

“GIRLS DON’T WATCH PORN”: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S
NEGOTIATIONS WITH ‘PROBLEMATIC SPACES’

by

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B.A., University Of British Columbia, 2008

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Interdisciplinary Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Okanagan)

July 2010

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Abstract

This research investigates the various strategies women use to negotiate, rationalize and story their sexual identities and their relationship to potentially problematic spaces. I interviewed ten women between the ages of nineteen and thirty looking for stories from, arguably, the first generation to watch pornographic films before engaging in sexual activities themselves. After listening to women's stories, two spaces stood out as places of fracture, tension, and also possibility – mainstream, heterosexual pornography and heterosexual anal sex.

I am interested in conceptualizing women who engage in socially 'problematic' sites as outside the traditional dichotomy of cultural victims who are unaware of their own subordination or as subjects that are entirely resistant and agentic. For example, when porn is viewed as something only men watch, it reinforces perceptions that women are not as sexual as men. This feeds into heteronormative assumptions of women's sexuality as biologically passive. When women in the audience are considered, questions of agency, self-reflexivity and the possibility for resistant relationships with pornography are absent.

Using a narrative methodology, this research works to conceptualize women's participation in and/or avoidance of pornography and anal sex as indicative of continual and active negotiations with postfeminist and heteronormative definitions of gender, sexuality and sex.

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Acknowledgements

First, thank you to the women who opened up your lives to me, this work would not have been possible without you and your stories. When I began this research I did so struggling to story my own sexual biography; with your words I have begun the process of finding my own.

For my endlessly patient supervisors, Ilya Parkins and Shelley Pacholok – I know this thesis would not be what it is without your tireless support, understanding and encouragement – I'm going to miss our weekly coffee meetings. Thank you for your guidance and especially for your patience, even when your email inbox was filling up at all hours of the night.

Thank you to my sister Kelsey. You've provided a safe haven for me with your words, with your belief in me, and literally, by opening up your apartment and even your own bed to me. I could never have done this without you – you believed in me and in this project long before anyone else.

Devin – you've provided me with every kind of support imaginable. Without asking any questions, without passing any judgement, you've supported me through some of the most challenging times in my life. You've made me laugh, never (rarely) complained when I worked through the night and slept through the day, you've gone on late night Slurpee runs with me - even in the winter - and, most importantly, it was you that insisted we bring Ruby into our lives.

And thank you to Ruby: you've brought me joy during the most difficult moments of the past year. Even in periods where the stress and lack of sleep made everything seem impossible, watching you blissfully run through the dog park has brought me endless, gleeful pleasure.

Thank you to Erin Dolmage and Jennifer Gustar - for reading infinite emails and for counselling, advising, proofreading, and cheerleading on more than one occasion.

To my Dad for telling me to follow my dreams - no matter what - and then doing so in his own life. Thank you to my Mum – I would never have gone to grad school without your lifelong encouragement and support. You were the first example I had of a strong woman and a feminist; knowing you are proud of me has always, always made me want to go further.

This work is lovingly dedicated to the storyteller in my life, my Grandpa, who passed away just before my defence:

It is because of your emphasis on education, your passion for reading, and your love for learning that I am on this path. I know you are proud of me and that means everything to me.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While at the hair salon I picked up the popular tabloid magazine, *People*ⁱ, and began flipping through the pages. In the centre of the magazine I found a four-page article, titled “Bedroom Bombshells.” The article features eight well-known celebrity couples hugging, kissing or cuddling with their partners alongside speech-balloons that highlight a quote from the couple about their sex life. In reading through these quotes, I noticed a theme - all of these couples seem to be having a lot of sex, good sex and sex that seems comparable to the sort of thing we might expect to find in mainstream, heterosexual porn. The first page has a picture of Spencer Pratt and Heidi Montag, stars of the television show *The Hills*: his “bubble” says, “Life with Heidi is like 24/7 porn without the obnoxious charges!” and her bubble says, “20 or 30 orgasms a day!” Eva Longoria Parker (#1 on *Maxim* magazine’s ‘Hot List’ of 2005ⁱⁱ), star of the television show *Desperate Housewives*, is shown leaning in to kiss her NBA star husband Tony Parker as she says, “I’m not averse to being tied up with silk scarves... There’s something sexy about being submissive”. In the next photo, television star Brian Austin Green and actress Megan Fox (men’s magazine *FHM*’s ‘Sexiest Woman Alive’ in 2008ⁱⁱⁱ) are pictured cheek-to-cheek alongside the quote, “I have the libido of a 15-year-old boy. I’d rather have sex with Brian all the time than leave the house!” Other celebrities are quoted as saying: “It is the little things – even a spanking every now and then!”, “He tells me what to wear each evening. It really helps our relationship!”, and “Ashlee gives a

ⁱ “Bedroom Bombshells”, In *People*. Issue: March 15, 2010, p. 55-58

ⁱⁱ <http://www.maxim.com/humor/stupid-fun/77458/2005-hot-100-list.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.fhm.com/girls/100-sexiest/100-sexiest-2008---the-results-20081207>

mean lap dance...Texas girls are fun!” These quotations correspond to some of the themes I work to unpack in my thesis including, the blurring of pornographic with mainstream popular culture, the post-feminist pressures for women to be more sexy, and especially, the suggestions that women should embrace the concept of having sex like a porn-star. This *People* magazine article seemingly presents overt female sexuality mediated with heteronormative discourse: all of the couples are heterosexual, all but one set are married, and nearly every person featured is white. Here, women’s sexual identities and the way they are represented and (re)present themselves are fraught with tension. This article provides a popular example of some of the contradictions present in heteronormative and post-feminist understandings of women’s sexuality in 2010.

Research focus

This research is focused on the various strategies women use to negotiate, rationalize, and story their relationship to potentially problematic spaces like sex and porn. Due to the mainstreaming of porn, articles like “Bedroom Bombshells”, and the increasing pressures on women to participate in this culture, I began this project interested in how women connected pornography to their sexual biographies in the continuous process of (re)presenting their sexual identities. I interviewed ten women between the ages of nineteen and thirty specifically looking for stories from, arguably, the first generation to watch moving images of sex found in pornographic films before engaging in sexual activities themselves. Although initially focused on pornography, during the process of interviewing I began to see connections outside of pornography, particularly connections to the discourses that women seemed to be negotiating with.

Their stories demonstrated time and again that post-feminist pressures to prove their empowerment through overt sexuality are often troubled with heteronormative discourses that construct women as sexually passive. While pornography is a theme running through this entire thesis, the project has expanded to include women's processes of negotiating with social discourses and the strategies they use to align, contest, avoid, and trouble simplified (re)presentations of their sexual identities.

After listening to women's stories, two spaces stood out as places of fracture, tension, and also possibility – mainstream, heterosexual pornography and heterosexual anal sex. The following four chapters use these potentially problematic sites in order to focus on the processes and strategies women use in their negotiations with heteronormative discourse and post-feminist pressures to (re)present sexual identities through stories from their sexual biographies.

Research questions

I am interested in conceptualizing women who engage in socially “problematic” sites - such as watching pornography and having anal sex - as outside the traditional dichotomy of cultural “victims” that are unaware of their own subordination or subjects that are entirely resistant and agentic (Holliday & Sanchez-Taylor, 2006). By considering social changes that inform the current mainstreaming of pornography, this research seeks to conceptualize pornography as an object of postfeminism, an object whose consumption aligns with the trends found in postfeminist practice. How has postfeminism informed a social space that facilitates and/or restricts women's consumption of pornography? How has postfeminism informed a social space that

facilitates and/or restricts women's participation in heterosexual anal sex? How are identity and self-reflexivity understood in postfeminism? What are some of the limitations of conceptualizing pornography as a postfeminist object, and what are the ramifications of this for women who watch and women who don't watch pornography? This research works to conceptualize women's participation and/or avoidance of pornography and anal sex as indicative of continual and active negotiations with postfeminist and heteronormative definitions of gender, sexuality and sex. In women's participation in potentially problematic spaces, where does agency fit in and is there a possibility for resistance?

Why porn and why now?

Hollywood makes approximately 400 films a year, while the porn industry now makes from 10,000 to 11,000. Seven hundred million porn videos or DVDs are rented each year. (Williams, 2004, p. 2)

In late 2003, Nielsen Netratings revealed that 1 in 3 users of porn were women, and over 9 million American women accessed adult sites in September 2003 alone. And in women-friendly boutiques such as Babeland, women make up 80% of the porn rental and purchase market. (Blue, 2009)

Pornography is a complex topic that has been a part of feminist academic writing for more than thirty years (Kemp & Squires, 1997). Many feminists defend pornography and see it as a medium of expression and a means of resistance – for breaking traditional and often repressive roles for women (Strossen, 2000). Other feminists see pornography as representative of male sexual fantasy that is inherently violent and argue that through constant and early exposure to it, women have “internalized a false view of [their] own sexuality” (Bryson 2003, p. 193). Regardless of academic debate, pornography is far-

reaching and can now be found in nearly every facet of social life in Western culture (McNair, 2002). This phenomenon, also called the “pornification of culture” refers to “...the increased visibility of hardcore and soft-core pornographies, and the blurring of boundaries between pornographic and mainstream” (Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarema 2007, p. 8). As pornography becomes more widely available, it is more accessible to all, including younger audiences. This results in many young people’s first representations of sex and sexuality coming from mainstream, heterosexual pornographic films (Sarracino & Scott, 2008).

The number of women watching pornography has been steadily increasing over the past three decades. By 1986 half of American households had VCRs, bringing pornographic films from public theatres, “peep shops” and arcades into the home (MacDonald, 1983; Williams, 2008). With the VCR, the discovery of our fathers’ hidden porn collections and finally the Internet, many, if not most women under the age of thirty have had pornography accessible at home since early childhood. Williams writes, “Private screening takes us out of public scrutiny and gives us control over what, when, and where we screen” (2008, p. 305). This is especially relevant for women’s consumption of porn, as the shift from public to private has eased women’s ability to make use of porn (Juffer, 1998). While the number of women watching pornography is steadily increasing, academic researchers continue to write about pornography as though men are the only ones watching it (Boulton, 2008; Levy, 2005; Loftus, 2002; Senn, 2003). Conceptualizing porn as primarily a masculine viewing experience reinforces perceptions that women are not as sexual as men. This works “to suppress knowledge about the ways sex differences are socially produced” (Rice, 2009, p. 256) and feeds into

heteronormative assumptions of women's sexuality as biologically passive. And, when women in the audience are considered, questions of agency, self-reflexivity or the possibility for resistant relationships with pornography are absent (Ciclitira, 2004). This research seeks to trouble the continued perception that women don't watch porn by interviewing women who do.

Although pornography is now an extensive genre with a variety of themes and representations, this paper is specifically interested in heterosexual, mainstream pornography. This type of porn is the most accessible as it is found on the Internet, on "pay-per-view" television and in mainstream video rental stores. And, while there has been growth in "alternative" pornography, including "women-friendly porn", "dyke porn", indie porn, BDSM porn (bondage/dominance/sadism/masochism), etc., heterosexual mainstream pornography continues to be constructed as the "norm" in porn (Williams, 2004; Williams, 2009). Although I have included a chapter focused on anal sex, pornography continues to be an over-arching theme connecting this entire body of work. I argue that for women who have grown up with easily accessible, mainstream, heterosexual porn, many of their first introductions to anal sex have come from porn. And, with something as socially taboo as anal sex, pornography is likely to be the only space that women have encountered it outside their own bedrooms.

The remainder of this chapter outlines some of the social discourses women are negotiating with in the storying of their sexual identities, working to trouble simplified understandings of women's sexuality through connections to sexual agency. Although my research is not limited to pornography, this chapter uses mainstream, heterosexual pornography to outline the theoretical lens I apply throughout this project. Pornography

is fraught with tension: on the one hand, it could be conceptualized as a post-feminist object, representing overt and sometimes excessive sexuality, on the other hand, for women, pornography represents a space of contradiction where watching it could symbolize an active and assertive sexuality, thus complicating heteronormative definitions of women's passive sexualities. And as Hollywood actresses and porn-stars continue to blend together, the space between fantasy and reality becomes increasingly blurred, particularly as porn seeks to redefine itself as less about sexual fantasy and more about teaching sexuality, presenting how to achieve an "appropriate" sexual identity and demonstrating how to regulate bodies in specifically heteronormative ways.

Feminism, strippers, and playboy bunny tattoos: Defining the role of postfeminism in women's consumption of porn

Most of the XXX I see is boring, and does not arouse me physically, or visually. I am determined and ready to be a commodity that fulfils everyone's fantasies. (Sasha Grey's "mission statement", cited in Grigoriadis, 2009, p. 54)

In this section, I work to define postfeminism, describe how I think it can be applied to women's consumption of pornography and then critique it as a concept that when applied, often oversimplifies women and sexual identities. The term postfeminism is a highly debated concept, with countless, often contradictory definitions. My understanding of postfeminism comes from Rosalind Gill, who writes,

... Post feminism is best understood not as an epistemological perspective nor as an historical shift, and not (simply) as a backlash, in which its meanings are pre-specified. Rather, postfeminism should be conceived of as a sensibility. (2007, p. 148)

I understand this to explain postfeminism as a set of values and ideas that inform our thinking, our choices and our behaviours with regards to sex, sexuality and gender in

2010. I use the term postfeminism in this research because over the past twenty years, it has been frequently applied to women, sexuality and the media. While I find it valuable for thinking through social discourse and the various pressures women are currently experiencing, I find the application of the term to be limiting, often with little or no consideration for women's agency. The following section defines postfeminism, as I understand it, including the possible value it has for my research on women and pornography, while identifying some of the limitations found in its application in the literature.

Although there are various components to Gill's definition – and I will elaborate on these throughout this section – it is the connections between feminism, antifeminism and neoliberalism that inform the events, actions and beliefs that are often labelled postfeminist. The term is premised on the belief that feminism is over and second-wave feminist goals have been met or are no longer needed (Ashby, 2005). Brunsdon writes, in postfeminism, “Second-wave feminism is remembered, and demonized, as personally censorious, hairy, politically correct” (2005, p. 112). Women that continue to view heteronormative pornography as problematic are seen as out-of-date, lacking a sense of humour and, sexually uptight (Levy, 2005). The postfeminist subject aligns with current neoliberal understandings of individualism and self-surveillance, emphasizing women as autonomous and agentic subjects (Gill, 2007). This has implications for how women dress, eat and monitor themselves and other women. Goldman writes that in postfeminism, women view themselves as empowered “sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so” (as cited in Gill, 2007, p. 151). Watching mainstream porn, getting a

Playboy bunny tattoo, or attending strip-pole aerobics demonstrates that a woman has sexual knowledge but, more importantly, that she is empowered and looks at sex just like “one of the guys”. Unlike her *uptight* predecessors, second wave feminists, she chooses to participate within seemingly misogynistic spaces; therefore, she sees herself, and is seen, as being in control and thus, empowered. It is this language of empowerment that perhaps best exemplifies the neoliberal, antifeminist and feminist connection.

Empowerment, as understood in postfeminism, is a concept taken from feminism but here, it has been redefined as an *achievement* that only individual women can attain. Postfeminist empowerment is not connected to social discourse, is not indicative of a social movement, and it does not take into account systemic pressures; instead, postfeminism is indicative of neoliberal individualism that seemingly exists outside of culture and society (Gill, 2007). For example, a woman that watches mainstream, heterosexual pornography proves that she is empowered because she engages in a space previously deemed patriarchal and misogynistic by second wave feminism – her enjoyment of it exists outside of the social and cultural implications of pornography and it proves that she is equal with men because she is able to “be like a man”.

Postfeminist discourse constitutes a specific type of subjectivity and agency and this informs how women experience, contest, question and engage with pornography and the construction of their identities. Gill writes,

Girls and women are invited to become a particular kind of self, and are endowed with agency on the condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography. (2007, p. 152)

This means that women who choose to act like the fantastical women of pornography are seen as agentic and as exhibiting choice. Women who critique this are seen as lacking in

agency, outdated and disempowered. Women now have the freedom to “choose for themselves”; however, as many critics of postfeminism argue, the choices are limited and often continue to reflect the same patriarchal “options” that second wave feminists were fighting against thirty years ago (McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie writes of postfeminism as “a kind of anti-feminism, which is reliant, paradoxically, on an assumption that feminism has been taken into account” (2009, p. 130). I apply this quote to Gill’s understanding of postfeminism, which qualifies it as less about antifeminism and more about the connections between anti-feminism, feminism and neoliberalism. Therefore, postfeminism draws attention to what second-wave feminism previously defined as a patriarchal institution or an oppressive and problematic behaviour and then it flips this around by labelling the women that participate as empowered subjects that choose to be there (Negra, 2009). Equality and the ending of patriarchy have become conflated with “being like a man” and therefore being an equal participant in patriarchy (Levy, 2005). Bodily and sexual discipline and self-surveillance, often areas of intense criticism and scrutiny within feminism, have been re-constructed within postfeminism as a shift from “work” to “pampering”, “fun”, “self-indulgence” and something “you deserve” (Gill, 2007, p. 155). The physical appearance of the body is an achievement and it is also a window for the self (Roberts, 2007). Gill writes,

...in today’s media, possession of a ‘sexy body’ is presented as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity. The body is presented simultaneously as women’s source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgements of female attractiveness. (2007, p. 149)

The body and appearance in postfeminism are thought to reflect the interior self, so that a woman that can represent herself as attractive, thin and well-dressed is clearly healthy,

confident and successful. This is evident in various forms of popular culture, including the *People* magazine article used at the beginning of this chapter that showed beautiful, thin, heterosexual, and predominantly white women describing themselves as overtly sexual – (re)presenting them as successful examples of women.

The achievement of identity via the successful disciplining of the body is one of the ways identity is understood and (re)presented in pop culture. Pornographic actresses epitomize the monitored and manipulated body, moving beyond well-put together clothing and expensive haircuts, to literally reveal/expose physically modified bodies to the world. From plastic surgery, to hair removal, skin bleaching, teeth whitening, toned bodies and tattooed make-up, these women embody sex, liberation and empowerment by physically achieving sexual and fantastical bodies (Levy, 2005). This becomes complicated as the pornographic blurs with mainstream culture. As the “Bedroom Bombshells” article demonstrates, Hollywood celebrities are increasingly representing themselves and being represented by the media as more overtly sexual. This increased sexualisation of popular culture, often called the “pornification” of culture and “striptease culture” makes use of porn stars in places outside of Adults-Only XXX spaces (McNair, 2002). It is now possible to become Facebook friends and Myspace buddies with various porn stars. You can buy their books, for example Jenna Jameson’s *How to Make Love Like a Porn star* (2004) and even watch them on talk shows, like Sasha Grey on “The Tyra Banks Show.” Porn star Jenna Jameson, one of pornography’s most well-known “retired” actresses, is seemingly everywhere – her highly toned, tanned, bleached, waxed, and augmented body can be found on tabloids, in women’s magazines, men’s magazines, interviews on “The Oprah Show” (Harpo, 2009), and as a “star” in the reality show

“Porno Valley” (Brocka & Hills, 2004). In conceptualizing this social space as indicative of postfeminist trends, it becomes apparent that the lines are blurred for viewers/consumers when “celebrities” move from what is perceived to be fictitious texts (like pornographic films), to spaces of “reality” like documentaries (“Porno Valley”), Facebook pages, and autobiographical books. The woman within pornography, a place of fantasy and fiction, appears to be the same woman within “real” spaces, within her daily life. Jenna Jameson the actress appears to be Jenna Jameson the woman – and within the “postfeminism era”, she is empowered because the body represents the self and in her case her body is an emblem of the successfully disciplined and sexually liberated body.

This is particularly apparent with the case of Sasha Grey. The now 22-year-old porn-star was voted 2008’s “Female Performer of the Year” at the Adult Video Network Awards, the youngest porn star to ever receive this award (AVNA, n.d.). Sasha Grey’s Myspace page (<http://www.myspace.com/sashagrey>) describes her entrance into pornographic films at the age of 18. She writes, “I have a huge appetite for sex and self exploration... I am a woman who strongly believes in what she does.” Sasha Grey presents herself as an aware, self-reflexive subject, a woman who has weighed her options and chooses to participate in pornography, viewing this decision as indicative of her firm sense of self. I think the example of Sasha Grey exemplifies this connection between neoliberalism, antifeminism, and feminism as foundational to the definition of postfeminism and understanding what the postfeminism subject might look like. Gill writes,

What is striking is the degree of fit between the autonomous postfeminist subject and the psychological subject demanded by neoliberalism. At the heart of both is

the notion of the 'choice biography' and the contemporary injunction to render one's life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy -- however constrained one might actually be. (2007, p. 157)

Since I began this research two years ago, I have seen Sasha Grey on “The Tyra Banks Show”, YouTube and on several documentaries, including “9 to 5: Days in Porn” (Hoffman, 2008). In all of these forums, Sasha Grey the porn-star appears to be the same as Sasha Grey the woman who exists outside of pornography. Both Sasha Grey and the *People* article demonstrate the blurring of the pornographic with mainstream culture as examples of the increasing pressure that women are experiencing to be more sexual, and to present themselves as empowered and confident women.

Limitations in utilizing postfeminism

Sasha Grey, porn's biggest star, reads Nietzsche, likes it rough and says she's liberating women one gangbang at a time. (Grigoriadis, 2009, p. 53)

I have briefly described postfeminism and how subjectivity, agency and identity are constructed and achieved within it. As a tool, postfeminism can be used as a way to “explain” why and how women are watching and participating in seemingly patriarchal spaces and how theories of empowerment are drawn upon to validate this participation. I think outlining postfeminism demonstrates the intense pressure women are experiencing to be more sexual, to demonstrate confidence and empowerment. It also provides a context and recognition for what is at stake for women with regards to representing and achieving a specific identity. Understanding postfeminism as a set of values and ideas that many women are working with in the construction and performance of their sexual identities is, I think, valuable for an analysis of women watching mainstream porn in

2010. Regardless of whether postfeminist subjects are actually ‘empowered’ or are really acting to reinforce patriarchy, recognizing that a postfeminist sensibility is informing the construction of women’s sexual identities provides valuable insight into the social and cultural trends informing contemporary women’s sexuality. However, I find the way that postfeminism is often applied in the literature to be limiting. Seemingly, this application often restricts the possibilities for conceptualizing agency and women’s active negotiations with images, texts, and especially pornography. This limited application of postfeminism often universalizes women’s experiences within socially perceived ‘problematic’ spaces like pornography, failing to account for the diversity in women’s experiences in constructing their sexual identities. A more complex reflection of desire, sexualities and identities is needed. How can the current trend of women watching mainstream, heteronormative pornography be analyzed while recognizing the constrained agency at work? Throughout this thesis, I work to complicate these simplified understandings of what it means to be a woman in 2010, how gender, sex and sexuality are being (re)presented, performed, and embodied by women and how watching mainstream, heterosexual porn could be indicative of sexual agency.

The “money shot”: Conceptualizing heteronormativity in women’s sexual biographies

Biologically men have only one innate orientation – a sexual one that draws them to women, - while women have two innate orientations, sexual toward men and reproductive toward their young. (Rossi, cited in Rich, 1980, p. 631)

There are those who believe that the come shot, or, as some refer to it ‘the money shot,’ is the most important element in the movie and that everything else (if necessary) should be sacrificed at its expense. Of course this depends on the outlook of the producer, but one thing is for sure: if you don’t have the come shots, you don’t

have a porno picture. Plan on at least ten separate come shots. (Stephen Ziplow, *The filmmaker's guide to pornography* cited in Williams, 1989, p. 93)

Heteronormativity is a term that has been written about for more than thirty years. This section outlines some of the components to heteronormativity that I find applicable to this research and the stories that women shared with me during interviews. The basic principle of heteronormativity is that there are only two sexes and they are inherently and naturally different from one another. The two sexes, female and male, have different attributes that complement each other; therefore, the only pairing that makes any natural or biological sense is male with female. Heteronormativity is a defining feature of postfeminism, as Gill writes, “A key feature of the postfeminist sensibility has been the resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference across all media from newspapers, to advertising, to talk shows and popular fiction” (2007, p. 165). This has implications for homosexuality, alternative relationships, and alternative gender identifications. Jackson writes, heteronormativity is, “...the normalization of heterosexuality which ‘renders any alternative sexualities ‘other’ and marginal’ (Jackson, 1999, 163)” (Cacchioni, 2007, p. 304). Living outside of a heterosexual pairing, having sex differently than what is deemed natural (penis/vaginal penetrative sex) has ramifications for identity construction, identity performance, group identity, etc. Cohen writes, “by ‘heteronormativity’ I mean both those localized practices and those centralized institutions which legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and ‘natural’ within society” (Cohen, 1999, p. 440).

A key component of Adrienne Rich’s concept, “compulsory heterosexuality”, is the denial of women’s *own* sexuality (1980, p. 638). Instead, in heteronormativity, women’s sexuality is built upon men’s sexuality: without male pleasure there is no

female pleasure. This includes the centrality of the male orgasm, heterosexual sex beginning with the male erection and finishing with the male orgasm, and conceptualizing female pleasure as secondary, lacking, irrelevant, or wholly based on the satisfaction she receives in knowing her male partner was sexually pleased. Mainstream heterosexual pornography is based upon and relies heavily upon heteronormativity. The most spectacular moment in mainstream porn is “the money shot” or the moment of male orgasm. As porn is based on the achievement of sexual pleasure (both for the audience and the actor(s) involved), the money shot signals that the scene can move on, pleasure has been achieved (Williams, 1989). This focuses the film and the audience on men’s sexual pleasure, rendering women’s orgasms and women’s sexual pleasure in porn either invisible or as an attribute of the male erection only. Generally heteronormative understandings of women’s sexual pleasure (both in and out of porn) define female pleasure as dependent on the male orgasm, so that it is through knowing, seeing, and experiencing her male partner’s orgasms that she is able to experience her own pleasure. In mainstream porn, women’s orgasms are generally (re)presented through sounds, words, and facial expressions, and seem to exist only as a step along the way to the ultimate climax, the male orgasm. Her pleasure, if it exists, exists because of him, and especially because of his penis. Another heteronormative aspect to mainstream, heterosexual porn is the passivity of women’s sexuality; men are the initiators of sex and women, particularly in porn, are all *waiting* to be *taken* by men.

Heteronormativity creates a single and universalizing definition for sex, gender, and sexuality. The *only* sexes, male and female are connected to the *only* two genders, man and woman and this can *only* result in one form of sexuality, heterosexuality.

Accordingly, Butler writes, “One is a woman, according to this framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call into question is perhaps to lose something of one’s sense of place in gender” (Butler, 1999, p. xi). Also included in the heteronormative female/woman trajectory of porn is the inscription of race and class. The quintessential woman in porn is a white woman, a middle/upper class woman, a heterosexual woman, a married woman, a woman with children, and a woman who is more concerned with her husband’s sexual interests/pleasure/satisfaction than with her own (Cohen, 1999). How institutional heteronormativity affects individual people changes from person to person. And how each person negotiates with heteronormativity changes depending on how “successfully” each embodies their “appropriate” sex/gender/sexuality. Jackson writes,

To argue that the power hierarchy of gender is structural does not mean that it is exercised uniformly and evenly at the level of interpersonal sexual relations, nor that our practice and experience is wholly determined by patriarchal structures and ideologies. There is some room for manoeuvre within these constraints. To deny this is to deny heterosexual women any agency, to see us as doomed to submit to men’s desires whether as unwilling victims or misguided dupes. (1999, p. 133)

It is the various strategies that women use in their negotiations with heteronormativity that I focus on throughout this research. Pornography is one of many spaces where this is complicated, anal sex is another. Heteronormative understandings of passive female sexuality are either challenged or reinforced as women choose to watch porn for themselves or describe it as something they do for the men in their life, as women choose to story their decisions about anal sex as though they are passive participants or as though they are actively seeking their own sexual pleasure.

Heteronormative discourse brings with it a lexicon, a database women draw from in the storying of their sexual biographies. In storying, we (re)present our identities with an awareness of appropriate femininity, and appropriate female sexuality. Watching porn, which is participating in an explicitly sexual space, is indicative of a “masculine sexuality”, not a feminine sexuality. This “masculine sexuality” wants to experience pleasure, uses porn to achieve it and therefore demonstrates an active sexuality. This contradicts heteronormative understandings of passive female sexuality and so, although women draw from heteronormative discourse in the storying of their relationships to porn, they make use of various strategies to justify and rationalize the contradiction of women watching mainstream, heterosexual porn.

Active spectators: Seeking agency when women watch porn

Movies move us, often powerfully. Sex in movies is especially volatile: it can arouse, fascinate, disgust, bore, instruct, and incite. Yet it also distances us from the immediate proximate experience of touching and feeling with our own bodies, while at the same time bringing us back to feelings in these same bodies. (Williams, 2008, p. 1-2)

In looking for a space that complicates the overly simplified understandings of women’s consumption of pornography, I have found writings on embodiment and the contradictions and complications of women’s identities to be valuable. Karen Ciclitira’s dissertation research in 1998 and subsequent articles discuss some of the complexities surrounding women’s engagement with pornography. Particularly, I think this work problematizes a straightforward reading of women’s opinions about pornography as being either “for” or “against”. It also troubles assumptions that this “pro” or “anti” opinion necessarily translates directly to either watching or not watching pornography.

She writes, “A woman can be clear that she is anti-pornography and that she does not enjoy viewing it, and yet she can still be sexually aroused by it” and thus continue to watch it (2004, p. 293). Through a more complicated, gritty understanding and representation of women’s identities and sexualities, agency can be conceptualized. Specifically, I find that discussions of negotiations with pornography and spaces of reflection and contradiction facilitate considerations of agency and the possibility for resistance.

In Ciclitira’s paper entitled “Pornography, women and feminism: Between pleasure and politics” (2004), she includes a narrative from Betty, a woman in her research who describes her ambivalence toward pornography. Betty states,

I have this real porn dilemma... and so because I don’t want to support an industry that is you know er abusing people, then I don’t want pornography, but because I want to explore my own sexuality, I want to reassure myself about my own sexuality. I want to explore my own potential then I do want it. (2004, p. 292-293)

Betty identifies as worrying about pornography as a place of exploitation and thus has difficulties consuming pornography, and yet, she continues to watch it. Here pornography is complicated as a space for considering desire and exploring sexuality. I think Betty’s ambivalence towards pornography complicates an either/or, postfeminist or feminist, anti-porn or pro-sex reading of pornography and is also indicative of self-reflexive understandings of contradictory identities. Her difficulties with wanting and yet being uncomfortable with mainstream, heterosexual pornography result in specific actions in order to explore desire in a text that she finds problematic. Betty discusses how instead of watching pornography, she prefers to read pornography because, “...I can close it and put it back under the bed, and that’s it gone...” (Ciclitira, 2004, p. 293).

This is an example of specific strategies for negotiating with pornography that I would argue are indicative of exercising agency. Betty is limited by the type of pornography that is easily available to her thus she actively engages with it in alternative ways.

Quinta, another woman in Ciclitira's research, discusses alternative strategies for consuming mainstream, heterosexual pornography. Quinta articulates her difficulties with mainstream pornography and what she perceives to be the limited sexualities that are presented with masculine fantasies in mind (2004, p. 292). In order to continue watching pornography, she chooses to stop watching it with her partner because "...I felt that I was colluding with something which, which I was uncomfortable about... and I felt I was fulfilling *his* fantasy about women fancying other women...It was a bit like reclaiming my own sexuality I suppose..." (2004, p. 292). Quinta continues to watch mainstream, heterosexual pornography but chooses to watch it alone, without her partner. The women in Ciclitira's research demonstrate active negotiations with pornographic texts and while articulating feeling conflicted with at times troubling representations within pornography, they utilize unique strategies in order to engage with a text that is troubling for them.

Women's consumption of pornography is a topic that is often ignored or ill represented. Attwood writes, "research that focuses on women as active users of pornography is practically non-existent" (2005, p.72). And I think the key component to that sentence is "active users" – very little attention is paid to the active processes that women utilize in order to engage with an often 'masculine' space. While the most accessible and available pornography continues to portray women as the primary object, with an uncomplicated "female sexual willingness as the premise of pornographic

scenarios” (Ciclitira, 2004, p. 285), women are actively engaging and negotiating with this space. A reading of women’s consumption of pornography that connects it directly to postfeminism does not facilitate a space for considering the complex ways that it is actually used, consumed or viewed. Sarracino and Scott discuss how women in their classes speak openly about their use of pornography. The women are quoted as stating, “We get together with friends, get a pizza, put on some porn and laugh at it” (2008, p. 186). While my own experiences with pornography have not been in this setting, I think this situation could be read in a couple of ways. First, I think that for critics of so-called postfeminist women, this could present these women as un-problematically stepping into the role of the masculine audience and thus utilizing a masculine gaze to collude with patriarchy and their own oppressors. But I also think this could be read as yet another strategy for negotiating with heterosexual mainstream pornography and the often limited sexual identities that are available for women to engage with. When women’s consumption of pornography is conceptualized as limited to a postfeminist sensibility, I find to be too simple. Women’s reflexivity and active strategies for negotiating with discourse are lost. Without agency, the possibilities for resistance are gone and it is these possibilities for resistance even when engaging in problematic spaces like mainstream, heterosexual porn that I focus this research on.

Resistance

Whether we like it or not, cinema assumes a pedagogical role in the lives of many people. It may not be the intent of a filmmaker to teach audiences anything, but that does not mean that lessons are not learned. (hooks, 1996, p. 2)

In order to conceptualize women’s negotiations with seemingly problematic spaces like anal sex and pornography as resistant, I find it necessary to deconstruct the

concept of resistance and to problematize my own tendencies to insist on resistance as an inherently spectacular phenomenon. I work to trouble resistance that is constructed as something that must shock and also, as requiring a revolutionary and radical plan to completely overthrow that which it is trying to resist. Thomas and Davis describe how, “micro processes of resistance, although often discounted within a totalizing ‘revolution or nothing’ conceptualization can still maintain a political project” (2005, p. 729). Applied to pornography, individual women utilizing various strategies to actively negotiate the various representations they are viewing on screen could be indicative of these small acts of resistance. Weedon writes, “resistance to the dominant at the level of the individual subject is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge” (cited in Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 719). My struggles to conceptualize ‘small’ acts as indicative of resistance have been so entirely in contradiction with the ease in which I conceptualize acts of oppression as small and individual acts. Our racial, gender, sexual, and class hierarchies are maintained through tiny acts that happen in everyday encounters. Small acts of resistance by women in relation to pornography are as plausible as small acts of oppression.

Within pornography, representations of gender and sexuality are complicated via spectator engagement and negotiations with the images presented and also with the possibility of complex identities found in some pornography (Williams, 2008). I am interested in the relationship between bodies on the pornographic screen and our own bodies as we watch pornography. How we construct, interact, embody, contest, deny, and ultimately conceive of “actively” screening these representations is implicated in considerations of agency and pornography. Williams writes, “My body sympathetically

relates to the bodies I see on screen, but when I am screening sex I do not ‘have’ sex with the bodies I see there. Nor do I slavishly imitate what I see them do” (2008, p. 311). I am interested in this relationship between watching and acting, between consumption and conscious screening and how women embody this process. I think the common element in much of this discussion on resistance, complex identity (re)presentations and agency has involved considerations and representations of an embodied subject.

Audience theory continues to debate the processes involved in watching a film or television show. This becomes particularly difficult when trying to theorize about the audience as diverse, consisting of multiple and shifting identities. Often identities are analyzed as essential, resulting in a typical ‘female spectator’s’ reading of a film, positing a uniform experience for all women. When identity is conceptualized as fluid, complex and even contradictory, simplified representations of the audience and audience viewing techniques are challenged. Is it possible to watch pornography in order to explore and experience sex and sexual arousal without agreeing with everything on screen? Or, without passively absorbing all messages and images presented? Are the director’s intended meanings in pornography necessarily equal to the meaning an audience member, perhaps a woman in the audience, might get from the film? While pornography is generally working towards creating certain audience reactions, “...audiences do not just passively absorb pre-given meanings ‘forced’ upon them by media texts but actively create their own meanings” (Chaudhuri, 2006, p. 42). If, as Stuart Hall writes, “The reader is as important as the writer in the production of meaning” (1997, p. 33), does heterosexual, mainstream pornography necessarily produce and reflect the same meanings for everyone watching?

Agentic screening practices contest notions of a predetermined, situated audience by problematizing assumptions that the audience's reactions and interpretations can be controlled. According to Miller, meaning is a negotiable process because "the image does not preexist its apprehension by the viewer and thus has no truth prior to that encounter" (2008, p. 711). Therefore, the audience interacts with television shows and films in the production of meaning, as a collaborative process, not a predetermined, controlled and uniform experience. Thus, I find a possibility for agency in the audience, including for women that watch pornography. If meaning is not fixed, the way an audience interprets a pornographic film, which includes the strategies used while watching, is also variable. Jenkins describes "textual poaching" as a strategy where audience members pull out various aspects of a text in order to create new meanings and even new images (1992). For women watching pornography, this could include a re-appropriation and a re-imagining of images seen on screen, for future use as part of how they construct pleasure, fantasy or engages in sex. For these reasons, conceiving of pornography as an object of postfeminism and of women that participate by watching and enjoying pornography as cultural dupes is limiting for conceptualizing women's identities and their relationships with pornography as complex.

Conclusion

This paper has begun the process of considering various theoretical lenses for looking at women's consumption of pornography. Postfeminism and critics of the so called postfeminist subject have conceptualized either an overly agentic, self-aware woman or a woman that suffers from false consciousness as she participates in her own

oppression on the pretence of empowerment. Heteronormativity defines women as passive participants in sex who focus on their male partner's pleasure over their own, so that the very act of watching porn is contested – watching for male partners could demonstrate an alignment with heteronormative discourse while women watching porn to satisfy their own sexual pleasure could be conceptualized as challenging what it means to be a woman and resisting heteronormative discourse. Women's relationships to problematic spaces like pornography are complicated as academic analysis often conceptualizes an overly simplified understanding of women, sexual pleasure and desire; failing to account for fluidity, complexities, and contradictions of identity and especially the various strategies utilized by women in their consumption of pornography. As pornography has moved from the public space to the home, from the "Playboy" magazines to grocery tabloid magazines like "People," women are increasingly using pornography and perhaps are more openly watching pornography under their own conditions – with friends, or alone and for varying reasons. Complexities are increasing as fantasy and reality blur, with porn stars moving from XXX places to mainstream, primetime television shows, blogs and even social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace. Women's engagement with potentially problematic spaces like mainstream, heterosexual pornography is a complex negotiation with (re)presentations of identity in the construction of their own sexual identities.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Research topic

When I began this research project, I was interested in how women actively negotiate with pornography as a sexual discourse in the creation of their identities. Guided by the assumption that most women under the age of thirty have seen pornography at some point in their lives, often before engaging in sexual activities themselves, I was interested in how pornography might play a role in women's construction of sexual identity and what implications this would have on their porn watching habits as adults. Over the course of interviewing this project has shifted, or, rather, grown and become a collection of stories by women about their sexual biographies organized with a focus on stories of engagement with “problematic” spaces like heterosexual, mainstream pornography but also heterosexual anal sex. This research has expanded to also include stories of sexual experiences, sexual knowledge, and sexual pleasure.

I am connected to this project, as more than a researcher, interviewer or academic, because as a twenty-seven year old woman, I fall within my own population sample's demographics. Having spent most of my life struggling with my sexual biography, what to reveal, what to hide, what to remember, what to forget – I set out on this project hoping to find women with stories to share. Although my sexual biography, including my relationship with pornography, has often been clouded with guilt and shame, I hoped

with this research I'd find women with different stories to tell, memories of curiosity, excitement, and pleasure.

As an identity project, this research is interested in women's sexual biographies, the events that have happened in their lives, and how they story them. For this research I use the singular word *biography*; however, I acknowledge that in each individual biography, found amongst the many stories, there are multiple identities – each woman interviewed has one biography but many identities. In this chapter I outline my methodology and the values that inform it, define identity and what it means to this research, and connect this to the research methods that I've applied in this project. I will also outline concerns about producing a “responsible” body of research, one that situates me as a researcher and a research participant. With this chapter and ultimately my thesis, I work to expose my own situatedness, make explicit what is at stake for me with this topic and effectively demonstrate that I am implicated in this research.

Truth, knowledge, and stories in post-structuralism

There is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality, nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text. (Lieblich et al., 1998, p.2)

Within poststructuralism, the concepts of knowledge, reality, truth, objectivity and even experience are troubled (Weedon, 1997). A single version of knowledge, knowable reality, and the possibility for objectivity is replaced with instability, fluidity, contradictions, and indeterminacy. Reality as a separate and singular construct is dissolved into a multiplicity of people's perceptions, mediated by social discourse and expressed through language. Gergen writes that “what is described, understood and even seen is not a direct consequence of how the world is but of the meanings it carries within

society” (as cited in Taylor, 2006, p. 95). Post-structuralism complicates simplified understandings of experience, embracing fluidity and movement of people’s perceptions, the contradictions and overlaps between different versions of reality, and the possibility of fragmentation in narratives and texts.

Within positivist understandings of research, in order to claim that knowledge is in fact *the truth*, various strategies are required to ensure an objective researcher has used rigorous methods to produce unbiased data (Oakley, 1981). Fine et al. write, “There has long been a tendency to view the self of the social science observer as a potential contaminant, something to be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized, and controlled” (2000, p. 108). Objectivity, a singular and knowable truth and the ability to create or even want to create unbiased work requires a distant researcher who is given authority over the people they study because of their expert status. Gergen and Gergen write, “In traditional research ‘the investigator’ reports on the results of his or her observations... [Therefore] the reality constructed in the research report is that of the researcher...” (2003, p. 62). As the producer of knowledge and the “reporter” of reality, researchers have a certain level of expertise, which translates into having the authority to know (Lather, 1993). Poststructuralism challenges this masterful knowledge by problematizing the concept of truth and challenging those given the title to “create” knowledge. This produces a space for multiple perspectives, multiple realities, and multiple voices.

The primacy of a singular voice, a singular version, and a singular truth is a patriarchal concept that silences. It silences the participants whose words are rewritten and analyzed by an expert researcher that is given authority over someone else’s stories

(Fonow & Cook, 2005). It also silences the audience who read the research as though it is indicative of scientific truth; therefore, written by an “expert”, validated with objectivity, thus without room for debate. Feminist methodologies call for a movement away from this type of research, calling for research with accountability, self-reflexivity, and recognition of relationships of power (Alcoff, 2006). In this research I am not interested in producing a linear text where only my voice is heard *or* a text where my voice is completely absent in order to avoid contaminating what *really* happened. My concern about objective research extends beyond the “knowledge” that it produces, to the form that these “unbiased” texts take which seems too sanitary, too quiet and too simple. In describing their project, Fine et al write,

Following a poststructuralist emphasis on contradiction, heterogeneity, and multiplicity, we produced a quilt of stories and a cacophony of voices speaking to each other in dispute, dissonance, support, dialogue, contention, and/or contradiction. (2000, p. 119)

Within the noise of such a text, there is space for many voices to be heard; here there is room for the audience to participate and co-construct meaning. This next section works through what a ‘noisy’ text might look like, how identity is constructed and represented in ‘noisy’ texts and the possibility that can be found within them.

Post-structural understandings of knowledge, truth, reality, and meaning as fluid and complex constructs can also be applied to the concept of identity. The concept of identity in post-structuralism is reflected by Davies et al., who write:

The self both is and is not fiction, is unified and transcendent and fragmented and always in the process of being constituted, can be spoken of in realist ways and it cannot, and its voice can be claimed as authentic and there is no guarantee of authenticity. (2004, p. 367)

The contradictions of “self” are apparent here, as one can occupy several, often contradictory spaces at once. The self is constituted in the telling of stories, stories that we tell ourselves and stories that we share with others. Chase writes, “When someone tells a story, she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience and reality” (2004, p. 657). Within narratives, identity is performed, constituted, and achieved; thus, research projects that focus on stories are positioned to reflect on identity. Mishler writes, “Narratives are identity performances. We express, display, make claims for who we are – and who we would like to be – in the stories we tell and how we tell them. In sum, we perform our identities” (1999, p. 19). These performances shift and change depending on the audience, the context, the day, the moment, and how they are interpreted by the audience and even by the person performing. This research project is interested in identity, specifically how women (re)present their identities using stories from their sexual biographies and so, is well suited to a narrative methodology.

During interviews, it is generally the women interviewed sharing their stories while I listen; however, my role as listener has a direct relationship to the narrative that is ultimately produced. Chase writes that narratives are “socially situated interactive performances – as produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience for these particular purposes” (2004, p. 657). As reality and experience are socially constructed, stories told in interviews are collaborations between the storyteller and the listener, the participant and the researcher. Stories shift and change depending on context, the audience, the mood of the storyteller, their comfort/discomfort, the questions asked, what was discussed before, etc. Post-structuralism recognizes the researcher’s voice as always present, whether the researcher acknowledges it or not, whether the research explicitly

shows this or not. Rice writes, “Because subjectivities are neither disembodied nor detached, researchers’ personal histories, physicalities and positionalities necessarily inform the theoretical stories they tell” (2009, p. 246). Regardless of whether the researcher is implicated as a “research object” or not, our subjectivity is part of the research we conduct, the theoretical questions we ask, and the type of stories that are shared with us. As a researcher, it is important to me that I apply a methodology and produce research with an emphasis on the role of the researcher. In recognizing that where I am situated influences not only my perceptions of the narratives being told, but also the choices women make regarding which “stories” to tell and how to tell them, this body of work strives to reflect the interweaving of multiple voices, multiple interpretations and multiple identities.

Researcher reflexivity: Challenging the hyphen or writing as researcher and participant

Do you sit silently, adding to the power imbalance, scrutinizing gaze, etc.? Or do you share and risk centering yourself – making it about you? (Rice, 2009, p. 254)

Fearing that I will produce another piece of qualitative research that thinks about, hypothesizes about, and even celebrates situated researchers but never actually does this, I turn to researchers that move from writing about reflexivity to actually ‘doing it’ in their own research practices. Sandy Grande (2006) challenges qualitative researchers to take responsibility for our own legacy by writing ourselves into our work, so that research participants are not “... left carrying the burden of representations as we hide behind the cloak of alleged neutrality” (Fine et al., 2000, p. 109). Self-reflexivity, embodied research, and situated methodologies all describe this process of moving away

from the expert who is absent in his/her work. Fonow and Cook conceptualize reflexivity as,

...The way researchers consciously write themselves into the text, the audiences' reactions to and reflections of the meaning of the research, the social location of the researcher, and the analysis of disciplines as sites of knowledge production. (2005, p. 2219)

In order to begin the process of producing a responsible text, I find it necessary to write my own narratives, both as a researcher and as a woman with a sexual biography, and to write this thesis from that place of connected embodiment. I participate in this project as a feminist, researcher, researched, academic and grad student; all of these hyphenated, categories that are constructed as dichotomous (researcher-researched, subject-object, insider-outsider), that overlap and constantly leak into one another throughout this project. Through the use of a hyphen, it is implied that each side is separate, representing two disconnected identities but also that each side is connected depending on the existence of the other in order to be defined by what it is not. In challenging the hyphen I seek to recognize that I occupy all sides of the hyphen at one time, working to untangle the power hidden within each pair (Fine et al., 2000).

Chase emphasizes the significance of researchers exposing themselves within texts, writing, "... Researchers need to understand themselves if they are to understand how they interpret narrators' stories" (2004, p. 671). Reflecting on my own narratives takes me back to the beginning, when I originally chose this research topic. Pornography is a topic that I am constantly struggling with in my own life: how I feel about it, how I consider my interactions with it, and especially how I have worked to separate myself from it since childhood. This separation has often necessitated working towards a forgetting of my own memories, a rewriting of my narratives to push out the memories of

pornography. My sexual biography includes various encounters with pornography beginning at a young age. Some of my earliest memories include feeling simultaneously guilty and curious about my uncle's porn magazines that I was caught looking at and reprimanded for. In writing that sentence, the neat dividing line between research and researched, subject and object is blurred, as I occupy both spaces simultaneously. I am implicated in this research topic as I move between multiple spaces, from "directing" the questions to trying to "answer" them, from the narrator storying her life, to the writer, 'revealing' other women's lives.

Writing about how I am implicated in this research as a "research object" is only one side of the hyphen, one side of the binary pair of researcher/researched. If I am to situate myself, or really my selves, in this research, it is necessary not only to situate the self that is implicated as the "insider", but also the self that is the researcher. Haraway challenges objective and scientific texts, critiquing the author who utilizes the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (1988, p. 581). A movement towards responsible research involves producing a self-reflexive text, one that openly situates the researcher. Fine et al. (2000) discuss this as "coming clean at the hyphen", openly interrogating the separation between researcher and researched and explicitly exposing the researcher as a co-constructor/co-performer in the text. The difficulty in producing a text that includes a visible researcher with his/her self-reflections exposed is to do so without decentring the women interviewed in the process. In the following paragraphs, I outline some of my concerns about this process, highlighting several researchers who are exposed as participants within their texts.

While situating myself as a researcher and as a woman that has watched pornography is important to me in the creation of a more responsible text, this is a complicated space to work within. I do not want to create a text that situates myself confessionally, decentring other women's narratives in the process. Goodson calls this producing "pornographic narratives (i.e. narratives that are prone to explicit self-disclosure and exposure of the researcher)..." (as cited in Lather 2007, p. 29). Swinging from the position of objective and removed researcher over to John van Maanen's "vanity ethnograph[er]" is not my intention either (as cited in Lather, 2007, p. 29). I work to find a balance, a way to utilize my own narratives as a researcher and to problematize and complicate simplified representations of identity while situating myself – and this is a complicated process. Feminist researchers Patti Lather and Christine Smithies in *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS* (1997) negotiate the spaces of writing as situated and present themselves as researchers amidst women's narratives. They alter the structure of a traditional narrative by having their thoughts, in smaller font, at the bottom of each page. Lather and Smithies discuss how this troubles the want to simplify and categorize the women's narratives, as they are complicated and multilayered with the various voices that are included. As situated researchers that problematize their position and self-consciously reflect on the research written, a space is created for the third participant in the co-performance of identity, the audience/reader. Conversely, a closed text that writes from an objective perspective closes the door on this valuable dialogue. It is through the reader/audience's participation that stale assumptions about women and sexuality can be interrupted, redefined, and renegotiated. An open text, one with room for many voices, including the reader's voice, keeps the production

of dialogue moving beyond the closed space of an interview and beyond the closed experience of reading a text.

In “Silent Voices: A Subversive Reading of Child Sexual Abuse” (2003), Karen V. Fox produces a text that is multi-voiced and multilayered. She intersplices her voice between the voice of a man who has sexually assaulted his stepdaughter and, the now adult, stepdaughter’s voice. As a victim of sexual abuse herself, Fox rotates between researcher, victim, woman, listener, storyteller – at times simultaneously. This text fights linearity and it troubles a tendency to simplify and categorize identities such as those of victim and abuser. Fox has produced a text demonstrating that something is at stake for her with this topic, a text that explicitly threads her, the researcher, the woman, the victim and the writer, throughout. Carla Rice outlines dilemmas in producing self-reflexive research in her article, “Imagining the Other?: Ethical Challenges of Researching and Writing Women’s Embodied Lives” (2009). Rice discusses the complications she experiences interviewing women about their body histories as a researcher and a woman, but also as a body that historically was labelled Other but now appears “normal”. She questions “How can critical reflections on our own embodied subjectivities carefully and cautiously be employed to enrich the analyses and further feminist critical concerns?” (2009, p. 246). Within this article, Rice contemplates the importance of exposing her own bodily secrets while working to decentre them in her research; it is these open reflections that facilitate the audience/readers to enter into the discussion and connect Rice as an embodied subject to the research she produces.

While the call to situate ourselves within our research has been here for decades, resistance to this as a challenge to authority, objectivity and knowledge is ever present

(Haraway, 1988; Fine et al., 2001). The production of messy works positions these texts often within an “experimental” or peripheral space, as they continue to be the exception, not the norm, in academic research (Harding & Norberg, 2005). Considerations of the third party implicated in these co-performances, the audience and the readers, are also valuable. Qualitative research projects that draw succinct conclusions and close up the narratives effectively block out the audience’s ability to participate, making the author the single voice, an impenetrable and unchallengeable expert. George Marcus writes about “messy texts” that “are messy because they insist on their own open-endedness, incompleteness, and uncertainty about how to draw a text/analysis to a close” (1994, p. 391). Representations of identities through actively storying experiences is “always multilayered and many stranded” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xvii) and exposing myself, and the role that I have in this research facilitates an opening, a gap, a space for the narrative to continue to shift.

Narrative methodology: Finding a methodology to match my epistemological and ontological needs

Finding a research methodology that incorporates the various ideas discussed in this chapter (feminist research, post-structuralism and social constructivism) led me to narrative methodologies. Narrative methodologies are qualitative research projects that focus on narratives or stories as the item of analysis. As discussed earlier, stories lend themselves to identity projects and also to feminist research by focusing on women’s lives, storied in their own words. Riessman loosely describes the narrative research process as one in which “events perceived by the speaker as important are selected,

organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (2008, p. 23). Using a narrative approach facilitates a space for women to share their stories in an order that is not fixed and thus facilitates the post-structural understandings of identity as fluid and non-linear. Rice writes,

From a poststructuralist feminist vantage point, the narratives people compose from personal experiences informed by broader cultural scripts, contribute to their construction of identities and selves. (2009, p. 248)

The women in this research, in sharing stories about watching pornography throughout their lives, represent, create and perform their identities in the interview setting (Taylor, 2006).

After deciding that narrative methodologies encompass many of the criteria that are important to me, including conceptualizing reality and identity as socially constructed, interviews as collaborations and stories as a means to produce and perform identities – I struggled during interviews to actually get traditional, beginning-middle-end stories from participants. Riessman writes, “The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (2008, p. 23). As hard as I tried to ask broad and open questions to draw out stories, women’s sexual biographies are not something most of us think about or share every day. While I gave the interview guide to participants ahead of time, hoping this would start the process of thinking and potentially ease the actual process of storying in the interviews, the women in this research project did not generally share stories that took “traditional” story form. At first I was concerned that I would no longer be able to do a narrative methodology; however, after unpacking the word story, I think the interviews are full of the “detailed

accounts” Riessman is writing about. It is, however, necessary to challenge what a story actually is.

Narrative methodologies focus on stories, but what are stories, what goes into them, how do you know when you’ve heard one and especially, how do you know when one begins and ends? According to Riessman, “...determining the boundaries of stories can be difficult and highly interpretive” (2008, p. 74). This posed a difficulty for my research, particularly at the beginning of the project. As I revised the interview guide after every interview conducted, trying to gain longer and more traditional stories, I began to recognize that the issue was less the questions I was asking and more the topic being discussed. Women’s sexual biographies are not often spoken about and they are often shrouded in secrecy. Rice writes,

Rather than approaching the accounts as accurate representations of reality or imagined texts of fiction, I came to view women’s versions as stories they made to give meaning to their experiences, and later modified to connect and communicate with others. (2009, p. 248)

In many ways this is how stories are being defined for this project. As opposed to traditional narratives, those with a clear beginning, middle and end – the stories that women shared during interviews were far more complicated. The stories remembered were often interrupted as new thoughts came to the surface or were connected to events described at an earlier or later time and stories were often never ‘properly’ concluded. ‘Answers’ to questions were often only a few words or a sentence in length. Stories on topics that are not frequently spoken about - even privately to ourselves – take a different shape than casual conversations about daily life. At times participants began to share stories and then seemed to change their minds, changing directions, only to come back to that first thought at a later point. I argue that these are still examples of stories, often

loosely connected in different places throughout a single conversation. Stories are messy, shifting and fluid just as identity is messy, shifting and fluid. These stories indicate identity, the identity the participant wanted to present, the identity she imagined herself to previously have been, and/or the identity that she has worked very hard to separate herself from.

There are various branches within narrative methodology and for this project I utilize a thematic narrative approach that is grounded in feminist post-structural perceptions of fluid identities. All narrative inquiry is focused on stories; however, thematic narrative analysis is focused on “what” is said, rather than “how” it is said (Riessman, 2008). According to Riessman, in thematic narrative analysis,

Data are interpreted in light of thematics developed by the investigator (influenced by prior and emergent theory, the concrete purpose of the investigation, the data themselves, political commitments and other factors). (2008, p. 54)

Although themes are the focus, and often these themes stretch across participants’ stories, as with all narrative analysis, much is invested in the idea that each individual participant’s narrative is kept “intact”. Mishler argues that a narrative analysis grants individuals “unity and coherence through time, respecting them as subjects with both histories and intentions” (cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 12). However, while narrative analysis works to represent a “unified” and “coherent” subject, “there is no way to stuff a real-live person between the two covers of a text” (Denzin, cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 103). This is arguably the most challenging part of narrative as a methodology and I would argue the most controversial within the field – as different theorists work to interpret this in different ways.

How narrative analysis conceptualizes identity versus how post-structuralism conceptualizes identity is a space complicated with contradictions. Language like ‘unity’ and ‘coherence’ within narrative collides with the language of post-structuralism, like ‘fractured and ‘fragmented’. Adding to this complication is a subject’s understanding of her own life in generally linear terms, as a unified subject storying a coherent chain of events, through traditional narratives. Mishler writes,

We can easily extract chronologies from [participants’] accounts, these sequential orderings of events and episodes linked together by the familiar narrative conjunction, “and then.” But it would be misleading to read them as progressive, that is, as linear, continuous movement through developmental stages... I am not arguing that our lives are chaotic, nor suggesting we cannot construct meaningful narratives of our experiences – our stories. However, if our stories represent our lives with any adequacy, then they must leave room for the complex interplay of multiple and sometimes competing plot lines. (1999, p. 80)

What does this mean to a researcher applying a post-structural analysis? I’m not sure there is a neat answer to this question; however, I have some ideas about how I’ve worked to research and write within this space of contradiction and what I think it means to this thesis.

I see value and possibility in the contradiction between the unified understanding a “subject” has of her life and the fragmented framework I apply to analyze it. The cracks and ruptures apparent in putting these two understandings of subjecthood together reflect the cracks and ruptures present in any conversation had during an interview, in any stories told about identity. It is within these breaks that I see a way to reflect on the partiality of (re)presentations and analyses of identity found in qualitative research (Miller & Glassner, 1997). Denzin writes, “Most important, language, which is our window into the subject’s world (and our world), plays tricks. It displaces the very thing it is supposed to represent, so that what is always given is a trace of other things, not the

thing – lived experience – itself” (cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 101). While putting together the two “data analysis” chapters for this thesis, I spent months agonizing over which stories to use, what each story might tell, what meaning the storyteller intended to express, and what meaning a reader might find within them. Once I recognized spaces of contradiction and conflict, places where a woman might align and moments later separate herself from a particular identity, I began to visualize what this thesis could look like. I also began to connect these moments of rupture with my post-structural methodology, theoretical apparatus and overall theme of seeking agency in women’s engagement with problematic spaces. The first stories I selected were chosen because they seemed to most effectively convey a complicated reflection of identity, a contradiction and/or a moment of negotiation with social expectations/social discourse. Mason writes that narratives can be chosen quantitatively because they are statistically the most common, or qualitatively because “this quotation is typical, extreme, a particularly articulate expression of a point, and so on” (1996, p. 144). After selecting this first story I worked diligently to find other narratives from the same woman that might complicate simplified understandings of her identity and that would challenge a reader trying to place her within a single category to instead recognize the overlap, the fluidity and the complexities of the many identities each woman presented through her stories. In this way, I hope to have begun the process of producing a text that not only theorizes about post-structuralism in its methodology chapter but also works to embody it within all the chapters.

Disagreements regarding overlap between research paradigms exist; however, more and more methodologists are recognizing the value of drawing from both, challenging the

rigid divisions between methodologies (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Netting, 2010).

Describing some of the debate between grounded theory and narrative analysis, Nancy Netting (2010) discusses how key features previously viewed as foundational differences are no longer relevant. According to Netting,

Although the origins of these methods, in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) and narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993), respectively, were quite different, the two sub-methods have to a significant extent converged, making a productive synthesis possible. (2010, p. 7)

The key difference, as described at the top of this paragraph, the “containment” of individuals’ narratives in narrative analysis versus the “fracturing” of individuals’ stories in grounded theory is challenged in the grounded theory sub-method, social constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000). Charmaz, a proponent of this sub-method, writes that coding and categorizing, the point of analysis for grounded theorists, does not necessitate a fracturing of individual’s stories (2000, p. 521). And in fact, sub-methods within narrative analysis, including thematic narrative analysis, also conduct data analysis by looking for themes and categories across participant’s narratives. Overlaps between paradigms complicate the notion of sovereign methods and methodologies and researchers are able to construct new ones from the “best” parts of many paradigms. As the rigidity of separate methodologies loosens for some, Guba and Lincoln write, “There is a great potential for interweaving of viewpoints, for the incorporation of multiple perspectives, and for borrowing, or *bricolage*... (2005, p. 197).

An example of *bricolage* is Carla Rice’s research, which seems to effectively combine both grounded theory and narrative analysis as she focuses on women’s stories but utilizes various elements from grounded theory, including coding. Rice writes, “Empiricist approaches of coding combined with poststructuralist narrative analysis shed

light on social processes underpinning personal accounts...” (2009, p. 248). She theorizes across interviews while working to conceptualize each story as connected to each participant’s narrative in its entirety. In many ways this fluidity and overlap between methodologies is in line with post-structural understandings of knowledge and knowledge creation described throughout this chapter. Guba and Lincoln explain how fluidity and the dissolution of a single version of truth, “...leads us ineluctably toward the insight that there will be no single ‘conventional’ paradigm to which all social scientists might ascribe in some common terms and with mutual understanding” (2005, p. 212). In many ways this project is indicative of a post-paradigmatic stance or a *bricolage* of sorts, as I work to use both narrative analysis and methodological aspects of grounded theory, with the goal of complicating, always troubling the possibility of overly simplified readings of women’s narratives. I drew upon several aspects of grounded theory while conducting this research, generally centered on inductive research and staying grounded within the data. This means that as interviews were conducted, the research has shifted and grown organically, as I’ve worked to follow participants and their stories, rather than fitting them into existing theoretical frameworks. The aspects of grounded theory that inform my research are based on the principles of grounded theory; rather than the methodology.

Drawing from multiple paradigms has implications for how to evaluate the validity of this research, as traditionally qualitative research has been evaluated by the tenets within each *separate* methodology. Riessman writes, “...ways of thinking about validity and ethics are products of the paradigms that spawn them” (2008, p. 185).

Within my conception of validity, outside of the separate research paradigms, I include a

situated methodology, one that stems from Lather's "voluptuous validity" which includes self-reflexivity and space for multiple truths in a text that is tentative, partial and questioning (Lather, 1993, p. 686). Through explicit self-reflexivity and by challenging the hyphen through the inclusion of myself as both researcher/researched and with the use of my own narratives, I hope to create a space for the reader to enter into the knowledge creation process. An important evaluation criterion for myself is "my accountability for how my personal experiences have marked my interpretation of women's stories" (Rice, 2009, p. 255). As Harding notes, when "the researcher appears to us not as an invisible anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests' the research process can be scrutinized" (cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 103). Opening up the text and exposing myself, as a researcher, creates a space for the reader to hear my thoughts, facilitating the interrogation of my interpretations. Perhaps an effective indicator of validity in this research is determining if I have accomplished what I set out to do, what I outlined in the first chapter. Mason links "research questions, methodology and methods" as indicators of the validity of a research project (1996). As outlined in my introduction, I am interested in conceptualizing women who engage in socially "problematic" spaces like watching pornography and having anal sex as outside of the traditional dichotomy of cultural "victims" that are unaware of their own subordination or subjects that are entirely resistant and agentic. Chapter One unpacked the theoretical implications of that statement, the first half of this chapter has outlined the various research paradigms and 'textual friends' that I have drawn from in the construction of my methodology, finally

this last section outlines my method, how I applied my methodology to the research questions while in ‘the field’.

ACTUALLY ‘DOING IT’: MY RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

As discussed previously, I came to this research topic through my own interests in it. Drawing up my research plans, I decided to focus on women aged thirty and under because of my interest in pornography and how this generation has grown up with fairly accessible pornographic films at a younger age than previous generations – via the home VCR and the Internet (Sarracino & Scott, 2008). I focused on women older than nineteen because of ethics concerns with interviewing women under the age of consent on the topic of their sexual biographies. I put up posters at adult sex shops, the Kelowna Pride Centre, the gym, yoga facilities, hair salon, etc. Ultimately all ten of the interviews I conducted came through either personal contacts or are women that I have some sort of relationship with. As a post-structural researcher, I do not subscribe to concerns of objectivity or the perception that research reflects a singular reality or truth; therefore using participants that I know does not conflict with my methodology. Post-structural research “... does not assume objectivity; rather, it privileges positionality and subjectivity” (Riessman, 2002, p. 696). I argue that having an already established connection with most of my participants was actually valuable for this topic. As most women do not discuss their sexual biographies often, even privately with themselves, a certain amount of previous personal contact likely facilitated a higher level of comfort –

for the women participating and for myself. Riessman notes that in interviews, “the story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener” (cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 101). Having a prior relationship/connection to all of the participants was likely one of the many variables influencing what participants chose to tell and how they chose to tell it, just as my status as an academic researcher, my race, sex, sexual identity, and class all potentially influenced how women storied their sexual biographies.

Ten interviews were conducted over the course of a five-month period in 2009. In deciding how many interviews to conduct, I took several factors into consideration. First, this project is intended to be an identity project, focused on individual women’s storying of their sexual biographies. This research is not looking to suggest that any one of the women’s narratives or that all ten combined could be representative of any other women’s experiences. Instead of producing knowledge that is generalizable to a greater population, this research follows Mason’s “theoretical generalizability” which seeks to “throw light on processes or issues which are pivotal or central to some wider body of explanation or knowledge” (1996, p. 154). In this thesis I work to develop explanations that can broaden theoretical understandings of gender, sexuality, pornography and agency through the use of ten women’s stories. In connecting this to existing literature on agency and resistance, this research complicates stale assumptions about women’s sexual passivity and gendered agency.

I began the recruitment process intending to interview women with certain criteria including the following: varying sexual identities, relationship statuses, ages (between nineteen and thirty), and educational backgrounds – this was my focus, rather than

achieving a certain number of participants. Drawing on grounded theory for my sampling technique, the women I asked to participate changed as interviews were conducted, as I worked to ensure multiple sexual orientations, ages, relationship statuses and education levels were represented. Also, narrative research analysis does not require a set number of participants, some researchers interview only a couple of participants (Hole, 2007) while others include upwards of eighty participants (Luce, 2004; Rice, 2009). Unlike other methodologies, including grounded theory, saturation is not the focus; instead the focus is on who is being interviewed and what their stories are.

Creswell writes,

In a narrative study, the researcher reflects more on who to sample – the individual may be convenient to study because she or he is available, a politically important individual who attracts attention or is marginalized, or a typical, ordinary person. All of the individuals need to have stories to tell about their lived experiences. (2007, p. 128)

The main limitation of this sample is its homogeneity in terms of race – all participants identify as either white, Caucasian, or of European descent. My intentions during the recruitment phase were to interview women with a variety of sexual orientations, relationship statuses and educational backgrounds. Having very limited luck with my recruitment, the opportunity to interview any women of colour did not arise. This is likely as a result of several factors: from the incredibly small population of colour living in Kelowna, the fact that I am white, and the very private/personal focus of this research. This research focuses on identity, working to recognize the many complex identity categories that any one woman identifies with, that any one woman works to (re)present with her stories. These identities include race but they also include class, gender, geographical location, sexual orientation, etc. Mayne writes, “I assume, from the outset,

that all so-called members of so-called communities live that membership in complex, contradictory, and radically different ways” (1993, p. 158). Although I may share an identity, “woman”, with the ten people I interviewed, each of us experiences that category, constructs it, and conceptualizes it differently. The many identities that I identify with work together, conflict with one another, and overlap. Although all of the women in my sample identify as white, they experience whiteness differently. Therefore, having ten white women does not mean that their experience of race is identical; however, having women of different racial backgrounds could have provided another layer of complexity to this project.

Although I am finished conducting interviews for this project, this work is in some ways more of a beginning than a finished project as I intend to continue researching women’s sexualities and sexual biographies for my PhD research. The next phase of research will build on this work by focusing on the teaching of sex and sexuality in women-friendly sex shops and at-home sex-toy parties in Vancouver, British Columbia. Because I am moving this research to a larger centre, a more racially diverse community, I am hopeful that this next project will include narratives from women of colour. This future research has developed organically from some of the interviews conducted during my MA research, including stories shared about accessing tips and information about sex and sexual pleasure from various sources like sex shops and sex-toy parties.

Participant Chart^{iv}

Participant^v	Sexuality	Relationship Status	Ethnicity	Education Level
Adelle	Bisexual	Long distance/boyfriend	German	Upper-Level BA student
Christina	Bisexual	Single	Ukrainian	Diploma
Ashley	Straight	Single	Caucasian	Diploma
Lauren	Bisexual	Common-law/boyfriend	Scottish/Albertan	Upper-Level BA student
Rachel	Straight	Married	Caucasian	First Year Student
Jessica	Straight	Common-law	White	High-School
Taylor	Straight	Married	White	High-School
Kelly	Straight	Married	White	Diploma
Zoe	Lesbian	Married	White	Upper-Level BA student
Kylie	Straight	Separated	White	Diploma

Table 1: Participant Chart

^{iv} Each of these categories, sexuality, relationship status and ethnicity include how each participant self identified, in their own words. As Kelowna is a small city, in the interest of anonymity, I have decided not to share the age of my participants. All are between the ages of 20 and 30.

^v Pseudonyms are used for all participants throughout this project.

The interview

As a researcher, I am interested in the fluidity and complexities of meaning, the active constitution of self/identities through language and perceptions of identity as indicative of processes. In order to facilitate a space that resembles a conversation as opposed to a structured interview, the interviews for this research were open-ended. Mishler (re)conceptualises research interviewing with the use of a “conversation-styled” interview replacing the old “vessel-like respondent” and the “facilitating interviewer” with “two active participants who jointly construct narrative and meaning” (as cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 23). An open-ended interview has the possibility of shifting and adjusting as the women who share their stories move throughout their narratives. This has the potential to increase comfort; particularly as sharing sexual biographies is potentially a difficult topic to speak about. The women interviewed have more control over where the conversation moves if I, as the researcher, am not holding a list of specific, linear questions. Riessman writes, “...narrative interviewing necessitates following participants down *their* trails” (2008, p. 24).

Instead of a list of questions, themes were given to each participant prior to our meeting and these themes were loosely referred to throughout the roughly one hour interview. The participants had the option to flag certain themes ahead of time as ones to avoid and others as indicative of stories they wished to share. Identities are fluid and shifting presentations of self; therefore, I emailed each of the participants a copy of their transcribed interviews to continue the dialogue. In recognition of post-structural understandings of identity, this enables changes, reconsiderations, and alternative identities to be expressed by the participants during a second engagement with their

narratives (Weedon, 1997). This is also indicative of values found in both narrative analysis and social constructivist grounded theory where “It is the responsibility of researchers to share results with participants, allowing them to help in interpretation (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Riessman, 1993, 2008)” (Netting, 2010, p. 7). As participants were all very busy and scheduling the first interview was often difficult, I felt that continuing our conversation through email might increase the possibility of participation. After emailing all participants their transcripts, only three of the participants actually responded with comments to their initial interviews although nine responded at some point after the interview occurred saying they enjoyed the conversations we had during their interview. Where relevant, these comments have been incorporated into the data analysis and in the final write up of this project. Post-structural texts often layer more than one voice within a single text, including not only the interviewer and their participants but also giving those participants an opportunity to return to their original interview and make comments on it. A text that includes the same participants creating dialogue with themselves is indicative of post-structural understandings of identity as constantly changing and often contradictory. And ultimately, upon the completion of this thesis, it will be made available to all of the participants. As I am continuing this research into the future, I am particularly interested in their comments about the final write up to aid in the construction of the next project.

Data Analysis

I conducted all ten interviews and then immediately following each interview I wrote up field notes describing the interview process, noting any initial points of interest

and including possible elements to change for future interviews. After transcribing all ten interviews, I printed them and read through each one in its entirety. Like Netting, I “made notes on basic themes and issues [and] went over notes and transcripts repeatedly...” (2010, p. 7). As I read through the transcripts, I used different coloured highlighters, highlighting themes, points of interest, and elements of the interviews that seemed different, similar, and challenging. I continued to memo my thoughts during all phases of the data collection and analysis and I referred back to these notes in the process of writing up my thesis. Hesse-Biber et al. write, “Memo writing allowed us to sort data into topics and to define how categories are connected in the overall process” (2004, p. 53). Memo writing was also a space for me to begin thinking through self-reflexivity as a researcher throughout this project.

My data analysis followed Mason’s outline for when and how “the development of theory takes place in the research process” (1996, p. 141). She writes, “Theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process” (1996, p. 141). I began interviews aware of some of the social pressures and discourses that women are negotiating with in the construction of their sexual identities because I am a woman that falls within my own sample population. I intended to focus on pornography specifically, as a way for women to organize stories; however, I did not intend to write a chapter on anal sex, nor did I expect to use women’s narratives to demonstrate heteronormativity and post-feminist discourse. It was in the moving back and forth through and across interviews, reading books, articles, websites, thinking about objects and texts from popular culture that relate in some way to women and sexualities that I began to see connections to theory. And although I was not looking to produce

statistics on the ten women interviewed, the fact that of the nine women who watch porn, eight prefer some form of girl-on-girl porn was not something I could ignore – I felt compelled to unpack this in the data analysis chapter on porn.

While I have described combining inductive research from social constructivist grounded theory and thematic analysis from narrative, it is maintaining the context of each individual sexual biography with a focus on each woman's stories in her own words that has remained central to this project. Netting's methodology for her research on marriage and love in India overlaps with my own methodology, as "[Her] aim was to let the voices of participants be heard, for they are witnesses and agents of Indian reality" (2010, p. 7). And I would add not only heard, but also contextualized by maintaining each story within the larger narrative of each woman's individual sexual biography. In order to conceptualize individual woman's narratives as connected, I continuously read through interviews in their entirety. Although I pull out narratives from each that fall within a common theme or that stand out as unique, I do so while remembering the context of each individual woman's stories.

Conclusion

My methodology is indicative of post-structural and social constructivist understandings of knowledge and knowledge creation. As a feminist methodologist, this project seeks to interrogate power within the interview context by exposing the research process, situating myself as a researcher and as an implicated subject, and focusing on women's stories in their own words. Combining thematic narrative analysis and social constructivist grounded theory facilitates pulling what I perceive to be the best elements

for this particular research from each paradigm, including theorizing across interviews while working to contextualize each story told as a part of each woman's entire collection of stories during all phases of analysis. Ultimately my methodological goal continues to be producing a text that resists simplified understandings of each woman, as I work to complicate one narrative through the use of another. This research is an identity project, interested in how women story their sexual biographies while incorporating my own stories as I navigate the space of both researcher and researched.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN DO *IT* TOO

This chapter conceptualizes the increasing pressures on women to gather sexual knowledge, the centrality of male pleasure and heterosexuality, and how both of these have become equated with what it means to successfully prove yourself as a woman in 2010. Women watch pornography: they watch it for a variety of reasons, with or without partners: some tell friends about it, while others never tell anyone. This chapter is organized into themes around women's use of pornography, contrasted with the social construction of women's sexuality, and the pursuit of women's pleasure. Each theme includes stories shared during interviews to demonstrate the complexities, variety and commonalities of ten women's sexual biographies.

Some girls do and some girls don't

Jessica: ...Girls hate porn. And it was weird because I was like, I don't know why girls hate porn so much! I loved it! I was like, it's so great and everything.

Women chose to watch or not watch pornography for various reasons, aligning and rejecting social discourses in the process. For Jessica, who identifies as heterosexual and in a relationship, this statement identifies her as a woman who enjoys pornography, actively separating herself from other women - women who don't enjoy porn - in the process. As pressures to prove your sexual knowledge increase, pornography works as an emblem of sexual confidence. Acting as both a site of "masculine" interest and a concern of second wave feminism, pornography is positioned as an object of post-

feminism. In connecting pornography to contemporary and empowered women, post-feminism relegates second wave feminism to the realm of the old fashioned and out of date (McRobbie, 2009). Jessica achieves womanhood by successfully occupying a masculine space; she is able to enjoy aspects of sex “like a man” – unlike other women who, through their dislike of pornography, present themselves as “prudish” and “out-dated” feminists. However, viewing Jessica’s pleasure in mainstream porn as anti-women or anti-feminism also seems limiting; by simplifying Jessica’s interest in porn, it fails to show what is at stake for her. Throughout her interview, the intense pressure she experiences to demonstrate her sexual knowledge and especially to demonstrate comfort with performing sexually comes up in many of her stories.

Me: How come you didn’t have sex before [age 18], do you think?

Jessica: I was just scared, nervous – I was kind of a frigid person actually. Like it took me awhile just to, like, do anything else. Like I could kiss and make-out and, like, flirt with the guy without any problems. But, like, any time it got any further than that, I got really nervous and then like...

Me: Tried to get out of the situation?

Jessica: Yeah, just like flee. So...

[...]

Me: And you were just nervous to have sex?

Jessica: Well no, cause I remember a couple of times, like, where I would be, this is really slutty sounding... it would be like a guy I liked and I’d be making out with him and he usually would have been my brother’s friend or...like...someone from a party and it was usually, like, just one nighter kind of deal.

Me: Mmhmm.

Jessica: But like, I really liked him so I was, like, all into it and then they'd be, they'd want a blowjob until they came and I'd be, like, I don't really want to...

Me: Yeah.

Jessica: And then they'd be like well...and if they asked for sex I'd be, like, well I'm a virgin and then they'd be like, oh okay – and then they'd back off. But then I'd be like, well no, you can. And I, like, felt almost like, well I'm going to let you down if I don't sleep with you.

Me: So you would try to, after you'd tell them – because you'd feel bad?

Jessica: Yeah. Not so much that I wanted to so bad, but it's like, because you told them and they knew sex was coming and they were quite a bit older – like three years older – so they were like...and I think they felt really bad being my brother's friends that they were fooling around with a virgin.

Me: Yeah.

Jessica: Cause I don't think a lot of people knew.

Jessica's story seemingly places the blame for men's disappointment on herself. Here, her refusal to have sex and her justification for the pressure from these men, including the fact that they are older, that they didn't know she was a virgin, and that she was being "slutty", all work to emphasize *her* as the problem, not them. Jessica becomes the quintessential "cocktease", slutty but frigid and as the temptress virgin she fails to satisfy men's natural sexual needs. As an adult, watching pornography and especially enjoying pornography facilitates a separation from the eighteen year-old self she is describing here. Heteronormative and post feminist discourse come together to define empowerment as engaging in sexual activity confidently, in a way as determined by male partners. For Jessica saying no to sex is not indicative of sexual confidence; instead, it reflects insecurity, immaturity and fear of disappointing men. Her active desire for sex

and sexuality are proven through her interest in pornography, separating herself from the sexually inexperienced younger self and from other women who, for Jessica, continue to demonstrate a lack of sexual confidence.

While literature on post-feminism points to increasing pressures for women to prove their sexual confidence by viewing and having sex “like a man”, there are women who seemingly do not comply with these pressures. Rachel who is married and identifies as heterosexual, has only seen a short clip of pornography as a teenager – and chooses not to watch it as an adult. When I ask her who, if not her, she thinks is watching pornography, she says:

Rachel: [...] I have no idea if that’s who it is, but I just picture young guys, before they are ready for sex and then guys who aren’t getting it.

Me: Yeah, so not really women, per se?

Rachel: No, not me or my friends.

Why does Jessica find it important to say that she loves pornography, pointing out that other women don’t – while Rachel separates herself from it by connecting it to men who can’t find sexual partners and/or women she wouldn’t be friends with?

Like Jessica, Rachel has several themes running through her narratives. For Rachel, much is at stake in this distancing from porn. She has been in a relationship with her husband for nearly her entire adult life. Multiple times during the interview Rachel reminds me that she has “only” had sex with one person, one time, prior to her husband – and that this first experience “almost” doesn’t count. This emphasis or de-emphasis on her “loss of virginity” with a man other than her husband is monumental for Rachel, but especially for Rachel’s husband. In the following narrative, she remembers the first time she had sex with her husband,

Maybe he felt pressure to do it because he can't be the boy that backs down. Because, I mean, he joked for a while – now he jokes that, you know, I raped him. And I ruined the good little Christian boy that he was. And...and what was it, probably I think we were engaged at this point – he told me, I didn't know this before, that he – when he first met me and he learned I wasn't a virgin, he was debating whether or not he could continue to date me.

Rachel's husband nearly ended their relationship because he didn't like that she had sex with someone prior to him – and this narrative makes it seem like he may have some regrets about their initial sexual experience as well – which she initiated. Therefore, embodying what could be described as an active sexual position: having sex at the age of eighteen with her long-term boyfriend at the time, initiating sex with her husband after they dated for two months, these are both aspects of Rachel's sexual biography that she seems to view as problematic. Perhaps an overtly sexual object like pornography, if she brought it in to bring her marriage, or, if she was discovered watching it, could be another example of problematic, active sexuality. Not watching pornography and defining it as something she is so distant from (as she told me, she isn't even friends with anyone who watches it), provides a way for Rachel to (re)present herself as different from her younger self. For both Rachel and Jessica, association or disassociation with pornography can be a way to demonstrate the sexual identity they feel is most important for them, at this moment, in this context. Both Jessica and Rachel use other women as a point of comparison, to (re)present themselves as different; in Jessica's case to appear more sexual and for Rachel, to appear less so. This distancing is indicative of the postfeminist trend to distance oneself from feminism, where “Rather than sisterhood, not being like that other woman is central” (Brunsdon, 2005, p. 113). Jessica shares that she loves porn and then brings up other women's disinterest in it as a way to align with a particular sexual identity; thus separating herself from *other* women, women who don't

watch porn. Rachel shares that she doesn't watch porn and isn't friends with anyone who does; thereby drawing firm boundaries around the type of woman she considers herself to be, compared to *other* women, women who chose to watch porn.

“I kissed a girl and I liked it”: Looking for pleasure in ‘girl on girl’ from bedrooms to nightclubs to porn

A wave of ‘bisexual chic’ is sweeping the United States. Emboldened by such images as Madonna kissing Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera on a TV awards show, girls are proudly declaring their alternative sexualities at a younger age than ever before. (Richard Luscombe of the *UK Observer*, cited in Shapiro, 2005, p. 48-49)

Christina: Maybe I'm into girls, and I liked when I watched something where girls were intimate. I like, really liked it. So I wanted to go, so I went to the video store and said, I'm looking for something for my boyfriend who likes girl on girl.

In the past, Christina, who identifies as single and bisexual, has gone to porn to explore alternate sexualities, to experiment with the possibility of bisexuality. However, the DVDs she bought are mainstream heterosexual DVDs, depicting “girl-on-girl for heterosexuals”, so she decides to give away her DVDs and instead explore her bisexuality outside of porn. For Christina, girl-on-girl made for men is not pleasurable and is not conducive to her identification as a bisexual woman. Kylie identifies as heterosexual, is recently separated from her husband and has been watching pornography since she was a teenager. Unlike Christina, Kylie blends the fantasy of “lesbian for men” found in mainstream heterosexual pornography with her “real” sex life outside of porn.

Me: Okay and so – so you were renting porn then? Whatever you could get until you were nineteen – and then once you were nineteen...?

Kylie: It was more like guys – like one guy and two girls. Always, I always kind of gravitate to that. And still to this day I like it more.

I think – I did have an experience with a girl after [meeting her husband] – just me and this girl. But I felt like I would perform better if there was a guy - to be showy for.

Me: So was that in – in-between? [After meeting her husband and before they got married]

Kylie: Just before I got engaged – like [husband] was coming to that party that night – from Vancouver to pick me up – and that’s like, that’s the night he proposed to me. And that’s the first night I slept with a girl. [Laughs].

Me: So you guys were actually together while that was going on?

Kylie: Yeah we were together – but I guess I didn’t feel that girl on girl was cheating.

The space between pornography and real life’ is blurred – even as she works to ‘answer’ my question about what kind of porn she watches, Kylie draws connections to experiences and interests from her sexual activities in her life outside of porn. While Christina struggles to connect her sexual interests in ‘real life’ to what she finds in mainstream porn, Kylie does not separate the two spaces. In my initial reading of this passage, what seems to complicate Kylie’s narrative is her self-identification as a straight woman, her sexual interest in women only if a man is present, and how this relates to current discourse about sex.

Kylie: It was good – it was very, definitely – she was good at oral sex. Like, I think I was just more – I would have been showier if there was a guy to – cause I do like the cock. I like the penis. Like that’s, that’s happy times for me.

Me: And you think that it would have been better if there would have been a man there too, not just for the penis but just for the audience?

Kylie: Yeah. Almost – the excitement.

Me: And that’s why you like watching two girls one guy?

Kylie: I think so, yeah – cause even in that they’re like watching for a little bit. So I like that definitely.

[...]

Me: Does anybody know about your experience with a woman?

Kylie: I used to brag about it to guys. For some reason I liked to bring it up. And I have, like, I have I’d say – I like to make out with girls. It’s, like, fun for me. So yeah, like this summer I’ve kissed a couple of friends. But some of my friends aren’t cool with it. Like a guy broke up with me this summer cause he caught me kissing my girlfriend. I said really! This is so interesting to me! I think I kiss girls for the attention – cause now I get free drinks at a pub downtown. I think I’ve done it for guys’ attention but I don’t know...

The narratives I have selected from Kylie’s interview have been chosen because of their alignment with post-feminist writings about the current phenomenon of straight women engaging in sexual activity with other women while in the presence of men, often in public spaces. Diamond terms this “heteroflexibility”, Ariel Levy calls it “raunch culture”, Shapiro uses the term “bisexual chic”, MTV award shows use it every chance they get (the Madonna/Britney/Christina kiss in 2003, Selma Blair and Sarah Michelle Gellar in 2000, etc.), and in mainstream heterosexual porn you would be hard pressed to find a DVD without it (Diamond, 2005; Levy, 2005; Shapiro, 2005). Girl-on-girl porn and/or lesbian porn often incorporates this same male oriented slant – even when a man is not present on screen, it is presented in such a way as to perform for a presumed male audience/male gaze. At the beginning of this section Christina’s story demonstrates how asking for girl-girl porn and saying that it’s for a man dodges the possibility that anyone might think the porn is for her or that she is the person sexually interested in women. And that even in a sex shop that sells porn, likely to a clerk that has heard everything,

Christina still connects her porn preferences to a man by pretending to look for something to watch with a boyfriend.

Instead of connecting to bisexual or lesbian relationships, women making out with women - in the presence of men – actually emphasizes heterosexuality. Jackson and Gilbertson write “... the heterosexual identities of the women characters are never in doubt, allowing the acts to be read as ‘performance’ rather than identity” (2009, p. 202). This works to nullify sex between women without men, male pleasure is emphasized over female and has become another badge demonstrating sexual confidence and empowerment for contemporary women. Wilkinson writes, “Lesbianism becomes no more than the latest trend -- a girlfriend is a heterosexual woman's fashion accessory...” (1996, p. 298). Katy Perry’s song “I kissed a girl and I liked it” could act as an anthem for this generation. In it she sings,

I kissed a girl and I liked it
The taste of her cherry chapstick
I kissed a girl just to try it
I hope my boyfriend don’t mind it.^{vi}

Shortly after this chorus, lines like, “ain’t no big deal”, “it’s innocent”, “you’re my experimental game”, constitute sex between women as not “real” sex, especially when boyfriends and husbands are on the sidelines providing encouragement. If it’s not “really” sex, it isn’t really cheating. As Kylie points out at the end of her narrative, she can’t understand why a man would break up with her after finding out she made out with her girlfriend – heteronormative constructions of “hetero-lesbians” cannot conceive of

^{vi} Lyrics from the Katy Perry song, “I kissed a girl and I liked it.” Dennis, Cathy; Gottwald, Lukasz; Martin, Max. (Writers); Perry, Katy. (Writer & Performer). (2008). I kissed a girl and I liked it. *One of the boys*. Capitol Records.

two women actively engaging in sex without the driving force of male pleasure (Diamond, 2005). Interestingly this song comes from Katy Perry's album entitled *One of the boys* (2008), aptly named as it connects with post-feminist pressures for women to prove their sexual empowerment by being more like "one of the guys."

Interpreting Kylie's narratives as indicative of postfeminist empowerment is only one way of reading this. Although helpful in some ways, particularly for connecting it to society at large and recognizing some of the implications for lesbian and bisexual relationships, it simplifies Kylie's story and makes her seem like a cultural dupe. In post-feminism, "Girls and women are invited to become a particular kind of self, and are endowed with agency on condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography" (Gill, 2007, p. 152). Seemingly, Kylie might be the poster-child for a postfeminist dupe, as she colludes with her "oppressors" by embodying male fantasy, while claiming it is for herself. She has sex in order to embody heterosexual men's sexual fantasies, and when men aren't present, she tells them about it after. I have been struggling with this since I began this research – well to be fair, this was on my mind long before I began researching women and pornography. Seeing women make out with other women while husbands/boyfriends watch has been a staple of my late teenage to late twenty-something life. I have often struggled to recognize agency within these moments, trying to counter feelings of frustration and pity as I've assumed that these women just can't seem to recognize their role in their own oppression. However, in the process of conducting these interviews and writing up these chapters, I have begun to recognize this as both limiting and over-

simplified - and I find Kylie's narratives can be used to complicate my assumptions and locate agency.

I think the primary difficulty is how to separate what Kylie does to pleasure men and what Kylie does to pleasure Kylie – and do those two things have to be separate? If having sex/making out/kissing women in front of men turns her on, is this necessarily centring men's pleasure – and can it really be said that this is at the expense of her own? Kylie may constitute her own sexual subjectivity via situating herself as the object of a male gaze, but this does not preclude her taking pleasure in being that object. In porn Kylie has access to what turns her on and she applies this, performs this, and embodies this in her “real life”. Contextualizing Kylie, recognizing the many complex facets to the sexual biography she (re)presents during our interview facilitates recognition of agency and perhaps even small acts of resistance. Kylie has had to contend with various forces seeking to limit her sexual expression – during the interview she describes growing up in a strict religious home where the only discussion about sex came at fourteen when her father brought home a picture book of sexually transmitted infections and made her and her older sister go through it at the kitchen table. Out of fear that Kylie could be masturbating, her older sister monitored the length of time she spent alone in the bathroom from childhood into her teenage years. She ultimately married at nineteen, earlier than she wanted, in order to comply with pressures from her family. While married for over ten years, she constantly struggled to find a sexual connection with her partner. Perhaps rather than viewing Kylie as a victim or a woman oppressed by patriarchy throughout her life, it could be valuable to recognize that in viewing the type of pornography she watches and engaging in sex with women for men, she is able to

simultaneously align with postfeminist pressures to be more sexual and heteronormative discourse to do so via enacting the heterosexual, masculine fantasy. She can be overtly sexual, even in public places, without challenging the centrality of the male orgasm or even constructions of passive female sexuality.

“Girls fingering each other, I couldn’t care less”: Pleasure for whom?

For a fun, story line-based porn, try the big budget *Pirates*. If she doesn’t like the sex, she can at least be entertained by the porn stars sword fighting with CGI Skeletons. (From the article “Why your girlfriend doesn’t watch porn” on www.askmen.com)

Kylie’s narratives describe an interest in pornography that is based on her sexual interests outside of it. She watches bisexual and lesbian women engage in threesomes with men because this is what turns her on, both in porn and outside of it. By watching threesomes and sharing that with men, Kylie embodies heterosexual male fantasy. Her pleasure is complicated because of its connection, rather its requirement of male pleasure; however men are not usually literally in the room with her while she watches. Another example of connecting men’s pleasure with women watching porn can be found with women who watch directly with and for their male partners. Taylor identifies as married and heterosexual and occupies a complicated space within heteronormative and postfeminist discourse as she connects her own pleasure to her husband’s pleasure. Throughout the interview Taylor describes herself as “always horny”, “very sexual”, “always aroused, sometimes to the point that I can’t handle it and I can’t think”. This connects to post-feminist discourse where (re)presenting yourself as sexy and overtly sexual means that a woman is confident, assertive and happy – to do otherwise or to reject conventional notions of sexy must then mean that the subject is lacking,

inadequate, lesser, a “prude” (Gill, 2007). Early in the interview she describes her first date with her husband that took place during a high school lunch break. Taylor says, “And we watched that and they were having sex on a boat – and I was like, this is fantastic! The best date ever, eating Ichiban and watching porn.” I remember shortly after Taylor shared that story I began to get really excited about this interview, particularly my upcoming questions about pornography – what she looks for in porn, which actors/actresses she likes, what positions she enjoys, which ones she doesn’t, etc. Instead of the connoisseur of porn that I expected, someone with strong likes and dislikes, Taylor told a different story.

Me: Okay, so you’ve never really watched Internet porn?

Taylor: Um yeah, [husband] and I watch Internet porn. It’s more...the reason I like porn is because it turns [husband] on and it turns me on that he’s turned on.

Me: Oh, that’s interesting.

Taylor: Mmhmm...

Me: So you wouldn’t really watch it by yourself then?

Taylor: Unless...no. Because I like [husband] to be turned on and that turns me on a lot.

Me: Yeah.

Taylor: Like girls fingering each other, I couldn’t care less.

Me: Yeah, but it makes him excited, so...?

Taylor: Yeah.

Me: Makes you excited?

Taylor: Yeah.

At the time I was really surprised by this answer, I thought that her decision to describe watching pornography as the “best date ever” implied a high personal interest in pornography. However, as with Kylie’s need for a man so she can experience pleasure with women, Taylor’s use of her husband in order to find her own pleasure in porn does not have to negate her own personal pleasure. She is navigating between heteronormativity where, as a woman, her sexuality is passive and is not her own and postfeminist pressures to be more sexual, like a man (Rich, 1980; Gill, 2007). While she often describes herself as a very sexual person, she tempers this seemingly overt sexuality by storying it as always connected to and centred on her husband. Enjoying porn, even going so far as to pick out all the porn they watch could be seen as problematic for a woman and/or a wife, as porn continues to be viewed as a masculine space and an active sexual space. However, doing this for the pleasure it gives her husband connects Taylor to male pleasure and male orgasm, maintaining her husband as the active sexual agent. Also, using her husband to justify watching predominantly lesbian porn ensures her continued identification as a straight woman. Watching porn that features lesbian and bisexual women and doing so with and because of her husband excludes the possibility that she might be sexually interested in women. It also allows Taylor to embody “the heterosexual man’s fantasy” - that women are interested in other women under the supervision of men.

Jessica, Taylor and Kylie identify as “straight” and all three prefer girl-on-girl porn. In the interviews I conducted, girl-on-girl porn is watched by seven of the nine women who watch pornography. Taylor’s interest in it because of her husband’s enjoyment also applies to Kelly, who is married, identifies as heterosexual and watches

pornography occasionally with her husband. When I ask what type of porn she prefers, she says, “I don’t know, like girl on girl. Just cause he likes it. I [don’t] really mind.” Later, when I ask her if she could find porn that looks exactly the way she wanted, would it be the same girl-girl that her husband prefers? Kelly says, “Probably. Watching two people have sex probably just doesn’t really do it for me. You know - if that’s what we’re going to watch then fine. But, yeah.” Although all four straight women prefer watching women have sex with women on screen – a potentially ambivalent choice considering their identification as heterosexuals and their interest in a genre that could, theoretically suggest otherwise – they distance themselves from this choice by positioning their partner’s interest ahead of their own. This includes Kylie, although she is no longer in a relationship, she connects most of her narratives about pornography to learning techniques for sexual practices with men or for threesomes that necessitate a man’s presence or for stories to share with men later.

Doesn’t anyone watch porn to ‘Jack/Jill’ off anymore?: How men’s ‘cum compilations’ can mean less man and more woman

Pornography is defined in the first instance by its function – which is to turn the user on, leading to sexual activity such as intercourse or masturbation. (McNair, 2002, p. 40)

Up until this point, the four main interviews that I have drawn from, Jessica, Rachel, Kylie and Taylor, are all interviews from women who identify as heterosexual. This potentially informs which discourses around sex, gender, and sexuality are more prevalent in their lives – including the dominant presence of heteronormativity. However, this does not mean that lesbian and bisexual women do not also deal with

heteronormative pressures. Jackson writes, “We all learn to be sexual within a society in which ‘real sex’ is defined as a quintessential heterosexual act, vaginal intercourse...” (1999, p. 18). The only woman who identifies as a lesbian in my sample is Zoe, who is married and describes herself as an avid watcher of pornography. For Zoe, pornography is a space for pleasure, but also for curiosity, to explore sexual acts that she does not do in her “real” life. Although she identifies as a woman and as a lesbian, she is not interested in pornography showing lesbians, she is not particularly interested in watching women at all.

Me: So then do you think that, like, do you think that the reason why straight porn is – turns you on – is because it is more of a fantasy for you? Then, like, well, not as in your personal fantasy but –

Zoe: - totally not –

Me: - but is it fantastical for you?

Zoe: Yeah! It’s way more fantastical! And you know what, I partly enjoy the anatomy lesson. I like the men with the big penises. I think that it’s like good to see – it’s like, to me, you know I’ve never experienced and I’ve never watched it on my own body. I need to be able to watch all the things happening with other peoples’ bodies. So it’s more, part of it is curiosity, because I’m not going to do it, I know I’m not interested in doing that. It’s not going to happen, so as to satisfy that curiosity for me, like, everyone knows what it is to be curious – I’m only curious in a visual sense, in an experimental sense. I used to think if I never, like, if I never finished being with uh – or got married – eventually I would be, like, hey do you want to jack off for me. So I can watch your penis? I don’t want to help you, I just want to watch you come. Can I see it because I need a real life - I need a live demonstration? The closest I’m going to get to a live demonstration without cheating, or without being really awkward about it is to view porn. And, but I think that’s always been how it is – I think I’m always interested in, like, I don’t know if I’d call it physics but like...”

At the beginning of the interview Zoe told me she'd never been with a man sexually. Later on she uses the above narrative to connect that to her curiosity about male anatomy, and her use of pornography to explore fantasy – not fantasy that she hopes to practice or experience in her “real” life like Kylie, but fantasy that literally stays in the realm of the fantastical. Zoe is not looking to pick up tips and/or techniques to apply with her partner and she is not watching porn looking for things that she fantasizes about trying in her “real” sex life. Instead, porn is a space of curiosity and especially, porn is a place for getting off.

Zoe's relationship to porn challenges simplistic arguments about women as passively absorbing and/or imitating what they see in porn. This narrative positions Zoe as what Janet Staiger terms, a “perverse spectator”, someone who negotiates with images on screen in seemingly unpredictable ways in the pursuit of their own pleasure (2000). This concept comes from film and audience theory where “perverse spectatorship” establishes the importance of pleasure for audience members as an oft-forgotten strategy people use to engage, make meaning and, as is the case with porn, satisfy sexual pleasure with images on screen. This “perverse spectator” reading of Zoe is facilitated via her enjoyment of and her ability to satisfy her sexual interests as a woman, in a seemingly masculine space like mainstream porn.

Zoe is very particular about what porn she watches, what sites she uses, how she selects each individual video – and is generally on a quest to find pornography that is centred around the penis – literally. She will fast-forward porn to the “cumshot” or “cum-compilations” (clips from multiple porn films all linked together, sometimes involving different penises, at other times the entire video will be clips of the same penis

– but always while ejaculating). As one of only two women interviewed that watches porn and doesn't prefer girl-on-girl porn to all other genres, Zoe has strong feelings about why she doesn't like that genre and why she watches the pornography she watches.

I don't prefer women on women porn – I don't like to watch women, I only like to fuck women. Because that's what I do in my life, I know that it exists. So it's not a curiosity, if I want to go home and have sex with my wife and I want to try something new then I go and try it. I don't need porn to watch other women get off with women, cause I know what it's like to get off with women.

Listening to Zoe describe her disinterest in watching any pornography that mimics her 'real life' causes me to think about the other women I interviewed. Perhaps what separates her from other interviews even more than a fascination with male anatomy is the fact that *she* watches pornography for *herself*. This is unique amongst the women I interviewed. Zoe's narratives do not centre her interest in porn on her partner like Taylor, nor does she watch it in order to tell men about it afterwards, like Kylie. Not only is Zoe's use of pornography not for a man, it is not even for her wife. For Zoe, pornography is for experimentation, curiosity, but above all, self-pleasure and getting off. Zoe is a "perverse spectator" because she challenges simplified readings of how people watch and make meaning with film – by watching for her own pleasure (Staiger, 2000). She is also challenging the category 'woman' under heteronormative discourse, as she actively pursues her sexual interests, looking to satisfy her own sexual pleasure, in seemingly 'problematic' and 'masculine domains' like mainstream, heterosexual pornography. Challenging compulsory heterosexuality where women's sexuality is not our own, Zoe knows what turns her on and she seemingly has no hesitation in accessing it and using it (Rich, 1980). Although Zoe does not identify as heterosexual, she lives within a society that is saturated in compulsory heterosexual images and heteronormative

constructions of sex, gender, and pleasure – both of which inform the sex, gender, and pleasure found in mainstream heterosexual porn. Watching heterosexual porn does not challenge Zoe’s identification as a lesbian anymore than watching lesbian porn poses a challenge to Kylie, Taylor or Kelly’s identification as heterosexual.

Of the ten interviews, only one other woman describes watching porn without connecting it to a partner. Some of the other women interviewed are single and share stories about watching porn while single; however, these are always in the context of watching while young and, therefore, dismissed as part of a childish, ‘natural’ curiosity; or they are watching as adults, but with a partner. Ashlee is the only woman I interviewed who is single, watches porn to ‘get off’ alone and is not interested in ever doing it with a partner. However, Ashlee is also the only woman whose stories about pornography are explicitly loaded with ambivalence.

Me: So do you always just watch whatever kind of porn pops up? Like do you screen through them? Do you, like, look for one that you’re going to like? Or do you just watch whatever you can find?

Ashlee: I usually look for one that I like. And I end up usually not liking any of them. I don’t know why I keep looking.

She uses the language of guilt to express this ambivalence, often sharing a story about watching porn and then rejecting it as “wrong”, problematic and “stupid”. The following examples are pulled from various places during our interview.

Ashlee: Yeah I always felt like I was doing something wrong. If I like, looked up something I felt like I was, like, sinning or something.

Me: Was it a religious thing, like that? Was it like sinning or was it just being a “bad person”?

Ashlee: Well I wasn’t really religious then, at this time, so...probably just my definition of sinning, yeah. It’s a bad thing.

Ashlee: Yeah. That's what makes me wonder too, like, why do I even Google it again, if I never enjoy it?

Ashlee: Maybe that's because [women] feel guilty about porn. And not masturbating.

Ashlee: I just feel weird when I do it, after, just after. I'm like, why did I do that? It's just like, a sense of guilt. And a sense of, that was stupid.

Ashlee: I don't know, there's just this thing that all guys watch porn. And it's just, like, girls don't fart. Girls don't watch porn.

For Ashlee, watching pornography seems to be a complicated and difficult event. However, rather than discontinuing her use of porn, she continues to watch it even though she describes this as something she is disappointed in herself for doing. Ciclitira writes about women's ambivalent relationships with porn that came up in her own qualitative interviews. She writes, "Women in this study who do not agree with porn politically but enjoy viewing it talked about their experiences of discomfort at the contradictions between their beliefs, feelings and actions" (2004, p. 293). Parvez, who also researches women and porn writes, "This ambivalence reveals how sexuality, as experienced through pornography, can be simultaneously a source of pleasure and unease" (2006, p. 607). Untangling Ashlee's relationship with porn is complicated; she continues to watch something that she seems to regret. When thinking about Ashlee, I find it helpful to look beyond the literal language she uses to describe her feelings about watching porn, words like guilt, sin, stupid, etc. and instead think about them as

indicators. She uses these words during our interview to let me know (and potentially herself know) that watching porn as a single, heterosexual woman is transgressive. While storying her use of porn as problematic, Ashlee is still challenging the heteronormative definition of women's sexuality by continuing to use porn anyway. Not unlike Zoe, Ashlee is experiencing sexual pleasure with porn but unlike Zoe, it is constrained because of her discomfort in defining her *own* sexuality, one that is not contingent on a man.

Conclusion

The ways that women negotiate with social discourse and the ways that social discourse is applied to women vary from woman to woman, story to story. The women I interviewed share their multiple strategies for entering into overtly sexual spaces like watching porn, while (re)presenting their identities in unique ways through stories from their sexual biographies. As we constantly navigate and negotiate with conflicting ideologies about our sex and sexuality, we story our identities in conflicting and often contradicting ways. In order to demonstrate the complexities of identity construction and production that is ongoing during each interview and in hoping to provide more stories in women's own words – I have selected multiple parts from multiple women's interviews. While the storyteller may share her narratives in a seemingly linear chronology – moving from one event to the next – the meaning, messages, and connections flow circularly, as one question may be “answered” over and over again with each story that is told and each story that remains untold. This is why I often used several narratives from different points in the interviews – although they were told in response to different questions I see

connections between them. My role in this chapter has been very active – I have had my hands in every story. Not only because I write and ask the questions during the interviews, but also because I have actively selected certain passages from certain women to tell the story I want to tell.

When all of the narratives I've selected for this chapter are placed alongside each other, a pattern begins to emerge. Heteronormativity and postfeminism define pornography in different but also similar ways, so that pornography, although watched by more and more women, continues to be socially constructed as a masculine space – mainstream porn continues to be for men. This has implications for how women story their relationship to porn, be it a direct connection like Taylor's, watching with and for her husband, or an indirect relationship like Kylie, watching in order to embody heterosexual men's fantasies. The women in this chapter use pornography to deal with pressures from postfeminism, including Jessica's use of porn to prove her sexual confidence. They also use pornography to align with and at times contest heteronormativity, like Rachel's avoidance of porn to (re)present herself as the more passive sexual agent in her marriage. Zoe and Ashlee complicate the other women's stories as they watch porn without men. They story their relationship to porn differently; however, they are both actively defining and satisfying their *own* sexual pleasure, without justifying it via connections to men.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN'S ANAL SECRETS

Sex and the City: Episode 4/Season 1^{vii}

The women are in the backseat of a cab discussing Charlotte's emergency – her boyfriend has asked her to have anal sex.

- Miranda: It all depends how much do you like him?
Charlotte: A lot.
Miranda: Dating a few months 'til somebody better comes along *or* marrying and moving to East Hampton a lot?
Charlotte: I don't know? I'm not sure.
Miranda: Well you better get sure real quick.
Charlotte: You're scaring me.
Carrie: Don't scare her.
Miranda: It's all about control. If he goes up there, there's going to be a shift in power. Either he'll have the upper hand or you will. Now, there's a certain camp that believe whoever holds the dick holds the power. [...] The question is, if he goes up your butt, will he respect you more or will he respect you less, that's the issue.
Cab Driver: No, no smoking in the cab!
Carrie: Sir, we're talking up the butt – a cigarette is in order.
Samantha: Front back, who cares? A hole is a hole.
Miranda: Can I quote you?
Samantha: Oh don't be so judgemental. You could use a little backdoor.
Charlotte: I'm not a Ho.
Carrie: Honey, we know.
Samantha: All I'm saying is, this is a physical expression that the body was, well, it was designed to experience. And PS. it's fabulous.
Charlotte: What are you talking about? I went to Smith!
Samantha: Look I'm just saying, the right guy with the right lubricant...

[They all laugh.]

^{vii} King, Michael Patrick (Writer) & Maclean, Alison (Director). (1998, June 28). Valley of the twenty-something guys [Television series episode]. *Sex and the City*: Season 1 Episode 4.

Later on Charlotte is in the bedroom with her prospective ‘backdoor companion’ ...

Charlotte: I can’t Brian. I can’t. I, I, I want to but I can’t. Actually no, that’s not true, or maybe I do – I don’t know what I want. But I’m afraid that if I don’t then you’ll dump me and if I do then I’ll be the up-the-butt-girl. And I don’t want to be the up-the-butt-girl, because, men don’t marry the up-the-butt-girl. Whoever heard of Mrs. Up-The-Butt? No, no, no. I can’t. I want children. And nice bedding. And I just can’t handle this right now.

Brian: Can we fuck the regular way?

Charlotte: Yes please.

Introduction

Is it just a hole, will he still respect you after, and does anyone end up marrying the up-the-butt-girl? As something that appears in most mainstream porn films, has widespread presence in popular culture, and has come up for contemplation in my own life, I thought that anal sex might be a topic that links porn, women’s sexual biographies, and identity construction. And, like porn, anal sex continues to be socially constructed as a problematic space, especially for heterosexual women. In each interview, women use various strategies to address anal sex with partners and ultimately story these experiences producing and presenting particular identities that both contest and align with heteronormative and post-feminist discourse. This chapter follows several women’s narratives around anal sex, teasing out some of the difficulties with this topic and ultimately reflecting on how women rationalize their engagement with anal sex. This topic also provides an opportunity for me to reflect on my process in this research and contemplate the difficulties I have balancing the social context of anal sex with my role as interviewer, researcher and woman.

“Let me get some action from the back section”^{viii}: From “backdoor loving” to “anal destruction”

Anal sex is the source of much discomfort in North American society. Regardless of who is doing it – man/man, man/woman, woman/man, woman/woman – popular culture, academic writing and porn continue to portray it as dangerous, deviant and dirty. However, a disconnect lies in the continued perception that anal sex only occurs in the gay community, while in actuality, heterosexuals are just as likely, if not more likely, to do it too. According to a health study conducted by Satterwhite et al., 37 percent of heterosexual men and 33 percent of heterosexual women identify as having anal sex at some point in their life (2007). In the same study, 22 percent of heterosexual women and 21 percent of heterosexual men identify as having anal sex in the past 3 months (Mackesy-Amiti et al., 2010, p. 1; Satterwhite et al., 2007). I have some issues with this particular research, including its reinforcement of anal sex as synonymous with “disease” and for its failure to unpack the study’s population sample, which is almost entirely people of colour, working to reinforce the perception that only certain portions of the population are having anal sex. Although problematic, it is, I think, important to acknowledge that health articles like this are valuable because they acknowledge and write about anal sex in the heterosexual community. Unfortunately, as it continues to be underexplored in the literature, health and medical journals like the Satterwhite et al. study are providing the only voice on the topic. Because all of the women interviewed that spoke of anal sex spoke only about anal sex with men and because of the incredible

^{viii} A verse from: Beastie Boys (Writer, Producer, Performer). (1998). *Body movin*. On *Hello nasty*. Label: Grand Royal/Columbia Records.

lack of literature on the subject, this chapter will focus on anal sex in the heterosexual community. This being said, as pornography often depicts, anal sex comes in many forms other than that depicting man as penetrator/woman as penetrated (heterosexual anal sex) and in choosing to only focus on this, the diversity of the various practices of anal sex are being limited.

Perhaps what stands out most for me about this topic is the silence that surrounds it. While preparing for interviewing, I was well aware of the social taboo of anal sex. And because these interviews were already difficult, discussing potentially private aspects of women's sex lives, I was especially apprehensive about approaching the topic of anal sex. Because of my fear that direct questions about anal sex might make women uncomfortable during the interview and that this discomfort could pressure women into answering questions in ways that do not reflect their 'actual' practices, my discomfort is often palpable in the interview transcripts. For example, to avoid defensive responses like *Sex and the City* Charlotte's, "I'm not a Ho", I worded questions to reflect the assumption that women are passive participants in anal sex. This is not every woman's experience, and, in phrasing questions this way, I potentially limited responses and reinforced notions of women's passive role in sex. This being said, some women managed to resist my assumptions and share their stories about anal sex in their own way, outside of the active/passive dichotomy. While I am aware that each interview in its entirety is influenced and co-created by myself, and that I, as an interviewer story these women's narratives as much as they do, in reading through the transcripts I find that it is with anal sex and particularly during interviews where I was challenged with a participant's brief responses, that this is most explicit. I hope to use this chapter to reflect

on my role in reinforcing social discomfort with this topic and how I both challenged and contributed to the silence surrounding anal sex in the heterosexual community.

This silence is likely related to the numerous social beliefs about anal sex, not the least of which is reflected in Charlotte's fears of being 'the-up-the-butt-girl'.

Connections can be made between this chapter's "up-the-butt-girl" and last chapter's women who watch porn for their own enjoyment – as both enter into "problematic spaces", seemingly challenging heteronormative discourse about women's passive sexuality. A woman who wants to have anal sex suggests an assertiveness that disputes the feminine and seems to imply, as Charlotte worries, that a woman who has anal sex is a "Ho" and, therefore, not the marrying kind. Many of us probably remember girls from high school being labelled "the-up-the-butt-girl," which for me was more than enough to ensure silence – both the "I do not want to be caught wanting this" kind of silence and the "if I ever do it I must ensure that no one finds out" kind of silence. However, there is more to silence about anal sex than challenges to a woman's 'femininity': anal sex has some serious baggage.

Anal sex is often described as dirty – both literally and figuratively. It is literally dirty due to its association with faecal matter and this is often brought up as a reason for not participating in or enjoying anal sex. Christina says, "For me it just feels like I'm going to poo up." Taylor says, "Things aren't supposed to go in my bum." And Rachel says, "It's an out hole, it's gross." Grosz describes this association of anal sex with faeces and the discomfort this provokes, writing, "The (social and psychical) goal is to establish as great a separation as possible from the excremental, to get rid of it quickly, to clean up after the mess" (1994, p. 207). Bodily waste, specifically excrement, is to be

avoided, posing a potential problem for anal sex. I think it's valuable here to contextualize these concerns with general fears about cleanliness of our 'private parts in general. With the release of such products as Linger, a "vagina mint" that ensures proper internal feminine flavouring (Jezebel.com; Phillips, 2009) and Waterworks, a mysterious product that markets itself as "fixing" vaginal odour to make women smell "more feminine" (Waterworks.com and Jezebel.com), the "hygiene" of our "private parts" is clearly on society's radar. I distinctly remember in elementary school hearing boys tell girls to "close their legs because something smells", or, asking, "what smells like fish." As we got older, stories about the "smell" or "taste" of girls were common. To say that I was concerned with the smell, taste, and looks of my "sexual parts" is an understatement and this began young and was reinforced through close, careful, and public monitoring by peers – especially boys – and now apparently marketing campaigns for products designed to profit off of these fears. Perhaps anal sex is one step further, being an area that is associated with defecation, it seems even more difficult to ensure "cleanliness", or the absence of body waste.

It is this aversion to our bodily fluids that becomes most apparent when discussing anal sex; however, sex of all kinds involves fluid and sex of all kinds is fraught with tension. Mary Douglas (1966), Julia Kristeva (1982), and Elizabeth Grosz (1994) discuss the social, cultural and individual tensions that surround what Kristeva terms, "the abject"; in this case, bodily fluids like faeces and places where they are exchanged, like sex. The abject, while "sickening", "repulsive", "shameful" and "worrisome" is also "fascinating" and "tempting" – it draws us in while simultaneously pushing us away (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1). Grosz writes,

[Mary] Douglas makes explicit here the notion that the body can and does function to represent, to symbolize, social and collective fantasies and obsessions: its orifices and surfaces can represent the sites of cultural marginality, places of social entry and exit, regions of confrontation or compromise” (1994, p. 193).

As such, sex is a highly regulated space: social rules outline what is and is not appropriate, what is and is not “dirty”, how to manage these encounters with the abject and what they mean to our identities when we do engage in them. Vaginal mints, commercial and magazine ads that describe “unfeminine” smelling vaginas, elementary school boys that tease girls for sitting with their legs apart, and jokes about the smells and tastes of women during sex are all indicative of the social disciplining of and the obsession with body “pollution”, with women’s bodies generally acting as the contaminators (Douglas, 1966; Grosz, 1994, p.197). Grosz writes,

It is women and what men consider to be their inherent capacity for contagion, their draining, demanding bodily processes that have figured so strongly in cultural representations, and that have emerged so clearly as a problem for social control. (1994, p. 197)

Sex is a vulnerable space precisely because it is a place of exchange, and, especially a space where boundaries (including the unified subject and the bounded physical body) cross outside of themselves, beyond themselves, and into one another. Therefore, it is less about an aversion to the “dirtiness” of faeces and more about the ambiguous space where anal sex takes place that warrants the label “abject”. Kristeva writes, “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (1982, p. 4). If sex, as a site of fluid exchange that crosses body and identity boundaries is fraught with tension, than anal sex seems exponentially more problematic, particularly in a patriarchal, heteronormative society. Anal sex is

transgressive; it is borderless and boundary-less; it involves two bodies crossing borders, penetrating in an area of pollution, contamination, filth, and waste, and it exists outside of socially sanctioned heterosexual, heteronormative sex.

Viewing anal sex as “dirty” due to its connection with excrement is not the only “dirty” associated with it; it is also about assumptions of “who” is partaking in anal. This is demonstrated in my conversation with heterosexual, recently separated Kylie:

Me: How come you didn’t want to [have anal sex]?

Kylie: I just didn’t think it was supposed to go in there. And to this day, I’m like not a fan. Like cool for a gay man, but it’s just not my style.

Kylie links anal sex to gay men rather than to its heterosexual participants, when she could have said “Like cool for women that like it, but it’s just not my style” instead. The continued association of anal sex with the gay community places it into a binary of transgression; whereby, heterosexual/homosexual, vaginal sex/anal sex, “clean sex”/“dirty sex”, “straight sex”/“deviant sex” are seen as dichotomous. Here the left side is “good”, “moral”, “normal” and the right signifies “bad”, “immoral”, “abnormal.”

Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* describes the social systems, beliefs and institutions in place within various cultures that create this binary, producing acceptable and unacceptable, safe and dangerous ways of engaging in sex, ultimately defining what acts and whose bodies pollute while working to keep people away from this (1966). With the continued social belief that HIV/AIDS is a “gay problem” and not something straight people have to worry about, anal sex moves from being “deviant” to also being unhealthy, dangerous and deadly. And as articles profiling the face of HIV/AIDS as gay

are infinitely more plentiful than articles about HIV/AIDS and straight folks, anal sex remains a “gay” thing and not a “straight” thing.

Anal sex is also perceived as dirty because of its connection to porn. The women in porn are viewed as different than “regular women”. According to the article “Convince her to have anal” found on askmen.com,

Professional porn actresses are either stretched out in the sphincter or too high to notice the pain that results from the minimally lubed, no foreplay, extremely rough anal sex that almost always occurs in pornographic pictures (Stefanson, n.d., p. 2).

Likewise, Taylor, who identifies as heterosexual and is married, describes this:

Me: But you don’t like watching anal sex on porn? Do you now, or...not really?

Taylor: Not. You know what, in porn their butt looks like their vagina – it doesn’t really matter.

Me: That’s true, there’s little to differentiate between the two.

Taylor: It’s the same thing.

Me: [Laughs].

Taylor: It doesn’t look like when we do it. There’s no tears.

This article and Taylor’s narrative seem to challenge the possibility for “normal” women, women who aren’t “high” or “physically modified”, to enjoy anal sex, while simultaneously “othering” women (i.e. pornstars and women who enjoy anal sex) in the process. Interestingly, some pornstars share these similar concerns about anal sex. Jenna Jamieson, the world’s most well known pornstar writes in her 2004 autobiography, “I’ve only given [anal sex] up to three men, all of whom I really loved. Doing it on camera would be compromising myself” (cited in Henderson, “Anal sex”). Anal sex is more vulnerable, more private, seemingly more complicated than vaginal penetrative sex.

Besides connecting anal sex to pornstars, Taylor and pornstar Jameson's narratives share the fear, pain, and vulnerability associated with it for women. This came up in nearly every interview as a reason that women either have never tried it or have done it only once or twice. Jessica who identifies as heterosexual and is in a common-law relationship says there are certain circumstances where she would try having anal sex again. She says, "I would have to be drunk. It would have to be crazy, can't really feel anything anyway sex." In another interview, Kylie describes her experiences with anal sex saying,

I think that the first time, I think I was so drunk that I didn't mind it. And I think I was really lubricated up and then the second and third time – we didn't have enough lube and I think, I just, I felt, oh it was just a bad experience.

These two stories describe anal sex as painful, potentially resulting in crying and requiring alcohol to ensure that women don't "feel anything". These stories also work to align these women with a passive role in their anal sex experiences. They were not the ones initiating it and this is reinforced when they explain that they were very drunk; they were not themselves. This is one of several strategies women use to keep heteronormative passive sexuality intact as they engage in potentially "unfeminine" activities like anal sex.

Lastly, as *Sex and the City*'s Miranda discusses at the beginning of this chapter, it is difficult to think about anal sex without thinking about power. In approaching the topic of anal sex with Adelle, who identifies as bisexual and is in a relationship with a man, talks about why she thinks she hasn't been propositioned for anal sex prior to her current relationship:

I think they were too tentative for them to bring it up. Because I might come off...I mean, I've been told that I come off as a very strong...person. Because I go to school, so I think guys, like, assume that I wouldn't be in to that.

I think this shows that Adelle believes strong women are less likely to have anal sex, or at least she believes men might think so. Conversely, this means that the opposite is true, weak and less powerful women are more likely to be propositioned for anal sex by men.

I think this calls up power, questions of who has it and who doesn't and what those with power are able to do or ask to do to those who don't have it. According to Taormino, the so-called expert of anal sex and author of *The ultimate guide to anal sex* (1997), "The ass is the most democratic orifice, we all have one" (cited in Henderson, "Anal Sex").

However democratic our "asses" may be, penetrating a man's anus has a completely different social meaning than penetrating a woman's anus. For the Ancient Greeks, "To be penetrated [was] to abdicate power" (Bersani, 2010, p. 19), and I would argue that this belief still exists and is the underlying factor in Adelle's narrative. Masculinity continues to be couched in "action", "penetration", the "doing" of sex, as heteronormative discourse has men demonstrate their "manliness". Bersani uses Foucault in his analysis of sex and men, writing, "The only honorable sexual behavior 'consists in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, and in thereby exercising one's authority'" (2010, p. 19).

Although men's asses are theoretically equally available for penetration, mainstream heterosexual pornography rarely points the camera at men's anuses, and seemingly never entertains the possibility that one might be touched or penetrated. Perhaps pornography is relevant here, where the titles and accompanying descriptions of porn videos depicting heterosexual anal sex are loaded with underlying considerations of power and dominance. A quick search for anal sex in the free porn database spankwire.com brings

up video clips that have been posted and then named and described by the people who use the cite. Titles include, “First Anal Pain 2”, “Anal Furies”, “Anal Destruction” and descriptors such as rough anal, “watch her lose her anal virginity”, “watch her get reamed in the ass” are numerous. In porn, for the person *doing* the penetrating, anal sex seems to signify conquest, dominance, and power. Perhaps this is what Adelle is thinking of when she says men have previously avoided expressing an interest in having anal sex with her because she appears to be a strong person.

Anal sex is a social taboo for many reasons; it is perceived to be dirty, immoral, deviant, gay, painful, potentially emblematic of dominance, and something that belongs in porn. Anal sex exists outside of the socially sanctioned heteronormative, heterosexual sex, increasing “contamination” and body “pollution” between participants; thus, anal sex is a place of much social discomfort. As such, it has been advantageous, to say the least, for women to remain silent about their participation in anal sex. I would like to untangle what this silence looks like, what it means, how the women in this research approach this topic, and what it means for me as an interviewer, a researcher, and a heterosexual woman. The rest of this chapter is divided into two sections, the first discusses how women approach anal sex for the men in their lives and the second includes how women approach anal sex when it is for their own pleasure.

“Shake for me girl, I wanna be your backdoor man”^{ix}: Anal sex for him

Although anal sex has significant baggage, a sizeable portion of the heterosexual community engages in anal sex. We might not talk about it, but we are doing it. This section works through some of the ways that women story their approaches to anal sex with male partners and how this can be used to avoid transgressing heteronormative femininity while also avoiding the postfeminist label, “frigid”. As with the last chapter on pornography, heteronormative discourse regarding the passivity of women’s sex coupled with post-feminist pressures to be more sexual create a complicated climate for women and anal sex.

For Jessica, anal sex is something she does for her partner, not something that she enjoys or looks forward to for herself.

Me: Okay. Um...I was going to ask about anal sex. Do you guys have anal sex?

Jessica: Oh we have. Not anymore, it was a present kind of thing.

Me: Just, like, once? Or, like, a few times?

Jessica: A couple times but, like, don’t really – I do it more just to, like, if he really wants to or something. One drunken time it was apparently good, I don’t remember. [Laughs].

Me: So then is it something that you see yourself doing again in the future?

Jessica: No. No.

Me: No?

Jessica: Like I wouldn’t do it just for...

^{ix} A verse from: Led Zeppelin. (Writers, Producers, Performers). (1969). “Whole Lotta Love.” *Led Zeppelin II*. Label: Atlantic.

Me: Just, like regular?

Jessica: Yeah it would have to be, like...I would have to be drunk. It would have to be crazy, can't really feel anything anyway sex.

Anal sex is a gift that she can give him. But perhaps it is also a gift that she feels obligated to give him. At a later point in the interview, Jessica describes how she currently feels about having sex with her partner.

Me: So what about your sex life now? Do you guys do stuff, like, to spice it up? Or to change things up? Or...?

Jessica: It's sporadic. Like we'll get in, like, really bad lulls where I'm just, like, I hate it. It doesn't even feel good when we're doing it. It hurts almost. I'm just, like resentful about it.

[...]

Me: What do you think will happen in your future? Do you think things will get better sex-wise? Or do you think it will go up?

Jessica: It better. I'm going to be thirty-five soon!

Me: In ten years!

Jessica: I go up and down. I do go through phases where I'm like, this is ridiculous, I need to work on it. And I do get to the point where I'm like, kay, you are a wife and this is part of your job so...or a girlfriend...so you have to do something about it.

The gift of anal sex as described in the first narrative is contrasted to the duty of having sex and rather than a gift, it is a responsibility, a job. Cacchioni writes about this in terms of "sex work" as "the unacknowledged effort and the continuing monitoring which women are expected to devote to managing theirs and their partners' sexual desires and activities" (2007, 301). It's Jessica's job to have sex regularly with her partner, even though it is painful and "doesn't even feel good"; it is her responsibility to satisfy his sexual desires. In saying, "I need to work on it" and "you have to do something about

it”, her lack of enjoyment in sex, actually her pain and discomfort in sex, is not his problem or even *their* problem, it is her problem. The second narrative explicitly demonstrates the social discourses at work – in the first narrative anal sex seems to be something *he* wants her to do, but in the second narrative, vaginal sex is something *she* feels she should do. Cacchioni’s theory of sex work is based on the work of Duncombe and Marsden and their definition of sex work also seems relevant here. They write, “And we ask whether individuals may be viewed as performing a kind of ‘sex work’ – analogous to ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 1983) – to bring their sexual feelings more into line with how they suspect sex ‘ought to be’ experienced” (1996, p. 220). Jessica doesn’t enjoy sex but she realizes that it “ought” to be something she enjoys, so she tells me it is something she needs to work on, to fix.

Another narrative that describes anal sex as a gift comes from Adelle. She has never had anal sex before but she is thinking about it and during our conversation, Adelle shares a friend’s experiences with anal sex and connects this narrative to her own expectations of anal sex.

Adelle: [...] Because, um, the only real exposure I’ve had with anal was with this same girl that kind of introduced me to porn in the first place. And she’s like, oh yeah, my husband and I do it, like, um, every month or so.

Me: It’s like a special day?

Adelle: It’s like a special day for them because she doesn’t really enjoy it all that much.

Me: And is that...do you think that’s, like, your expectations on it – that it would be more for him than for you? Or do you think...?

Adelle: In a way I guess, I am kind of freaky in that way. So I might – I’m kind of worried because I do know that it is something that would

initially be for him. So I'm worried if we do it once and I don't like it that I'll have to keep doing it.

I think what becomes apparent when Adelle's story is placed alongside Jessica's is the connection of anal sex to men. It is assumed that men want to do it and that women are the ones that either gift it or refuse it. How did women become the gatekeepers of anal sex? Somehow with anal sex it seems like a heavier responsibility than with vaginal sex; anal sex brings considerable social baggage. If social taboos conceptualize anal sex as unnatural, sinful, immoral, and dangerous and yet men want to do it anyways, it falls on women to stop men from being unnatural, sinful, immoral, and dangerous. Women are positioned as "the guardians of the sexual fluids of both men and women" (Grosz, 1994, p. 197). Although men are the initiators, it seems to be expected, natural, assumed that men want to have anal sex, as though it is part of their masculinity. The contradiction of a woman, socially constructed to have a passive sexuality, seen as doing it for her partner and not her own pleasure and participating as a receiver, not a penetrator, is conversely the one held responsible for the anal sex happening in the first place. Perhaps this is why women carry the social stigma the-up-the-butt-girl and men aren't called the-guy-who-likes-to-up-the-butt. Viewing women as the gate-keepers of anal sex, besides placing the responsibility on women to protect men from themselves, also fails to recognize that some women want to have anal sex, some women take an active role in the pursuit of it and through various sex toys, etc. some women prefer to be the ones doing the penetrating, and the presence of a man is not always needed or wanted.

The role of gate-keeping comes up in a couple of interviews, including with Christina, who is single and identifies as bisexual:

Me: And what about anal with you? Have you had to address partners asking for anal sex?

Christina: Oh yeah, my first boyfriend – because I was so open to try anything – but I wouldn't do that. And one time he tried to, like, slip it in and I was, like, what are you doing! That's not gonna happen!

In having to guard herself while she has sex with her boyfriend, Christina is positioned as not only the figurative gatekeeper of social taboos, but also the physical gatekeeper as her boyfriend tries to force anal sex. It seems as though Christina is responsible to gate-keep for her own body as well as her partners to ensure their sex remains “socially appropriate”. I also have a role in this particular narrative as I have asked her about anal sex in a way that assumes she is the gatekeeper and that she is a passive participant in anal sex. This makes it seem like Christina would not want anal sex for her own pleasure and disregards the possibility that she may have been the person initiating it. While writing this chapter I looked back on this interview script and tried to see if anything along the way prompted me to position her in such a way. In the paragraph above I segue into anal sex by bringing up how some women watch porn with their partner, saying that I often find this is a place where people start discussing an interest in having anal sex. Christina shares a story about a friend that has that experience and she does not directly talk about her own experiences. Perhaps this is why I rephrase the question a second time, as shown in the narrative above, trying to make it directly about her but with hesitancy because I'm concerned that the use of her friend's story was to avoid talking about the subject herself. Therefore I try to position her in the most “socially acceptable” way, as the passive participant.

In another gate-keeping narrative Kylie describes pressure from her then-husband for anal sex as going on for years until she ultimately *gives in* or *gives up* and has anal sex.

Me: So did he want to do that before that? [before they had anal sex the first time]

Kylie: Uh huh. Always, always!

Me: And so he would bring it up and say, can we try it?

Kylie: Yeah always, always.

Me: And you'd say no, or?

Kylie: Yeah.

Kylie is aware of her husband's desire to have anal sex for years before she agrees to do it. The first part of this narrative can be found at the beginning of this chapter, where she describes the first time as drunken and thus okay; however the second and third time she finds incredibly painful. There is a merging of gate-keeping with gift-giving in Kylie's narratives as she describes how, after her marriage began to "fail", she tried to spice it up with porn and anal sex. Anal sex is something that her husband wanted to do for years; it is also something that once they actually do, is "a really bad experience". Therefore, it seems to be at a considerable sacrifice to herself that she has anal sex again, for a fourth time. Here anal sex is a gift and I think also an example of agency as Kylie uses her "sex work" knowledge, that is, her awareness of her partner's sexual desires, something that she finds very painful, to try and reignite a marriage that she said had begun to fail. Agency here is fraught, as Kylie's story demonstrates her agency, but this agency is complicated as she seemingly plays into, rather than resists dominant paradigms.

Adelle's partner is interested in having anal sex and she is thinking about doing it, for him. It is her friend that earlier in this chapter described anal sex as a gift she gives her husband monthly, even though she doesn't particularly enjoy it. Adelle's perspective on anal sex is full of ambivalence, trepidation, but also curiosity. I think it provides an important complication to the narratives I've used so far in this chapter, as it demonstrates that she is considering having anal sex because her partner's pleasure is important to her; however, so is her own.

Me: You've obviously seen anal sex in porn, is that right to assume?

[...]

Adelle: Actually, it's just been with, since I've been going out with my current partner. I would always avoid any anal porn, I never even clicked on one. Until the past couple months because he told me he was very into it. But he is a very respectable person. So he never seemed to pressure me to do anything with that.

Me: Mmhmm.

Adelle: So I was, like, maybe we'll just check it out, see what it looks like, see if it's possible... [Laughs]. You know, just things like that.

Previously anal sex was to be avoided, but with her new partner's expressed interest in it, Adelle has gone to pornography to try and learn about it and decide if it is something she wants to do. Adelle is thinking about her sexual partner's interests, wanting to satisfy him, but she is also an active participant in this. She researches, talks to friends, watches porn with anal sex in it, and discusses her feelings about it with her partner.

Adelle: He's very frank. He's even more frank than I am. [Laughs] Surprisingly.

Me: You probably have some good conversations.

Adelle: Yeah and it's so refreshing. Because there's no beating around the bush with anything. And right away I told him what I like, what I

didn't like. And he told me what he liked and what he didn't like. Um...so that was really nice.

While she researches, talks to friends and talks to him, there is still some concern about anal sex. Likely some of the reasons described throughout this chapter influence Adelle, including various aspects of Charlotte (Sex and the City narrative)'s concern about getting "dumped" if she doesn't have anal sex. Adelle's relationship is fairly new; he is an older partner and they have a long distance relationship that seems to put added pressure on her to maximize their time together. However, I think there is another element here - I think Adelle is concerned about what it might mean if she has anal sex and he ends up being the only one that enjoys it. Earlier she describes herself as a "strong person" and she connects this to the reason men previously did not approach the subject of anal sex with her. Perhaps Adelle is concerned that having anal sex with her partner, without any enjoyment on her part, might challenge her status as a "strong person".

Me: And do you feel kind of nervous or maybe a little scared knowing what he wants. Like having such a frank discussion means, like, now we're going to have sex. And I've heard that he likes to have anal sex or he likes to do this?

Adelle: It still is a bit unnerving. Cause, like, I'm going to see him in two days, and I know that he likes blow jobs. And I know that he loves anal. And those are both things that I don't have a problem with... I just...I have bad experiences with it. You know? I don't see it as really bonding - with the other person. Although I'm not the type of girl that needs to have emotive sex all the time. I could have sex like a guy has, you know? Like, without the whole word of intimacy latched on to it.

In trying to satisfy both her partner and herself, as well as heteronormative discourses about men and women's "natural" sex drives and post-feminist pressures to be able to "have sex like a guy", anal sex becomes a highly complicated space. Adelle is working

to be both sexually open and think about her own pleasure ,while thinking about her partner's pleasure, and with the recognition of how anal sex is socially perceived. She demonstrates various strategies that position her as an active sexual agent in the pursuit of her own pleasure, while working to balance pleasing both her partner and social pressures. Interestingly when I emailed Adelle the completed transcript to get her thoughts on it, this was a section of the interview that she expressed concern that the comment "have sex like a guy" makes her sound "ignorant". She clarifies this point writing, "I was thinking of the more 'detached' approach to sex that men are assumed to possess." This reference, both the original and the second, show Adelle's negotiations with postfeminist discourse, including the current pressures on women to "have sex like a man" to demonstrate their confidence and empowerment.

This section has focused on women who have anal sex at the request of men in their lives, the next section focuses on a woman who enjoys anal sex for her own pleasure, contemplating her strategies for engaging in this socially taboo sexual act.

"A hole is a hole" and "P.S. It's fabulous"^x: Anal sex for her and how to avoid being "The-up-the-butt-girl"

Me: *We don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.*

Rachel: *No it's fine.*

Me: *Okay.*

Rachel: *It's just, I would never just be like, so Tara, you have anal sex?*

^x King, Michael Patrick (Writer) & Maclean, Alison (Director). (1998, June 28). Valley of the twenty-something guys [Television series episode]. *Sex and the City*: Season 1, Episode 4.

Me: It's embarrassing?

Rachel: It's an interview right? It's different than if we were just sitting here and having coffee...

This narrative comes from Rachel, who is married and identifies as heterosexual, and this is the beginning of our conversation about anal sex. Rachel's story stands out in my research as the only woman interviewed to tell me she "initiates" and enjoys anal sex with her husband. In this section I posit that it is because of Rachel's strategies to occupy both a passive/aggressive position, hinting rather than directly "asking" for anal sex, and also, through her use of secrets, that Rachel is "able" to have anal sex with her husband while avoiding the baggage that anal sex might bring. My own position in this interview is shadowed in secrets, as I do not discuss my experiences with anal sex in this interview or in any other. This interview also positions me as a holder of Rachel's secrets; as she shares her and her husband's secrets, they become my own.

Rachel's decision to share her secret with me was not something she took lightly. For this research, I began each interview by telling the interviewee that everything discussed is confidential and getting them to sign a confidentiality form that outlines how their identities will be protected, the use of pseudonyms, etc. Rachel's interview was no exception, however she checks in again, about a third of the way in to the interview, making sure our conversation is completely confidential. As Luise White writes, "Secrets are negotiated: continual decisions about whom to tell, how much to tell, and whom not to tell describe social worlds, and the shape and weight of interactions therein" (2000, p. 11). Rachel's decision to share her enjoyment of anal sex with me, with my tape recorder, and ultimately with my thesis is significant for me, not only because anal

sex is a social taboo but also because I did not share anything about my own encounters with anal sex, with her. In this chapter I unpack Rachel's narratives about anal sex and work to conceptualize how she uses secrets to engage in something socially transgressive.

Luise White writes, "keeping a secret requires negotiating a social world..." (cited in Parkins, 2007, p. 22) and Rachel's enjoyment of anal sex is no exception. Although she is able to engage in something considered socially problematic and "unfeminine", her active negotiations with heteronormative discourse are apparent when she tells me about having anal sex.

- Me: Okay, so you tried anal sex and it wasn't something that you necessarily enjoyed? Or?
- Rachel: It was fine. I've done it more than once and not always drunk.
- Me: And does it happen when, like, when, like, like, is it, like a present? Like a birthday present? Is it only when you're drunk? Is it something that you save especially for him? Or is it, like...?
- Rachel: No, it's just sometimes you can tell he wants it. And he may, it's usually like, should I get the lube kind of thing...should I?
- Me: Hint, hint.
- Rachel: Yeah. That's the only thing we use it for, so that's kind of his way of asking. And then he can just kind of tell if I want it and he's like, okay.
- Me: He's not the type, or he's never going to say no to anal sex?
- Rachel: Yeah. Not that I ever say it. I mean, he's missed the cue before.
- Me: And so is there almost always alcohol involved?
- Rachel: I would say most of the time, but no, not always. I'm not always drunk.

[...]

Me: And was it you that initially said [you wanted to have anal sex]?
The first night when you guys were drunk?

Rachel: Yeah.

Me: And was it you that was, like, could we try this? Or do you want
to do this?

Rachel: It was kind of, like, we were going to spoon and then instead of
spooning, what about this?

Me: And do you remember what his reaction was?

Rachel: Well he went along with it.

This section is loaded with themes: her awareness that it is *supposed* to be her husband who wants to have anal sex, who initiates it, and at first she goes along with this, but ultimately she changes her mind and tells me that it is actually she, herself, who initiates anal sex. She shares this with me even though it seems that I am working so hard to try to push her in the opposite direction. I cringe when I read this, reading my attempts to ‘soften’ the topic, to give her a way out, to facilitate her easy exit out of the possibility that she, as a woman, as a heterosexual married woman, might be the person that wants, enjoys and initiates anal sex with her husband. As I try to pigeonhole Rachel into the submissive, passive recipient of anal sex, she starts to perform what I am asking of her. However, halfway through she resists both social discourse about what sort of sexuality she is *supposed* to have and she resists me. Rachel tells her story. For example, even though Rachel begins the narrative by telling me she’s often sober when she has anal sex, I ask her twice if she’s drunk when she has anal sex. In doing this, I draw on the stories that other women have used involving alcohol to lessen their responsibility and sever the connection between themselves and the act of having anal sex. While I brought up this

possibility with her, Rachel is able to disagree with me and by doing so, disagree with what is considered socially acceptable.

Rachel's decision to make anal sex a secret demonstrates her negotiations with the social world, including her awareness of what anal sex means in our society and her agency in deciding to do it and enjoy it, but not share it.

Rachel: I'd be embarrassed to actually talk about anal sex with anyone. I feel like they might judge me. But probably they're doing it too.

Me: They probably are. But they'd still likely be judgemental out loud.

Rachel: You know the comments get passed on about it. You feel like you're some sort of dirty person for it.

[...]

Me: It's still something that we're very secretive about. Why do you think that is?

Rachel: Well because of girls like 'Up-The-Butt-Robin' in high school. I just thought she was, like, a dirty girl. Like it was just gross, you know? And I remember before trying it, like, just being freaked out. It's an out hole. It's gross.

Me: It's not for sex kind of thing?

Rachel: Yeah, it's not something that a loving couple does. But yeah, and you think now that you don't think that way, you don't know if your friends think the same way as you do or the same way that you did at nineteen. If they still feel that way...they'll think you're a dirty girl.

By not telling the secret, she doesn't risk changing people's perception of who she presents herself to be. Choosing to not share her engagement in anal sex allows Rachel to stay in control of her identity. Although she suggests that anal sex is probably something that every one else is doing, she is aware that she could be placed in the same category as "Up-The-Butt-Robin" from high school if she does let anyone know. Rachel

having anal sex with her husband is a mutual secret, something that only the two of them know and that the two of them continue to produce, each time they have anal sex, each time a friend discusses it, or someone asks them and they choose not to tell. I find it valuable to think of Rachel's secret as a tool that she uses in order to maintain some control over how she (re)presents herself and how people perceive her. Ultimately this negotiation with social discourse but I think especially her ownership and engagement in what is pleasurable to her, positions her as a sexual agent. Parkins says, "If secrets contain a principle of uncertainty, of incompleteness and indeterminacy, as I suggested at the beginning, then they also contain the possibility for agency on the part of their keepers" (2007). Secrets are a tool that Rachel uses in order to participate in something she finds pleasurable, even or perhaps especially, when this pleasure is socially defined as dirty, unfeminine, immoral, and dangerous.

Conclusion

This chapter on anal sex serves as a companion piece to the chapter on pornography and expands further on some of the themes that emerged in discussion about ten women's responses to pornography. Both demonstrate the various strategies women use to rationalize and negotiate their relationships to potentially problematic spaces like porn and anal sex. When I began this project I intended to focus on women's interests in porn; however, of the ten interviews, nine of the women shared stories about anal sex. Due to this and the complete absence of discussion in the literature, I felt a chapter on anal sex was relevant. Heterosexual anal sex may be largely absent as a topic of discussion in our society but it is clearly something that many of us are engaging in.

More apparent with anal sex than with pornography, my own apprehensions about discussing anal sex are explicit, even in the short clips from transcripts that I include in this chapter. Although I cringe every time I read them, I think they are important reminders of how difficult it is to talk about this subject at all. Rachel's story complicates heteronormative understandings of passive female sexuality and even within Rachel's own sexual biography it provides a point of contrast. In the last chapter I describe Rachel as the only woman who has "almost" never seen porn and how, through her admission of this, she works to align herself with heteronormative passive femininity. She does this because of her husband's discomfort with aspects of her sexual biography where she acted as the active initiator in pursuit of her own pleasure. While anal sex is something she initiates, she does so indirectly, through hints. Rachel, along with the other women in this chapter, through the use of stories from their sexual biographies (re)present themselves as sexual agents, albeit sexual agents negotiating with heteronormative and postfeminist discourses that often challenge how they construct and achieve their own pleasure.

CHAPTER 5

AFTERWORD: “GIRLS DON’T WATCH PORN” AND BEYOND...

This research has focused on the various strategies women use to negotiate, rationalize, and story their relationship to potentially problematic spaces like anal sex and porn. I have presented narratives that demonstrate the tensions and places of contradiction in women’s negotiations with social discourses. Within these spaces of tension, within the fractures and fragments, I find the possibility for complicating simplified understandings of agency, women’s sexuality and identity.

After finishing most of my thesis, I attended the Canadian Women’s Studies Association Conference (CWSA) in Montreal. While there, I listened to various papers about women, sex, gender, and identity – and, regardless of the topic, I heard many of the same questions surrounding agency that I’ve been working through in this research. When women sign up for extreme plastic surgery makeover shows, when they buy into the cosmetics and fashion industries, when, as teenagers, they text images of themselves naked to boys at school, or they turn novels and films that glorify passive women and aggressive, violent men into insanely popular, box-office hits – how can we, as feminists recognize agency in these moments? And perhaps more importantly, *should* we recognize agency in these moments? Often I think it is especially at such moments that questions of and recognition of agency are needed.

Working through questions of agency has been the most challenging aspect of this thesis research. From structuring the interview questions, selecting a methodology, deciding which narratives to share, which to emphasize, and which to complicate –

questions of agency have shaped this entire project. As feminists, it often seems most difficult to acknowledge agency in seemingly problematic spaces, including women's engagement in sites that have been labelled as patriarchal, misogynistic, and sexist. For example, Taylor's narratives about porn, found in Chapter 3, demonstrate tension and contradiction, as she works to (re)present her sexual identity through stories. Taylor is married, identifies as straight, and throughout the entire interview describes herself as an incredibly sexual woman - she says she is constantly thinking about pleasure, sex, and orgasms. Her stories seem to suggest that she is comfortable and confident with her sexuality; arguably, Taylor could even be an example of the postfeminist subject. She is sexually confident and even empowered because she is 'as sexual as a man'. However, she tempers overt displays of sexuality by sharing stories that connect this to her husband - she is interested in achieving her own sexual pleasure but only with the satisfaction of her husband's sexual pleasure. Taylor watches porn but only because it turns her husband on that she is watching it. Does the fact that Taylor stories her sexual pleasure as contingent on her husband's make her pleasure any less authentic? Does it make her any less agentic?

Perhaps where it becomes easier for me to recognize agency in Taylor's story is when I consider the social discourse and the current trends that inform women's sexuality in 2010. Taylor is occupying the highly complicated space of heteronormative understandings of her sexuality as passive, as heterosexual, and as inherently and biologically linked to her husband's pleasure. This is contrasted by postfeminist trends of overt sexuality, women's ability to "have sex like a man," and the growing emphasis on the female orgasm (including the increasingly popular sex-toys for women). Taylor is

in constant negotiation with both: she works to express herself as a part of this postfeminist trend, to appear sexually confident by describing herself as perpetually consumed with when her next orgasm will be; however, she also works to satisfy heteronormative pressures by marrying a man at age nineteen and then connecting all of her sexual pleasure to his. Taylor opens the interview with her story of the best date ever – “watching porn and eating Ichiban soup” and yet later on tells me she doesn’t actually enjoy porn - “girls fingering themselves, I couldn’t care less”. But, as Taylor shares with me, her husband likes the idea of her watching, so, she watches. Porn is an object that she can use to prove herself as overtly sexual and part of the current postfeminist trends, but it is also something she can connect to her husband, ensuring that her sexual pleasure remains heteronormative. The first several times I read Taylor’s narratives I struggled to find complexity and agency. However, just reading over this paragraph reminds me of how complicated and complex her stories really are – and especially, how active she is in storying her own sexual identity. Taylor is aware that our interview is a space for her to (re)present herself and how she wants to be perceived; the contradictions in her stories demonstrate just how difficult this is.

Taylor’s feelings about pornography are just one of her stories and she is only one of ten women who shared their stories with me for this research. I chose to highlight her story because I see it as a moment of struggle, of contradiction, and of constant and active negotiation with discourse. I also chose it because after reading it once, I would normally have disregarded her as presenting herself exactly as is expected, without much thought beyond how to best represent the postfeminist, heterosexual masculine fantasy. However, the more I read Taylor’s stories, the more complex her sexual identities seem

to be. Although I may view her stories about consuming mainstream porn only for her husband's pleasure as passively heteronormative, she complicates this when she later tells me that she is incredibly horny, so much so that she often masturbates in bed after she has had sex with her husband and he has fallen asleep. Taylor presents herself as a "good wife", one that ensures her husband is sexually satisfied (by watching porn for him and having sex with him daily); however, she also presents herself as a woman interested in her own sexual pleasure, when sex with her husband is not enough, she masturbates.

An over-arching theme throughout this thesis has been *for whom* the women connect, define and achieve their sexual pleasure. This informs how they negotiate with problematic spaces like anal sex and mainstream heterosexual pornography – whether they describe these relationships as for themselves, or for their partners. These strategies have been told through stories, and I think it is within the women's stories that their incredibly complex and complicated sexual identities become apparent. Although I often struggle with some of the strategies for aligning with and/or contesting particular identities and social discourses, I find it is these strategies that establish them as agentic subjects, actively storying their sexual identities.

From porn to sex-toy shops: What it means to learn from "the (s)experts"

While interviewing Rachel, a woman who has never seen pornography and who enjoys anal sex with her husband, the possibility for my next research project 'appeared'.

Me: Okay and what about anal sex? Has that come up for you and Jake?

Rachel: (Nods head)

Me: And was that brought up by him or by you?

- Rachel: Sort of a – not a discussion but a drunken night and a ‘let’s try it’.
- Me: (Laughs)
- Rachel: One of those awkward ones. Because everybody always jokes about [anal sex] - but I’ve had lots of friends who say, once you’ve had it, that’s all you want.
- Me: Girlfriends or guyfriends?
- Rachel: Well not girlfriends, but, like, the girl who hosted the sex party that my sister threw.

Rachel describes learning about anal sex, including techniques, from the saleswoman at a home-sex-toy-party. After leaving our interview I began to think about the women I’ve heard over the years talking about sex-toy-parties, sex-toys in general and where they go to buy them. In the current era, where women make up at least one third of consumers watching Internet pornography and television shows like *Sex and the City* proudly present vibrators as evidence of sexual confidence and empowerment, women-friendly sex toy shops and at-home-sex-parties like the one Rachel attended are popping up to fill the growing pressures on women to increase their sexual knowledge (Attwood, 2005; Winfrey, 2009). The connections between my MA research and this future research, to be conducted during my PhD, stems from the growing pressure for sexual knowledge many women described during interviews. The achievement of being a feminine and desired woman in the current climate requires a demonstration of confidence and empowerment through sexual knowledge (McRobbie, 2009). These stores are part of a highly lucrative industry, and with rising patronage, this seems to be an understudied and relevant topic. As pressure increases for women to present themselves as sexually knowledgeable yet maintain a reputation of limited sexual experience, women-friendly sex shops will continue to grow as a place for them to access information.

I am interested in what goes on at home-sex-toy-parties and in women-friendly sex shops. As Rachel describes, a saleswoman/*sexpert* “taught” her how to have anal sex – sex education is clearly being provided to women at these venues. I’m interested in thinking about this relationship between the ‘sexpert’ and the customer and how the sale of sex products and the teaching of pleasure is re-defining, producing and performing sex through education found in sex-shops. How is this used in the construction and performance of sexual identities? How are dominant discourses of sex, gender and sexuality both reinforced and complicated through pedagogical exchanges within sex shops? How do class, race and heteronormativity inform the information taught and the way pleasure is constructed? How do women negotiate with a consumer culture that packages the sale of material goods, from vibrators to pornographic films, as indicators of women’s sexual freedom and empowerment?

Ultimately the research I conducted for this MA thesis demonstrates that the pressures women are experiencing to be more overtly sexual are complicated by heteronormative, passive definitions of femininity and what is ‘appropriate’ female sexuality. The ten women I interviewed demonstrate their sexual agency in a myriad of ways using complex strategies to at times align and at other times resist these dominant social discourses in the process of (re)presenting their sexual identities through stories.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: UBC RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL



The University of British Columbia Okanagan
 Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
 3333 University Way
 Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7

 Phone: 250-807-8832
 Fax: 250-807-8438

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Shelley Pacholok	DEPARTMENT: UBC/UBCO IKE Barber School of Arts & Sc/UBCO Admin Unit 6 Arts & Sci	UBC BREB NUMBER: H09-00635
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
<small>Institution</small>	<small>Site</small>	
N/A	N/A	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: The research will take place in locations where the co-investigator will be conducting interviews. This will likely be the subject's home and/or other locations at the participant's request (including coffee shops). All of the research will take place in Kelowna and the surrounding area (from Vernon to Westbank).		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Ilya Parkins Tara D. Snape		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: Women and Pornography: A Narrative Analysis of Subject Formation		
EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL: February 26, 2011		
APPROVAL DATE: February 26, 2010		
The Annual Renewal for Study have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board Okanagan		

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



OKANAGAN

Irving K. Barber School of Arts and Sciences
3333 University Way
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7

Consent Form

Women and Pornography: A Narrative Analysis of Subject Formation

Principal Investigator

Dr. Shelley Pacholok
Department of Sociology
UBC Okanagan
Phone: (250) 807 8707

Co-Investigator:

Dr. Ilya Parkins
Department of Gender and Women's Studies
UBC Okanagan
Phone: (250) 807 9625

Tara Snape
Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies
UBC Okanagan
Email: tsnape@interchange.ubc.ca
Phone: (250) 469 3469

Purpose

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a woman who has viewed pornography and you have agreed to do an interview about this topic.

The purpose of this research is to understand how women who watch pornography construct their sexuality and identity. We are interested in hearing your personal stories about times you have encountered and watched pornography throughout the course of your life.

Study Procedures:

You are being asked to participate in an interview, which will take approximately 1 hour.

Potential Risks:

Although disclosure of your identity is a possible risk, every precaution will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of any records generated by this research.

Confidentiality:

If you choose to participate in the interview every effort will be made to ensure that your identity will be kept confidential.

With your permission, your interview will be electronically recorded and later transcribed. Your name and other identifying information will not be included on the interview transcript. Only the Principal Investigator and the two Co-Investigators will have access to the audio file of your interview.

The audio files will be deleted off of the recording device as they are transcribed. The transcribed interviews will then stored on a password protected computers and a secure network folder that only the research team can access. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The transcribed files will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Shelley Pacholok at (250) 807-8707 or Tara Snape at (250) 469-3469.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Subject

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Biography

Describe your childhood for me. (Parents, siblings, where you were born, etc.)

Describe how you first learned about sex.

Could you tell me about the first time you heard about porn. And the first time you saw it.

(What form did it take, with whom did you watch it, what did you think about it, how did you feel then and afterwards? Why do you think this is?)

How long until you watched it again? (If you watched it again) Why do you think this is?

How did you feel about pornography before watching it the first time? After watching it the first time?

Did anything stand out for you in particular? Was anything surprising? Expected? Boring? Exciting? Scary? Gross? Enlightening? Invigorating?

Pornography and Sexual Identity

What role do you think porn has played in your life?

Do you think that porn shaped or had an influence on what you think is sexy today? What about previously, when you first watched it?

Are your fantasies shaped by pornography? Do you think about scenarios, positions, techniques, actors/actresses, etc. outside of the porn itself?

Do you think that pornography has influenced your identity? Life? Sex? Sexuality?

Is pornography something that you can openly discuss with the people around you? Do you think it is becoming more acceptable to discuss topics like pornography? Why do you think this is?

If they haven't seen a lot of porn, focus on pop culture and how it's influenced how they have sex, who they have sex with, what sexy means to them, etc.

Details and Preferences with Pornography Now

*As an adult, do you watch pornography?

*Have your feelings towards it changed since that first time you saw it? Why do you think that is? (this question still applies, even if she doesn't watch it now)

If she watches porn...

Do you have a preference for the type of porn you watch? Where you watch it? Where do you get it? Whom do you watch it with?

Are there certain aspects that you look for? That you avoid? Why?

Are there times when you alter it – fast-forward, rewind, pause, skip, replay, etc.?

Volume or no volume?

Are there certain actresses/actors/directors/companies that you prefer? Why?

Are there aspects of porn films that you find yourself modifying while watching them, or while using them to create your own personal fantasies?

If she doesn't watch porn

-Why doesn't she watch porn?

-What about porn doesn't she like?

-Would she be upset if her partner watched it?

-Is she totally opposed to watching porn ever?

-What would porn have to look like for her to enjoy watching it?

*Can you think of elements that you've gotten from porn that you have tried or that a partner has wanted you to try?

Have you ever looked up any porn stars online? Did you know you can be their Myspace friends, Facebook friends, they have books published, reality TV shows, etc.?

Are you interested in knowing about pornstars lives outside of porn? Why do you think this is? If you knew that a pornstar was going to be on a reality show would you be more or less likely to watch it?

*Do you know about alternative kinds of porn?

*Are you happy with the pornography you've seen? Are there things you would like to change, keep the same, etc.? Pornography is often described as male fantasy, how do you feel about that?

Macro and Porn

If someone asked you to describe your relationship with pornography, throughout your life, what would you say?

How do you feel about pornography? Is it something to be embarrassed about, proud of, secretive about, open about, avoided, etc.?

What role do you think pornography plays in our society?

If minimal porn has been watched... FOCUS ON SEXUAL BIOGRAPHY

-How they learned about masturbation, first experiences with it, feelings about it now, etc.

-First sexual experiences (peer pressure, were they the motivators or were their partners, stories they heard about other people having sex, etc.)

-Anal sex – have they had it, what are their feelings about it, do they think other people are having it, etc.

-Make sure to ask what porn would have to look like - for them to be interested in it.