire (more on this later; Beres et al., 2014; Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2005). Token resistance has been theorised to support the specific rape

myth ‘women enjoy rape’ (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011). Furthermore, women who report using token resistance were found more likely to accept interpersonal violence than women who do not (Muehlenhard & Hollabaugh, 1988); whereas men who reported perceiving token resistance took longer than men who did not to indicate that a man in a rape scenario should stop (Marx & Gross, 1995). Token resistance offers some understanding of acquaintance sexual violence but not in the way first hypothesised. Token resistance is a rape myth, the endorsement of which is associated with acquaintance sexual violence.

Despite the miscommunication hypothesis being the dominant explanatory model of acquaintance sexual violence among lay and professional people alike, closer scrutiny reveals the model to be wholly inadequate. Furthermore, such scrutiny also reveals that that the miscommunication model is supported by and supports rape myths. In order to better understand acquaintance sexual violence a fuller understanding of consent and the gendered nature of heterosexual relations is needed.

Interpreting Consent

Lim and Roloff (1999) describe three standards that have been used to interpret consent: “affirmative non-consent, affirmative behaviour, and affirmative language” (p. 3). Affirmative non-consent is synonymous with presumptive consent where silence is assumed as consent. This is problematic because women experiencing sexual violence may well not resist due to fear (Hooper, 2015) and because direct refusals are awkward in most contexts (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999). The affirmative behaviour standard is criticised for being too ambiguous (Remick, 1993). The affirmative language standard offers the appeal that it results in actual consent according perfectly with legal consent and means that a woman need only refrain

from verbally consenting "to preserve her right to legal protection of her sexual autonomy" (Remick, 1993, p. 1126). However, verbal expressions of consent are not normative behaviour (Beres, Herold, & Maitland, 2004; Hall, 1998; Humphreys, 2007; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014; Muehlenhard, 1995/1996). It is therefore argued that a definition of consent that relies on verbalising would result in a lot of sexual behaviour between willing partners being defined as non-consensual. A useful definition of consent needs to include verbal and nonverbal expressions of consent (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999).

Consenting, Wanting, and Ambivalence

The literature on consent also varies from legal definitions because distinctions have been proposed and explored between consenting to sex and wanting sex. For example, Jozkowski (2013) used both an Internal Consent Scale (ICS) and External Consent Scale (ECS) when exploring students' perceptions of consent. The ICS measures internal willingness, whereas the ECS measures verbal and/or nonverbal indicators of consent. However, Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) found that ambivalence was a missing discourse in the unidimensional and "dichotomous model of wanting and not wanting sex" (p. 16) that previous research and conceptualisations had been based on. In the dominant dichotomous model, they argue, consensual unwanted sex is conceptually 'not possible' and neither is non-consensual wanted sex, which is therefore not considered rape. In a new model proposed by Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007), when wanting is not conflated with consenting a fuller understanding of rape occurs.

a. The Dominant Model: "Sex is either wanted and consensual or unwanted and nonconsensual."		
	Wanted	Unwanted
Consensual	Not rape	NOT POSSIBLE
Nonconsensual	NOT POSSIBLE	Rape
b. The Dominant Model: "Rape is unwanted nonconsensual sex."		
	Wanted	Unwanted
Consensual	Not rape	Not rape
Nonconsensual	Not rape	Rape
c. The New Model: "Wanting and consenting are distinct concepts; nonconsensual sex is rape."		
	Wanted	Unwanted
Consensual	Not rape	Not rape
Nonconsensual	Rape	Rape

Figure 1. "The dominant and new models of wanting and consenting and their implications for what counts as rape" (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007, p. 73)

Note that although the new model defines unwanted consensual sex as 'not rape' it differs from the dominant model in that such sex is conceptually possible within the new model. Unwanted consensual sex can result from an area of consent that is generally overlooked in the literature: the process of social coercion.

Social Coercion

Social coercion is a form of pressure that occurs in the absence of overt partner pressure but is due to internalised pressures to "meet certain sexual obligations and fulfil societal roles" (Conroy, Krishnakumar, & Leone, 2014, p. 2). Gavey (1992) asserts that there is a paradox in talking about women having unwanted but consensual sex because it is an unspeakable truism. Social coercion offers an explanation for unwanted consensual sex that is referred to in the literature as sexual compliance or 'willing unwanted' but that Conroy et al. label *sexual acquiescence*. Conroy et al. found that most participants in their sample engaged in unwanted consensual sex "to promote partner satisfaction, to maintain the

relationship, and to avoid negative outcomes associated with the refusal of sex" (p. 11). Furthermore, they found that in their sample 93% acquiesced passively to sex, which they argue is qualitatively different to freely given consent and "should not be disregarded as normative behaviour in intimate relationships" (p. 14). Indeed, Gavey (1992) states that:

> It is important to remember that the continued existence of more brutal forms of male (sexual and non-sexual) violence against women acts as an important signification and reminder of the lack of ultimate control and power that many women have in our sexual and/ or other relations with men. (p. 330)

However, as discussed by Powell (2010), social coercion and pressure within young people's relationships is an especially understudied area.

Discourses of Heterosex and Consent

While negotiation of consent is usually thought of as a personal and intimate experience, such negotiations "take place within a specific social and cultural context, effectively governed by gendered discourses about sex" (Powell, 2010, p. 86). An especially powerful and widespread discourse that informs heterosex is that of the 'male sex drive discourse' (Holloway, 1984). Gavey (2005) describes how this hegemonic discourse provides an account of male sexuality as a biologically determined and almost overpowering need to have sex. Men's consent can therefore be assumed as ever-present (Beres, 2007). Allen (2003) discusses how many young men seek to assert their masculinity by distancing themselves from feminine or homosexual identities and adopt subject positions that accord with the hegemonic

masculinity. Within hegemonic masculinity, the 'male sex drive' discourse constructs consent as women's business because men are assumed to be always consenting

Another powerful heterosex discourse described by Holloway (1984) is that of the 'have/ hold' discourse, which relates to Christian values of marriage and monogamy where a women's sexuality is valued in her role as a wife who submits to her husband's desire. The 'male sex drive' discourse and the 'have/ hold' discourse powerfully work together to support "understandings of men's sexuality as active and pursuant and women's sexuality as passive and submissive" (Powell, 2010, p. 65). These discourses position women as gate-keepers whose role it is to either accept or reject a man's advance.

Consent Evolves: Communicative Consent

Most of the limited research in the area of sexual consent has focused on understanding consent as it occurs or does not occur; however, some academics have focused on how a change in the understanding of consent might reduce the rate of acquaintance sexual violence. Pineau (1989) suggests that consent should be reconceptualised as a communicative model such that consent to sexual relations "were a proper conversation rather than an offer from the Mafia" (p. 235). A communicative model places mutual desire as the main concern of consent, and in cases of sexual violence moves the responsibility from women having to prove lack of consent on to men needing to prove how they knew they had the woman's consent (Beres, 2007).

Communicative consent at Antioch College.

Antioch College in Canada adopted a model of communicative consent in its Sexual Offense Prevention Policy (SOPP) that was devised by a group of 'Womyn of Antioch' in 1991 and is still in use today (Antioch College, 2015). Importantly, SOPP states that verbal consent must be "obtained each and every time there is sexual activity … [and at each] new level of sexual activity" (pp. 42-43). Humphreys and Herold (2003) were interested in whether such a policy would be acceptable to students on other campuses. In focus groups they found that although students thought the policy would be useful for educational or awareness-raising reasons they did not want it adopted on their own campuses. The students' objections were to do with the practicality of enforcing such a policy and its deleterious effect on the experience of sexual relations: students expressed that it was not normal to verbalise agreement in the way SOPP demands. Quantitative research using a survey design confirmed the findings from the focus groups: students viewed the idealism behind SOPP positively but did not think it practical or reflected normative sexual behaviour (Humphreys & Herold, 2003).

Victorian law reform and communicative consent.

In Australia, Victorian law reform in 2007 shifted the definition of consent to a communicative model. Powell, Henry, Flynn, and Henderson (2013) analysed court transcripts of ten rape trials where the issue of consent was central. They concluded that law reforms had resulted in some "discernible shifts in the discourse on rape taking place since the introduction of the communicative model of consent" (p. 476); however, they also found that rape myths and gendered discourses of consent are stubborn even in the face of law reform. Furthermore, they noted the irony that the communicative model can result in further victim-blaming in trials

because the focus on the defendant's state of mind can increase the interrogation of the behaviours of the victim-complainant.

Beres (2007) challenged the conclusions drawn by both Humphreys and Herold (2003) and Pineau (1989) that a communicative model of consent requires a paradigm shift. Beres did not think such a radical shift is required for the adoption of a communicative model because the main 'shift' is from demonstrating how a woman resisted to demonstrating how a woman consented. This need not be verbal, Beres explains, but should start by assuming that men and woman are already skilled at communicating their willingness, given most sex is consensual. To untangle the complexities of consent Beres suggests that future research should seek to gain a fuller understanding of consent by interrogating what is normative and conventional: "It is only by developing an understanding of 'consensual' experiences that we can really begin to examine what 'is absent' in non-consensual experiences" (Beres, 2007, p. 103).

Conclusion

This research seeks to contribute to the limited research into how young women understand consent and how they normatively negotiate consent in their heterosexual relations. Such insights into what is absent in non-consensual sexual experiences are needed to contribute to addressing the high rate of acquaintance sexual violence, particularly among young women. Furthermore, this research is timely because it will be useful to better understand whether the adoption of the communicative model of consent in popular campaigns to end sexual violence is being reflected in how young women normatively negotiate consent.

Method

Methodology

My epistemological position is best reflected in postmodern social constructionism: my understanding of science is that it produces knowledge that better reflects the social and historical position of its producers than of an 'objective' external world. This results in multiple, context-dependent realities (Eagly & Riger, 2014). This research is not designed to uncover objective truths or to make statistical generalisations about the prevalence of the attitudes, beliefs, or experiences of the participants but to explore a traditionally silenced group's understandings and experiences on a gendered issue of agency and coercion.

A qualitative design was selected to allow young women's understandings and experiences of consent to heterosex to be heard. Focus groups were selected because of an interest in understanding how young women would collaboratively create accounts of consent, and therefore the focus group better reflects everyday conversations than a one-to-one interview. Also it was considered that participants would gain more from the research experience conducted in focus groups as they would be able to compare their ideas with others and were more likely to find the group format comfortable and enjoyable.

I acknowledge that my interpretation of the data reflects my commitment to feminism and that it is therefore only one of several possible interpretations. The broad feminist framework I have drawn upon in this research was considered vital because of the subject matter and its associated issues of gender, power, heteronormativity, and gender relations.

Procedure

In small focus groups, participants discussed the topic of negotiating consent in heterosexual relations. The conversation was loosely guided by the researcher with some ‘key questions’ pre-prepared (see Appendix A) that were designed to focus the conversation on normative consent and understandings of consent; however, these questions were not designed to be prescriptive and the conversation was allowed to flow. Participants were told at the start that they were free to interpret questions as they chose and to ignore or not discuss anything that arose during the discussion that they were not comfortable with. The focus groups were held in a private lounge room in the halls of residence that was familiar to most the participants and was a relaxed and informal setting. In both groups a short warm-up task (Calder-Dawe, 2014; see Appendix B) was used to help the participants feel more comfortable communicating with each other. The discussion was recorded using a University issued digital recording device and was later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Recruitment.

Initial ethics approval was given for poster recruitment (see Appendix C) within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) in late-May. An amendment to ethics approval was granted in late-July to recruit participants via Women’s Studies and related papers. Despite this, recruitment remained unsuccessful. Further ethics approval was sought and granted in mid-August to recruit from the halls of residence. This was done with the help of a senior residential assistant who circulated copies of the poster and in late-August assisted with booking a room for an information session with women who were potentially interested. Participants were not directly recruited at this information session but it did result in several

following up with email contact and eventually a sufficient number to organise one and then another small focus group. During the email contact I carefully checked that the participants understood the project aims, that participation was unrelated to their university study, and that they were free to withdraw from the study subject to the natural limitations of the study design. They were emailed copies of both the poster and the information sheet (see Appendix D), although they were also given hard copies of the information sheet.

Participants.

Participants were six young women aged between 18 and 23 who had been sexually active with at least one man. Participants were divided into two groups partly due to their availabilities but partly because it was initially anticipated that there would be more participants in each group. All participants were university students and in one group two of the participants were close friends.

Analysis of data.

Transcribed data was analysed for themes using inductive thematic analysis following the recommendations made by Braun and Clarke (2006). First the discussion recordings were carefully checked against the verbatim transcriptions to ensure accuracy and a process of reading and rereading increased familiarity with the data. Then the data was coded and by copying and pasting coded sections into new files the data was organised into potential themes. Lastly the data was carefully reviewed to ensure that the themes interpreted were coherent and reflected well the codes, the data, and its connections. In total, nearly two and a half hours of discussion were included in the transcriptions.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were given an information sheet prior to the focus groups (see Appendix D). The information sheet introduced the researcher, covered the aim of the research, what participation would involve, their right to withdraw, and how their privacy and confidentiality would be protected. Before the focus groups began participants were verbally reminded of the purpose of the research and at the end of the groups they were given a post-group information sheet (see Appendix E) that included my contact details. Participants were contacted the day after the focus group they attended to ensure they remained comfortable with the research process. In the event that a participant had communicated distress and did wish to access counselling services I had a pre-prepared list of local counselling services (see Appendix F) that I would help them choose from and access. However, as was planned the group conversations were focused on consent rather than non-consent and none of the participants communicated distress during or after the research process. To protect confidentiality, rather than sending full transcripts to participants to comment on, summaries of the focus groups and a summary of the research findings were offered instead and they were invited to make comments or contact me if they wished to. None of the participants made any comments on the summaries, although some did make contact to share thoughts about the theme of consent more broadly. During transcribing careful attention was paid to anonymising the data and in the instance where the content was too nuanced to effectively achieve this aim it was omitted from the transcription.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee, School of Psychology at the University of Waikato – Ethics approval number 15:20, granted 28th May, 2015.

Findings

Analysis resulted in the interpretation of three key themes taken verbatim from the data: (a) '*Consent just seems like a more female thing*' including the sub-themes of 'women's business', 'men should instigate', and 'the male sex drive'; (b) '*If you want them to, you let them*' including the sub-themes of 'consenting to wanted sex' and 'communicating non-consent to unwanted sex'; and (c) '*It's complicated, cos it just depends really*' including the sub-themes of 'the role of alcohol', 'relationships', and 'anal sex'.

'Consent Just Seems Like a More Female Thing'

This theme describes how consent for these participants was a gendered activity. Participants had clear ideas about the roles men and women play in communicating interest and negotiating consent in heterosexual relationships, although this was complicated in the presence of alcohol (discussed in a later theme). There was broad agreement among participants that, apart from when drunk, it was more normative for men to approach women in situations such as bars and clubs where men and women might meet for the first time:

P1: but I feel like guys, this might be a little bit sexist, I feel like guys usually would approach
P2: you, yeah
P1: you, I don't wanna say me because I'm not always approached by guys but if that's happening and it's usually, like a guy will come and approach the girl

Most the participants agreed that it was their common experience that the woman's role was to decide whether to encourage or reject the advances:

P1: Or they're just gonna stare at you creepily for ages (group laughter)
P2: until you decide
P3: yeah
P2: either to abuse them or to go over
P1: yeah, whether to get away cos you're creeped out or whether to, like, yeah

***

P1: If you're not into him or whatever then you kind of move away
P2: Or say you're with someone
P1: Yeah, but that doesn't always work (group laughter)

They described how this norm also applies for groups of men and women:

P1: but usually guy groups come up to like girl groups and there's, hanging lurkers
P2: and if we're not interested we're like, move along, like move along
P2: and then they're like just keep coming closer and you're like
P1: yeah
P2: dude
P1: you just have to scoot to the dance floor, aye

It was also expressed that when interested in the man such behaviour was desirable. This reflects the extent to which these young women had internalised the hegemonic gendered sexuality discourses:

P: I like it when guys show they're keen tho, if they're not a creep
P: Yeah, it's nice when they're, when they buy you drinks and that (group laughter)

***

P: I expect guys to want to make the first move because they are supposed to want to be the man and the man is supposed to the one that's dominant and in control

One participant expressed her sense of agency that she was willing and capable of transgressing this norm when necessary but there was clearly a tension between that agency and compliance to the norm in that it was her preference not to have to:

P: I'm a dominant female so I'm more than happy to have to make the first move if I'm, like, I feel I need to but it's nice to think that a guy's interested in you enough that he would want to make the first move

Participants also broadly agreed that this pattern of men instigating and women responding by reciprocating interest or rejecting them was mirrored in their experience of heterosexual consent. There was a consensus that men are almost always consenting to sex because it was generally understood that their sex drive is 'naturally' higher. They described male sexuality in terms that reflected Powell's

(2010) description of it as “active and pursuant” (p. 65) and some participants clearly articulated that this meant that consent was therefore a female issue.

> *P:* *I just wanna say, guys in general, tho, um, like I would say that I say ‘no’ more than he would say ‘no’*
> *P:* *definitely*
> *I:* *definitely?*
> *P:* *yeah*
>
> ***
>
> *P1:* *consent just seems like a more female thing*
> *P2:* *yeah*
> *P3:* *yeah*
> *P1:* *which I know is probably maybe, hmm, I’ve never really thought about the guys consent*
>
> ***
>
> *P:* *You know the guy is consenting cos he’s, like, there, trying (group laughter)*

The expectation was that men would be almost always interested in sex and so their consent could be assumed and need not be considered:

> *P1:* *I think they’re just less likely to say no*
> *P2:* *in general, yeah, I feel like guys*
> *P1:* *that may be sexist but I think that’s how it is*
> *P2:* *like guys are like, if you get sex it’s a good day, so he’ll try*
> *P3:* *yeah, it doesn’t matter what she looks like, doesn’t matter when it happens, just as long as it happens (group laughter)*

The women described that they were much more likely to say ‘no’ to sex than their male partners in both casual and committed relationships. This behaviour accords with the ‘male sex drive’ discourse and the ‘have/ hold’ discourse because they describe men as always interested in sex and that their role as women is therefore to decide whether to accept or reject their advances. This is reflected in their shared endorsement of the view that consent is really a female issue because men are always interested and therefore consenting.

When asked how it was acceptable for guys to ‘let down’ women the participants were unanimous in finding the suggestion humorous. According to the women, men would only not be interested in sex in extreme circumstances or only

for a brief instance; for example, a participant described how her partner sometimes said he was too tired but that he “pretty much always changed his mind”. Another participant described a scenario that was typical of when her partner might let her down but this in itself only reinforced the assumed rarity of men being disinterested in sex because it was after he had worked a 25 hour day:

I: *how’s it ok for guys to let girls down and say no they don’t want it, I know*
P: *I don’t think it happens*
P: *I don’t know, I’ve been let down before but it was just in the like, huh, if he’s had a big week at work, like a big week, getting up at 4 in the morning or something and travelling over to [town] and coming back home at, like, god, 5 in the morning or something, he would just be like, ‘I am so tired’, you, I don’t know, it’s just, cuddly, he’s usually more cuddly and I’m like ‘come on, let’s do something’*

This contribution has to be considered it its context, i.e. within a group of women and coming immediately after one woman had stated that her own experience was that women do not get let down, which means that admitting to being let down by men is a more vulnerable position to take within the group thereafter and could account for why she described such an extreme scenario. However, describing such an extreme scenario was a resource available to her to shield her from such a vulnerability precisely because the ‘male sex drive’ discourse is so uncontested and hegemonic.

Men and women were described by the women in this study as having nuanced roles for communicating interest in each other and giving consent to heterosexual relations. They described men’s roles as typically approaching and initiating, and women’s roles as responding and giving or denying consent. These roles were described in ways that were supported by the ‘male sex drive’ discourse: men’s interest in sex was constructed as ever-present and almost unstoppable.

'If You Want Them To, You Let Them'

This theme describes how body language was considered the norm for communicating consent whereas verbalising consent was not considered normative behaviour unless it was to verbalise non-consent or to negotiate consent to anal sex. When the sex was wanted the participants described consent in nonverbal terms or as being unnecessary because their communication of wanting sex was considered by the women to be synonymous with consent:

P: if you want them to, you let them

***

P: like it's just a natural progression of, it's just, it's a flow

***

P: sometimes I'm like, do I want it? And then it's like, OK, but it's not like you say it, you just don't stop it
P: Yeah
P: Uh huh

***

P: it's body language
P: yeah, I was going to say, I just put it down to body language

These extracts show how the participants described consenting to sex as something that they expressed in their body language and this is consistent with previous research such as the finding by Powell (2008) that sexual consent among young Australians was "an embodied practice" (p. 177). Notably, their descriptions of how they consented conformed to the discourse of female sexuality as passive and receptive because they described their expressions of body language as "you let them" and "you just don't stop them". Despite the young women's candour, none of them articulated expressions of body language consent that could be described as active or pursuant.

One participant described a time when her partner had verbally asked for her consent to sex and the group discussed how this was 'weird' because when he

verbally raised the issue of consent she was already communicating that she wanted sex, albeit nonverbally:

> *P1:* *I wouldn't say I was drunk by any means but we had a few drinks and he, I remember him, he asked me 'can we have sex?' (laughter)*
> *P2:* *and you would have been like*
> *P1:* *we had already made out and things and I think I was lying in his bed, it was weird*
> *P2:* *it would almost have been better if he didn't ask, I think*
> *P1:* *I said no tho, and this was, this is the only reason I think I remember it was because it was a weird moment in time, it was very surreal*
> *I:* *so you said no?*
> *P1:* *yeah, I said no because I thought it was weird,*
> *P2:* *that he asked*
> *P1:* *I was like this is obviously the wrong thing*
> *I:* *so the actual asking was a bit of a*
> *P1:* *it was a turn off, it was weird*
> *P3:* *yeah, it is weird*
> *P2:* *when someone's on top of you (laughs) and they're like, 'can we have sex?'*

Transgressing the norms about how to negotiate consent to heterosex was considered "a turn off" and "weird", which demonstrates how powerfully entrenched and internalised these norms are despite widespread campaigns directed at young people to get verbal consent.

When discussing how they negotiate consent to wanted sex the participants also discussed how they communicate non-consent to unwanted sex. In both groups they talked about giving clear, direct verbal 'no' messages in the context of unwanted sex:

> *P1:* *nah, no means no, just straight to the point*
> *P2:* *yeah*
> *P1:* *if you don't want it, just say no*
>
> ***
>
> *P1:* *consent is like*
> *P2:* *yeah*
> *P1:* *given through your actions*
> *P3:* *but if you didn't want to you could tell them, but*
> *P1:* *right, I feel that's when you would be verbal, if you were like, 'no'*
> *P2:* *yeah*
> *P1:* *if you were like 'no, stop'*
> *P3:* *yeah, but you don't need to be like yes (group laughter)*

P1: unless you're like YES! (group laughter)

***

P: yeah, just, it happens, you like make out and they start touching you, and then if you don't want it, that's when you say no

P: you say 'don't touch me'

Because this study was not focused on non-consensual sexual experiences this topic was not teased out for further exploration and I made no attempt to encourage them to elaborate further. However, it is notable that the participants shared claim to be able to give a direct 'no' to unwanted sex is contrary to the argument raised by Kitzinger and Frith (1999) that such refusals are neither normative nor easy to perform in any situation, let alone one involving such emotional and interpersonal complexities as sexual intimacy. Furthermore, the endorsement of a 'just say no' discourse – as evidenced by them asserting that verbalising 'no' was how to ensure a man understood their disinterest in sex – suggests that the participants had internalised the miscommunication theory of sexual violence: while they expected that their male partners could interpret their consent to sex through body language the women thought that non-consent required a clear and verbal 'no' for the men to understand them. Burkett and Hamilton (2012) describe how this highlights the "contradictory nature of postfeminist sensibility" (p. 821) in that while the young women in this study were not sexually constrained in the way women were in the past they still carried the burden of responsibility for managing sexual encounters with men.

'It's Complicated, Cos It Just Depends Really'

This theme describes the contexts for the women that modified the norms around communicating interest and consent that they had described. These included the three contexts of alcohol, relationship status, and anal sex. When alcohol was

involved the women described themselves as more able to initiate communication and interest in sex:

> *I:* *how do you let them know you're interested in them?*
> *P:* *depends if you're drunk or sober in my case*
> *I:* *uh huh, OK*
> *P:* *very true*
> *P:* *mmm*
>
> ***
>
> *P:* *I dunno, I think guys usually would usually, like, it's more what they do in, in that situation like, in town, unless you're, you're like, shit faced and that (group laughter)*
> *P:* *Yeah, it is*
> *P:* *Definitely*
>
> ***
>
> *P1:* *But even, oh people, if I was like in town for someone and I had no idea I would probably just go up to them, hopefully try and get a vibe (laugh) see what's gonna happen, I'd be like 'let's do shots'*
> *P2:* *depends how drunk you are, aye?*
> *P1:* *and then if I do shots, it usually goes down-hill quickly (group laughter)*
> *P3:* *depends on the drunken level for me*

Alcohol seemed to allow the women to adopt a sexuality that more closely accorded with the norms for male sexuality than for female sexuality because it allowed the women to intentionally approach men (rather than using more subtle means mentioned as normative when alcohol was not involved) rather than vice versa. This was discussed with much laughter as well as reference to regret:

> *P1:* *If I'm pissed then, like, ha, I tend to start things off more, if that's in town or when you've gone back with them and you're making out*
> *P2:* *I think it's a confidence thing*
> *P3:* *Oh yes*
> *P2:* *but you regret it in the morning (group laughter)*
> *P1:* *yeah, that's true, I do*

Ward, Matthews, Weiner, Hogan, and Popson (2012) found that higher reported drinking levels among young people correlated with more permissive attitudes towards consent negotiated when drunk. This finding could mean that when intoxicated with alcohol women become more likely to say 'yes' but it could also mean that when intoxicated women, like the participants in this study, find

themselves able to more freely transgress the gendered norms that dictate a more passive and receptive sexuality and are able to adopt a more active and pursuant one. However, adopting a more active and pursuant sexuality is a transgression of a powerful gendered sexuality norm and the women described feelings of regret after the event.

The young women in this study described negotiating consent within their committed relationships as different to negotiating it in casual relationships: relationship status modified the norms for sexual consent. Although they talked about body language being the norm for communicating consent in both casual and committed relationships they described negotiating consent as qualitatively different in committed relationships. In committed relationships consent was described as being assumed to a certain extent.

> *P:* *I think when you're in a relationship, at any time it's OK, in my case, like there's not really the should we or shouldn't we, it's like if anyone wants to*
>
> ***
>
> *P:* *I kind of just feel like, oh, OK, whatever, like, I probably should*

This is consistent with Humphreys' (2007) research finding that not only is normative consent to sex different between casual and committed relationships but also that this change occurs quite early in the relationship, often after only a very few sexual encounters.

Another way that their descriptions of consent subtly differed between casual and committed relationships was that whereas the women were fairly unanimous in describing consenting as synonymous with wanting in casual encounters the picture was more mixed within committed relationships. Some women felt that wanting sex was not always important within committed relationships:

***

P1: I dunno, it's different in a relationship cos, like, it's not just about what you want, it's you both, you sometimes just do it for them but not in a bad way, they do stuff for you too and it's not that you totally don't want to
P2: I think that's true, it's not a bad thing, it's a compromise but when you're not in a relationship
P1: when you're not in a relationship, you sort of, like, you don't have
P2: you don't have to think about them so much
P1: right

***

P1: I feel like that would be it, if you, I didn't want it I would definitely say, like, say, speak what I was thinking
P2: I would if it wasn't someone that I didn't know but I mean, but it's like, with, with [name] it's not like I don't want to, it's that I can't be bothered, like it's kind of different, yeah it's different I think
P1: but you've gotta trust, like, a trusting relationship
P2: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, you trust him anyway so it's just like, whatever

Within their committed relationships these women reported that sex was not always about mutual pleasure and desire but was related to their understandings of trust and love. However, this was guided by norms that encouraged sexual compliance: some of the women described times when they were not interested in sex with their partner but felt a sense of obligation, although they did not consider this problematic and viewed it as part of a normal reciprocal arrangement of compromising. Some also articulated that while they felt they could prioritise their own needs in casual sexual encounters in a relationship they had to consider their partner's needs also, which they interpreted as sometimes having sex they did not actually desire. The model proposed by Peterson and Muelenhard (2007) includes this unwanted consensual sex as 'not rape' but nonetheless as distinct from wanted consensual sex, whereas the dominant model would also consider this 'not rape' because it considers such sex as 'not possible'. Conroy, Krishnakumar, and Leone (2014) would describe this as sexual acquiescence.

Gavey (2005) discusses an 'economy of sex' within relationships where women trade sex for love, trust, and commitment because they understand that healthy relationships that last include frequent sex. The women in this study

emphasised such tacit arrangements as something they actively contributed to the maintenance of rather than something they were subjected to: they saw themselves as free agents involved in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial arrangement that both partners gained from. However, Burkett and Hamilton (2012) argue that seen through a postfeminist lens women's compulsory sexual agency – whereby it is assumed that the sexual choices made by women are solely their own responsibility and free from socio-cultural influence – disguises the normalisation of sexual compliance by dressing such compliance up as free choice made within an egalitarian relationship.

Other women in this study were less enthusiastic about endorsing having sex they did not actively want within committed relationships and one woman demonstrated how she actively resisted the pressure to have sex with her partner when she was not interested and described herself in agentic terms:

> *P: See, I'm, maybe I'm just not like that. With the person I'm kinda with, last night for example, he was eager and I was like, 'I'm just, I'm tired, I wanna have a shower', so I had a shower and I think he was pretty like 'yes, it's gonna happen' and you're like, we're like cuddling and I'm like 'oh OK, I'm gonna go to sleep, can you move, like can you move over' (group laughter)*

It is telling that she was able to describe such agency without the reference to regret that was endorsed as a shared experience by the women when discussing adopting a more active and pursuant sexuality under the influence of alcohol. King (2014) describes the sort of agency the participant is describing here as "'derivative' of men's active sexuality" (p. 311) in that her agency was contingent on his active sexuality and its management and therefore not quite equal to men's sexual agency. The sexual agency described by the women in going to town "rolled-as" (drunk) with the intention of approaching men for sex is not just different in scale but is qualitatively different because the agency described above is still being acted out

within the gendered norm of female receptivity and therefore constitutes a smaller resistance.

The third context that participants described as an exception or modification to the norms around consenting nonverbally was that of anal sex. In one group a participant raised the issue of describing how she had friends who had found themselves having anal sex without it being discussed prior. The group were unanimous that this was something that should be discussed in advance, although one woman suggested that such discussion could be redundant in close relationships:

P1: I've got friends that have had, even boyfriends actually and casual partners as well that they'll be doing, say having sex then I don't know, moving around and then all of a sudden they start, they're having anal before they know it, there's been no, like verbal
P2: fuck that
P1: conversation or there's been no, no, I don't know, and I feel, which is interesting, sex is one thing where I feel like, like body language and that I take those sorts of consents and that sort of thing but with anal I feel like that's a verbal conversation
P2: Oh yeah, definitely
P1: like, you verbally say yes I'm up for that
P2: like, it's not something that you just slip in there, you're like, umm
I: so that should be verbal, yeah?
P1: Yeah, I feel like you should definitely talk
P2: I feel like if you didn't talk about it I'd turn around and punch him
P1: I think that's not surprising (group laughter) that people would be wanting to have
P3: if you want it
P1: I feel like you would discuss it, that it's like
P2: yeah, or they would know you well enough to know that you'd be fine with it

This suggests that the body language to communicate consent norm does not apply for all sex acts and that anal sex was probably considered by these women to be outside of the definition of normal heterosex. While anal sex among adolescents and young adults is increasing (Lescano et al., 2009) and is a sexual practice that women may experience social pressure to both comply with and be seen to enjoy (Marston & Lewis, 2014) in this study the women invoked notions of sexual agency in declaring anal sex as something that would require explicit verbal negotiation of consent (Fahs

& Gonzalez, 2014). P2's dominant voice ("fuck that") early in the discussion about anal sex may have shaped how the others responded and contributed: the group setting may have made them especially sensitive to promoting their sexual agency with regard to anal sex.

The third theme identified in the analysis was that there are certain contexts where the norms around consenting to sex identified in the first two themes are modified. The contexts identified by the participants included being drunk, being in a committed rather than casual relationship, and having anal sex.

Conclusion

In small focus groups young women attending a New Zealand university discussed their understanding of consent and how they negotiate consent in their casual and committed heterosexual relationships. Negotiation of sexual consent in heterosexual casual and committed relationships for participants in this study were shaped by gendered discourses that construct men as active, pursuant, and always interested in sex and women as passive 'gate-keepers' who more often say 'no' to sex than men. The 'male sex drive' discourse is an especially entrenched understanding of male sexuality that informs both men and women on how to behave and interpret each other's behaviour and this was reflected by the women in this study in their understandings and experiences of consent. Apart from when drunk, which was when the women described themselves in more agentic terms than afforded by the gendered discourses that instruct female sexuality, such agency was more partial and limited than men's and also contingent on managing men's more active sexuality. Alcohol may play a role in encouraging women to adopt more active sexualities.

Verbalising consent was not normative behaviour for the participants in this study, although for some of the women nonverbal consent to sex within their committed relationships was qualitatively different to within casual relationships; within their committed relationships they described consent as having a stronger assumed element to it combined with a sense of obligation when they did not want sex. The participants endorsed verbalising non-consent to unwanted sex but as this type of sex was purposely not a focus of this study it is not known to what extent this better reflects their experience or a behavioural intention.

An interesting aspect of how the young women negotiated consent was that when the sex was wanted they described how consent was either obvious in their body language that expressed ‘wanting’ or that consenting was unnecessary because they wanted it and so they just had to “not stop it”. For these women, consent was an issue related to communicating that sex was unwanted; consent as they understood it was not really a part of wanted sex. They seemed to conflate wanting with consenting when it came to sex they wanted but they were clearer about describing the role of consent when giving non-consent to unwanted sex. They considered consent as a concept to be of greatest importance in this scenario and of least importance for wanted sex in committed relationships. When the issue was raised, women in this study were unanimous that the nonverbal consent norm was insufficient in the case of negotiating consent to anal sex.

Limitations

The most significant limitation to interpreting this research is the relatively small number of participants. This was due to considerable difficulties recruiting participants for research involving the sensitive topic of how they consent to sexual relations. However, the limited number of participants does not detract from the

findings presented here as generalisable, universal ‘truth-claims’ are not being made. This research was interested in how participants constructed their understandings of consent and what they revealed about how they negotiate consent within heterosexual relations. It seems reasonable that the resources they drew on to account for consent are readily available in the wider cultural context and therefore these insights are likely to be of use to understanding the topic more broadly.

Another limitation of this study is that my interpretation of the data likely better represents a dominant White cultural lens on the issues of sexual consent and a mainstream White middle-class feminist interpretation of those issues.

Focus groups are a particular context and produce a particular sort of data. While some criticise the artificiality of focus groups others counter that most group-based conversations involve an element of performance and so in this respect focus groups are a familiar form of every-day talk (Smithson, 2000). However, because focus groups are not spontaneous discussion on self-selected topics among self-selected participants they should not be interpreted as such but as a social event. Dominant voices within the group may constrain counter-views and it is suggested that this is dealt with through homogenised groups, careful group facilitation, and reflexive interpretation of the data (Smithson, 2000). As the researcher I was almost twice the age of the participants and this risked creating a sense of ‘other’ that could act as a barrier to the discussion. My approach was to be mindful of seating and room arrangement (I sat on the chair that sank me lowest and I ran the groups in a lounge in the student halls where I was the one on unfamiliar ground) and I purposely shared some of my own background and interest in the topic as part of a reflexive interviewing (DeVault & Gross, 2007). I did not assume the role of ‘the knower’; I framed my participants as experts in their social worlds, which they were

generously willing to share with me. Sometimes this meant asking them to clarify terms and resulted in much hilarity when I shared the parallel language from my youth and cultural background.

Future Implications and Directions

During contact with potential participants it became clear that young women find the prospect of discussing how they consent quite confronting. One potential participant stated she would find it easier to talk about sex that was not consensual than sex that was because having considered participating in the research she realised that she did not know how she consented or what it really meant. At the end of both group discussions participants began to spontaneously discuss how they realised that consent as a concept was not quite as simple as they had previously thought or as it was in practice. Some participants have since made contact about things they have read or heard about the topic: there seems to be an appetite among young women to discuss and better understand the issues around sexual consent.

Despite campaigns to encourage affirmative consent this was not an approach endorsed by these women or considered by them to be normative in their social worlds, probably in part because their definition of consent seemed to focus more on unwanted sex. A more useful approach than campaigns encouraging young people to 'get consent' (which they may not feel relates to their experiences of wanted sex) and one that is more likely to satisfy young people's interest in issues of consent and ethical sex would include an examination of gendered discourses.

There are several group-based programs that cover issues of consent and ethical sex and have been evaluated positively, including: 'Sex & Ethics' (Carmody, 2009) aimed at 16-25 year olds and developed in Australia but piloted and evaluated

in Wellington (Carmody, Ovenden, & Hoffmann, 2011) and ‘Mates and Dates’ developed in New Zealand for school-age children from years 9-13 (Accident Compensation Corporation, 2015). Universities are uniquely placed to offer such programs to young people beyond the school context and in light of the stubborn problem of acquaintance sexual violence among this age group there is a strong argument that they have a moral obligation to do so.

Future research is especially needed in the area of young people, consent, and anal sex because it is recognised that this is an under-researched area (Lescano et al., 2009). As such, it is of significant and growing importance and interest to issues of gender, power, consent, coercion, and agency (Fahs & Gonzalez, 2014; Marston & Lewis, 2014).

Some of the young women in this study seemed to use alcohol to help them adopt more active sexualities. Future research into the role alcohol plays in issues of consent, coercion, and agency among young people is needed to better understand what is going on in that particular context. Similarly, it could be useful to explore whether group-based programs that enable young women to better understand gendered discourses of heterosex and consent and that help them to better assert their own sexual desires and wants could play a role in reducing binge drinking among young women.

Lastly, in light of the contributions the young women in this study made about the distinctions between wanting and consenting to sex further research in the area of social pressure and coercion in young people’s relationships could reveal useful insights into better understanding consent.

References

Accident Compensation Corporation. (2015). *Mates and dates*. Retrieved from: http://www.acc.co.nz/preventing-injuries/at-school/mates-dates/index.htm#P37_3073

Allen, L. (2003). Girls want sex, boys want love: Resisting dominant discourses of (hetero) sexuality. *Sexualities, 6*(2), 215-236. doi:10.1177/1363460703006002004

Allen, L. (2004). 'Getting off' and 'going out': Young people's conceptions of (hetero)sexual relationships. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 6*(6), 463-481. doi:10.2307/4005389

Beres, M. (2007). 'Spontaneous' sexual consent: An analysis of sexual consent literature. *Feminism & Psychology, 17*(1), 93-108. doi:10.1177/0959353507072914

Beres, M. (2010). Sexual miscommunication? Untangling assumptions about sexual communication between casual sex partners. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 12*(1), 1-14. doi:10.1080/13691050903075226

Beres, M. (2014). Rethinking the concept of consent for anti-sexual violence activism and education. *Feminism & Psychology, 24*(3), 373-389. doi:10.1177/0959353514539652

Beres, M., Herold, E., & Maitland, S. B. (2004). Sexual consent behaviors in same-sex relationships. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 33*(5), 475-486. doi:10.1023/B:ASEB.0000037428.41757.10

Beres, M., Senn, C. Y., & McCaw, J. (2014). Navigating ambivalence: How heterosexual young adults make sense of desire differences. *The Journal of Sex Research, 51*(7), 765-776. doi:10.1080/00224499.2013.792327

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Burkett, M., & Hamilton, K. (2012). Postfeminist sexual agency: Young women's negotiations of sexual consent. *Sexualities, 15*(7), 815-833. doi:10.1177/1363460712454076

Calder-Dawe, O. (2014) *Gender, sexism and social activism: A youth workshop resource*. Auckland: Sexual Politics Now, School of Psychology, University

of Auckland. Retrieved from: http://www.sexualpoliticsnow.org.nz/projects/media-sexism-action/about/

Carmody, M. (2009). *Sex & ethics: The sexual ethics education program for young people*. South Yarra, Vic: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carmody, M., Ovenden, G., & Hoffmann, A. (2011). *"The program really gives you skills for dealing with real life situations": Results from the evaluation of the Sex + Ethics Program with young people from Wellington, New Zealand*. Retrieved from: https://nzfvc.org.nz/sites/nzfvc.org.nz/files/carmody-et-al-sex-ethics-research-evaluation-june-2011.pdf

Conroy, N. E., Krishnakumar, A., & Leone, J. M. (2014). Reexamining issues of conceptualization and willing consent: The hidden role of coercion in experiences of sexual acquiescence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. doi:10.1177/0886260514549050

Crawford, M. (1995). *Talking difference: on gender and language*. Thousand Oaks, Calif; London: SAGE.

Crimes Act 1961 (2015). Retrieved from http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1961/0043/latest/DLM327382.html

DeVault, M. L., & Gross, G. (2007). Feminist interviewing: Experience, talk, and knowledge. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 173-197). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Eagly, A. H., & Riger, S. (2014). Feminism and psychology: Critiques of methods and epistemology. *The American Psychologist, 69*(7), 685-702. doi:10.1037/a0037372

Edwards, K. M., Turchik, J. A., Dardis, C. M., Reynolds, N., & Gidycz, C. A. (2011). Rape myths: History, individual and institutional-level presence, and implications for change. *Sex Roles, 65*(11), 761-773. doi:10.1007/s11199-011-9943-2

Fahs, B., & Gonzalez, J. (2014). The front lines of the "back door": Navigating (dis)engagement, coercion, and pleasure in women's anal sex experiences. *Feminism & Psychology, 24*(4), 500. doi:10.1177/0959353514539648

Gavey, N. (1992). Technologies and effects of heterosexual coercion. *Feminism & Psychology, 2*(3), 325-351. doi:10.1177/0959353592023003

Gavey, N. (2005). *Just sex? The cultural scaffolding of rape*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, D. S. (1998). Consent for sexual behavior in a college student population. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality, 1*. Retrieved from http://www.ejhs.org/

Hansen, S., O'Byrne, R., & Rapley, M. (2010). Young heterosexual men's use of the miscommunication model in explaining acquaintance rape. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy, 7*(1), 45-49. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13178-010-0003-4

Hickman, S. E., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (1999). "By the semi-mystical appearance of a condom": How young women and men communicate sexual consent in heterosexual situations. *The Journal of Sex Research, 36*(3), 258-272. doi:10.1080/00224499909551996

Holloway, W. (1984). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Holloway, C. Urwin, C. Venn, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity* (pp. 223-261). London: Sage.

Hooper, J. (2015, 2005, June 23). Why many rape victims don't fight or yell. *The Washington Post*.

Humphreys, T. (2007). Perceptions of sexual consent: The impact of relationship history and gender. *The Journal of Sex Research, 44*(4), 307-315. doi:10.1080/00224490701586706

Humphreys, T., & Herold, E. (2003). Should universities and colleges mandate sexual behavior? *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality, 15*(1), 35-51. doi:10.1300/J056v15n01_04

Humphreys, T., & Herold, E. (2007). Sexual consent in heterosexual relationships: Development of a new measure. *Sex Roles, 57*(3-4), 305-315. doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9264-7

Jozkowski, K. N. (2013). The influence of consent on college students' perceptions of the quality of sexual intercourse at last event. *International Journal of Sexual Health, 25*(4), 260-272. doi:10.1080/19317611.2013.799626

Jozkowski, K. N., & Peterson, Z. D. (2014). Assessing the validity and reliability of the perceptions of the consent to sex scale. *The Journal of Sex Research, 51*(6), 632-645. doi:10.1080/00224499.2012.757282

Jozkowski, K. N., Peterson, Z. D., Sanders, S. A., Dennis, B., & Reece, M. (2014). Gender differences in heterosexual college students' conceptualizations and

indicators of sexual consent: Implications for contemporary sexual assault prevention education. *The Journal of Sex Research, 51*(8), 904-916. doi:10.1080/00224499.2013.792326

King, B. W. (2014). Inverting virginity, abstinence, and conquest: Sexual agency and subjectivity in classroom conversation. *Sexualities, 17*(3), 310-328. doi:10.1177/1363460713516337

Kitzinger, C., & Frith, H. (1999). Just say no? The use of conversation analysis in developing a feminist perspective on sexual refusal. *Discourse & Society, 10*(3), 293-316. doi:10.1177/0957926599010003002

Lescano, C. M., Houck, C. D., Brown, L. K., Doherty, G., DiClemente, R. J., Fernandez, M. I., . . . Project, S. S. G. (2009). Correlates of heterosexual anal intercourse among at-risk adolescents and young adults. *American Journal of Public Health, 99*(6), 1131-1136. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2007.123752

Lim, G. Y., & Roloff, M. E. (1999). Attributing sexual consent. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 27*(1), 1-23. doi:10.1080/00909889909365521

Lindgren, K. P., Parkhill, M. R., George, W. H., & Hendershot, C. S. (2008). Gender difference in perceptions of sexual intent: A qualitative review and integration. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 32*(4), 423-439. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2008.00456.x

MacPhillips, K., Berman, S., Olo-Whaanga, E., & McCully, K. (2002). *Preventing sexual violence: A vision for Auckland/Tamaki Makaurau*. Retrieved from: http://helpauckland.org.nz

Marston, C. & Lewis, R. (2014). Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK. *BMJ Open, 14*. 1-6. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004996

Marx, B. P., & Gross, A. M. (1995). Date rape: An analysis of two contextual variables. *Behavior modification, 19*(4), 451-463. doi:10.1177/01454455950194003

McCaw, J. M., & Senn, C. Y. (1998). Perception of cues in conflictual dating situations: A test of the miscommunication hypothesis. *Violence Against Women, 4*(5), 609-624. doi:10.1177/1077801298004005006

Ministry of Justice. (2008). *Improvements to sexual violence legislation - Part one: Consent*. Retrieved from: http://www.justice.govt.nz/publications/global-publications/i/improvements-to-sexual-violence-legislation-in-new-zealand

Muehlenhard, C. L. (1995/1996). The complexities of sexual consent. *SIECUS Report, 24*(2), 4. Retrieved from: http://www.siecus.org/

Muehlenhard, C. L. (2011). Examining stereotypes about token resistance to sex. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 35*(4), 676-683. doi:10.1177/0361684311426689

Muehlenhard, C. L., & Hollabaugh, L. C. (1988). Do women sometimes say no when they mean yes? The prevalence and correlates of women's token resistance to sex. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 54*(5), 872-879. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.54.5.872

Muehlenhard, C. L., & Peterson, Z. D. (2005). Wanting and not wanting sex: The missing discourse of ambivalence. *Feminism & Psychology, 15*(1), 15-20. doi:10.1177/0959353505049698

Muehlenhard, C. L., & Rodgers, C. S. (1998). Token resistance to sex: New perspectives on an old stereotype. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 22*(3), 443-463. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.1998.tb00167.x

O'Byrne, R., Hansen, S., & Rapley, M. (2008). “If a girl doesn't say ‘no’…”: young men, rape and claims of ‘insufficient knowledge’. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 18*(3), 168-193. doi:10.1002/casp.922

O'Byrne, R., Rapley, M., & Hansen, S. (2006). ‘You couldn't say “no”, could you?’: Young men's understandings of sexual refusal. *Feminism & Psychology, 16*(2), 133-154. doi:10.1177/0959-353506062970

Peterson, Z. D., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (2007). Conceptualizing the "wantedness" of women's consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences: Implications for how women label their experiences with rape. *The Journal of Sex Research, 44*(1), 72-88. doi:10.2307/20620289

Pineau, L. (1989). Date rape: A feminist analysis. *Law and Philosophy, 8*(2), 217-243. doi:10.1007/BF00160012

Powell, A. (2008). Amor fati?: Gender habitus and young people's negotiation of (hetero)sexual consent. *Journal of Sociology, 44*(2), 167-184. doi:10.1177/1440783308089168

Powell, A. (2010). *Sex, power and consent: youth culture and the unwritten rules*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Powell, A., Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Henderson, E. (2013). Meanings of 'sex' and 'consent': The persistence of rape myths in Victorian rape law. *Griffith Law*

Review, 22(2), 456-480. Retrieved from: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rlaw20#.VgTRK_mqqko

Remick, L. A. (1993). Read her lips: An argument for a verbal consent standard in rape. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 141*(3), 1103-1151. doi:10.2307/3312449

Shotland, R. L., & Hunter, B. A. (1995). Women's "token resistant" and compliant sexual behaviors are related to uncertain sexual intentions and rape. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin [H.W.Wilson - SSA], 21*, 226. Retrieved from: http://psp.sagepub.com/

Smithson, J. (2000). Using and analysing focus groups: Limitations and possibilities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 3*(2), 103-119. doi:10.1080/136455700405172

Vannier, S., & O'Sullivan, L. (2010). Sex without desire: Characteristics of occasions of sexual compliance in young adults' committed relationships. *Journal of sex research, 47*(5), 429. doi:10.1080/00224490903132051

Ward, R. M., Matthews, M. R., Weiner, J., Hogan, K. M., & Popson, H. C. (2012). Alcohol and sexual consent scale: Development and validation. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 36*(6), 746-756. doi:10.5993/AJHB.36.6.3

Appendices

Appendix A: Key questions 42

Appendix B: Warm-up task 43

Appendix C: Recruitment poster 44

Appendix D: Participant information sheet (pre-group) 45

Appendix E: Post-group information sheet 48

Appendix F: Local counselling organisations information sheet 49

Appendix A

Key Questions

- In your group of friends how do you let a guy know you are interested/ attracted to them? For example, in a bar or a club.
    - And how would you know if they were interested in you?
- Do you think women and guys communicate interest/ attraction differently?
    - Why do you think there are these differences?
    - Where do you think these ideas come from? Where do messages about the OK way to let a guy know you are interested come from? (TV shows? Ads? Music vids?)
- Among your friends, are there differences in how you'd communicate interest in sex to someone you were in a steady relationship with and someone you were casually hooking up with?
    - Why do you think there are these differences?
- In your group of friends, what are the ways that it is acceptable to let a guy down if you don't want to have sex with him?
    - Is it different if you like him (i.e. you might want to spend time with him in the future) than if you don't?
    - And what about vice versa? What are the acceptable ways guys let women down?
    - Are there any differences?
    - Where do you think these differences come from?
- In your group of friends, is it normal to get verbal consent or to be verbally asked for consent?
- Do you think alcohol plays a role in communicating and understanding attraction etc., and if so, what sort of ways? For example, does it make it easier to let guys know? Does it make it more complicated?
- In your group of friends, how would you describe consent?
    - Is it different at a different time or with different people?
- Some universities overseas have adopted policies of affirmative consent, which means you can only assume consent if you got a yes rather than assuming the absence of a no is the same as yes. One university in the States has a written policy that each and every sexual encounter AND at each and every stage must only occur after verbal consent.
    - What do you think about this?
    - What might the problems with this policy be?
    - What would the advantages be?
        - IF they mention miscommunication: Do you think miscommunication is a problem in sexual consent?
        - Why does it occur?

Appendix B

Warm-Up Activity

Activity 12: Media Men and Women on the Wall

Purpose: To introduce media as a tool for sharing and policing ideas about gender, and to examine the features of culturally dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Materials: Magazines, pens, 2x A3 printed human outlines (draw one yourself or use an online template)

Duration: 20 minutes.

Group Configuration: Whole group discussion, split group exercise.

Begin this activity by briefly discussing the role of the media as a tool for sharing, reinforcing and policing social ideas about masculinity and femininity. What do participants think about the media's 'power'? How do the claims the media make about men and women influence people? And how do you think the media might affect you personally?

To examine dominant media messages about gender more concretely, ask the group to divide into two, and give one A3-size human outline to each group, along with pens and magazines. Ask one group to focus on masculinity, and the other group to focus on femininity. Using magazines and their own accumulated knowledge, ask participants to **fill their human outlines with ideas and information the media presents us with about the ideal, typical man or woman. This could include expectations of appearance and behaviour, likes and dislikes, shoulds and shouldn'ts, strengths and weaknesses.** After 10 minutes, each group presents their 'media man' or 'media woman' and discusses his or her features. After a closer look at some of these ideas, ask the group whether their ideas about the media's influence have shifted, and how so. You may like to pin the media man and media woman onto the wall of the room once the exercise is finished.

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

Interested in taking part in psychology research?

How do young women consent to heterosexual sex?

This study seeks to understand the ways that young women consent to heterosexual sexual relations in their casual and committed relationships.

Participants will be invited to attend a discussion group with other participants and the researcher *or* have a 1-1 interview.

Who can I contact to find out more or to volunteer? Contact Heather (hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz) for more information

You can participate in this study if you are:

- Female, and aged between 17 and 23
  and
- Are or have been sexually active with a man/ men

This study is being conducted by Heather Perry as part of a psychology honours degree. The research is being supervised by Dr Neville Robertson (scorpio@waikato.ac.nz).

Ethics approval has been received from the School of Psychology Ethics Committee.

All identifying information collected will remain confidential

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Heather Perry I Young women & sexual consent hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz

Appendix D
Participant Information Sheet (pre-group)

How do young women consent to heterosexual relations?

What is this study all about?

This study aims to gather information about young women's understandings of consent to sex with men and how they communicate and interpret consent within their casual and committed heterosexual relationships. Information will be gathered in group discussions with other participants and myself (the researcher). While consent between women is also a valuable topic to be researched, the focus of this particular study is how women consent to sex with men.

Who is the researcher?

I'm a 'mature-age' (37 years) psychology honours student studying here at the University of Waikato. I am a woman, a mother, and a wife. I am interested in understanding how we construct our social worlds and in hearing women's voices.

Why a discussion group and not an interview?

A group setting allows for a fluid discussion of consent and its complexities. I am interested in how understandings are shaped collaboratively and it's a chance for you to explore the issue with your peers. The group will involve 5-7 young women (17-23 years old) and me.

What will happen in the group?

The group discussion will take about an hour and will be loosely guided by some planned research questions. There will also be opportunity to bring your own ideas to the group.

What if I know someone in the group?

Before the discussion commences I will remind everyone that there is an expectation that discussion about the group afterwards does not identify anyone in the group. Also, you are free to leave the discussion at any time (see below).

What happens after the group discussion?

The group discussion will be audio recorded and salient parts will be transcribed by me, the researcher. During the transcribing process I will carefully ensure that each participant's anonymity is protected by changing or disguising identifying details including names, places, unique and identifiable events, etc. You can request to have a summary of the discussions sent to you and/or a summary of the research findings. Neither summaries will include transcribed material. The first will summarise the themes discussed, and the second will summarise how

these themes link to existing research/ theories. While I welcome your comments on the summaries, it may be possible that you don't agree with everyone else's opinion; however, it is necessary that the transcript records all participant's views, even if there are differences. Some ideas may be focussed on more than others in the analysis. The anonymised transcriptions, the audio recordings, and scanned copies of your consent form will be kept in a password protected file on my computer for five years to enable academic publication of the research findings.

What if I find the discussion upsetting, have questions after or just want to talk about it?

I will make contact with you the day after the meeting and you are welcome to contact me on my phone or by email (details below) if you have any questions in the meantime or after.

Can I withdraw from the study and if so, when?

Yes! You can withdraw from this study at any time, including after the group discussions, up until two weeks after I have sent you a copy of the research findings summary. However, in transcribing and writing up this research it is likely that it becomes very difficult to ascertain the entire contribution of individual participants. This is partly because the conversations are likely to be quite fluid and hard to identify individual contributions. Because of this I cannot guarantee that your withdrawal will result in none of the data you contributed being used. Also, to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of other participants it will not be possible to show you the transcribed transcripts. Should you wish to withdraw, either from the study entirely or a particular contribution, please contact me and we can discuss our options. It is important to me that everybody involved in the discussions feels happy with their experience in the research and I urge you to contact me with any concerns you have at any point so we can discuss them and work on solutions together. To withdraw from this study please email or contact me and request to be withdrawn.

I'm quite shy: Am I a suitable participant for the study?

Some of the discussion is likely to be quite personal so you are unlikely to find participation an enjoyable experience if you do not like to talk about personal matters or are likely to find the subject distressing. Feel free to contact me to discuss this further.

Contact Heather Perry (hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz; 021 030 4371) for more information or to volunteer to participate in this study.
Researcher: Heather Perry (psychology honours student). Supervisor: Dr Neville Robertson (scorpio@waikato.ac.nz; School of Psychology ext. 8300; Room K.1.24)

This research project has been approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee (currently Dr James McEwan, phone 07 838 4466 ext. 8295, email: jmcewan@waikato.ac.nz)

Appendix E

Post-group Information Sheet

How do young women consent to heterosexual sex?

Thank you for your participation in this research! I hope you found it interesting and enjoyable ☺

Just a quick reminder:

- I will be contacting you tomorrow to chat about today (unless you tell me you don't want me to!)
- All identifying information from today's discussion will be changed or disguised during transcribing to protect your anonymity. Please remember to respect the confidentiality of other participants by not discussing today's discussion with anyone not involved in the research
- You can contact me at any time in the meantime or afterwards if you would like to talk about today's discussion (see below)
- You are free to withdraw from this research at any time. You can withdraw by phoning me or emailing:

Heather Perry: hrp8@students.waikato.ac.nz 021 030 4371

Appendix F

Local counselling services information sheet

List of local counselling services

- **Rape and Sexual Abuse Healing Centre**

  Phone: 07 839 4433 - **0800 839 4433**
  Email: rasahc@xtra.co.nz
  Location: 33A Clarence Street, Hamilton 3240

  We are a counselling service for all women's issues but our field of expertise is Rape and Sexual Abuse. It is a free confidential counselling service. An opportunity to talk to someone who will listen to you and offer support

- **University of Waikato Student Counselling Service**

  Student Counselling Service
  The University of Waikato
  Hamilton
  Phone: +64 7 838 4037
  Email: student_services@waikato.ac.nz

  You can make an appointment by phoning (8384037) or coming in to the Student Health reception entrance from Gate 1 car park. The type of counselling that is available at Waikato University is brief intervention, rather than long term therapy. If you require more than the standard 5 sessions please discuss this with your counsellor who may refer you to another community counselling service off campus. At all times, our aim is to ensure that the service you receive will be beneficial for you.

- Hamilton Therapy Centre

  Counselling is available from 9am to early evening most days.
  Office Hours: usually 9am – noon Mon–Fri.
  If Lyn or Helen is not available, please leave a message.
  Contact us at
  15 Wellington St, off Grey St, Hamilton East
  07 858 3211
  PO Box 4127, Hamilton 3247
  office@hamiltontherapy.co.nz