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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL STUDIES

RESEARCH REPORT (MA)



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An exploration of Black women students' sexual experiences

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A research report submitted in fulfilment of the partial requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Department of Political Studies

August 2018

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Declaration

I Gorata Chengeta declare that *An exploration of Black Women students' sexual experiences*, submitted for the Master of Arts Degree in Political Science at the Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is my original work and has not been submitted before, at this or any other institution of higher education. I further declare that I am the owner of the copyright thereof, and all used materials in the dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

G. Chengeta 17 August 2018

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Signed Date

Abstract

In this research report, I critique the use of consent as a standard for differentiating between harmful/unacceptable and harmless/acceptable sexual experiences. Central to my investigation are the relationship between consent and power. Using material from interviews I conducted with eight Black women situated at Wits University, I analyze three main issues. I first analyze the political implications of emotion, arguing for a recognition of the role emotion plays in regards to sexual consenting practice. I then discuss the connection between bodies and language in discourses on sex, gender, sexuality and violence. I explore this through two frames: first, how Black women's bodies are read through a sexualizing lens and then, through an exploration of the possibilities of communicating consent through non-verbal language. Thirdly, I look at the complexity of meaning making practices, pertaining to experiences of unwanted sex. I make the argument that consent models of understanding sexual violence are inadequate, due to the way they conflate desire and consent, as well as consent and harmlessness. I also make an argument for prioritizing women's understandings of their sexual experiences, over legal understandings of these experiences.

Keywords and terms:

Sex, consent, power, agency, rape, sexual assault, sexual violence, affirmative consent, unwanted sex, unacknowledged rape, South Africa, Johannesburg, Wits University, university students, activism, feminism, Black women

Acknowledgements

Prof Shireen Hassim – Thank you for your encouragement, intellectual support, and for never worrying about me – it was incredibly reassuring that you never (seemed) panicked. Thank you also for supporting this kind of work through Governing Intimacies and connecting us to an amazing network of scholars.

Dr Danai Mupotsa – Thank you for your care and understanding. Thank you for gently pushing me in the directions needed. Thank you for explaining, in the ways I needed to hear it, how I could go about doing this. Thank you for helping me manage the tension between the me who has been trained to suppress her voice and the me who sounds like herself in writing and is unafraid. You're the g.o.a.t.

Thank you to my research participants – You are everything. This work could not have existed without you. You'll notice that I was only able to include a fraction of what we talked about here. That said, every minute of your time means the world to me. Thank you for everything you shared with me. Thank you for trusting me. You have affirmed me in ways I never expected. Love.

Black Womxn Caucus – Thank you for friendship and community that kept me going. You guys helped get me on campus every Friday, often times when I didn't feel like it. Thank you for enabling this research. For being your unapologetic, spirited selves, taking up space so loudly. For helping me to not be so serious all the damn time. For showing me the multitude of reasons it's dope to be a black womxn.

Dylan Bush – Thank you for holding me together in my first year in Joburg. Thanks for making sure I eat, for giving great life advice, ferrying me, everything. This research report would have been painful to do, and a million times harder, if I didn't have you in my life. For real. You are invaluable.

Youlendree Appasamy – Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for your intellectual and emotional support, not just in this project, but since we've met. Thank you for writing dates. I'm really excited about your research. I'm proud of you. We've survived most of this process together and I'm glad I got to do it with you. You're the best companion in all aspects.

My family – Thank you for support and love, and instilling in me the values that guide all my work. Special thanks to my brother, Taboka for his mixtape, *November*: a great companion to have had during the writing process.

Thandeka Ndebele – Thank you for helping me to settle into the department. You have helped me in so many ways - I couldn't have done this without you. You are a real treasure.

Kayla Cristoferi – Thank you, as always, for sending me great music and for proofreading the drafts I sent you at short notice. You're a gem ☺

Dominique McFall & Shushan Du Toit – Thanks for being an early home for sharing uncomfortable ideas! Our conversations have been a great comfort.

All my other lovely friends, rooting for me from different corners – Thank you. It takes a village, as they say.

Lisa Vetten - Thanks for your insights and for letting me talk to you about sexual violence, all the time. It's comforting to find someone who is as passionate about/fascinated by these issues as you are.

Thank you to Professors Dina Ligaga and Louise du Toit for reading my work closely and with such care.

Thank you to all the other people who I have inevitably forgotten to thank, because I'm sure I'm forgetting someone. Eish. Sorry. I'll thank you in person.

My intentions with this research report are closely connected to the greater feminist/womanist, queer, blackity black legacy of activism/life-giving that has brought me here. I am indebted to all the people who have struggled for my breath and who have ensured the survival of the knowledges that have saved my life. I give thanks to all of you: my ancestors, my grandmothers, the one in nine campaigners, the fallists, the reference-list-ers especially, the healers, the journalists, scientists, academics, artists, teachers, tweeters, anti-capitalists, abolitionists etc; basically all the people who are my people, wherever you may be in time or space. Thank you.

Finally, thank you to the younger versions of me that remained soft and strong, allowing me to access this knowledge, create it, draw from it, and share it here. Amongst other things, this is a love letter to my 20-year-old self. I hope this work reaches those who need it as much as I needed it.

Introduction

In August 2016, during an address she gave at the university currently known as Rhodes University, feminist scholar Pumla Gqola said:

> "We need to stop talking of 'consensual sex'. It has to be agreed to and wanted in order to be sex.…'Consensual sex' suggests that there are two types of sex: consensual and non-consensual." (5 August 2016)

We can understand Gqola's words as part of a political strategy by feminists to affirm women's experiences of sexual assault (by men[1]) as violence, in a context wherein such experiences are often mischaracterized as (at worst, undesirable but still permissible) experiences of "inappropriate" heterosexual sex (2015, p.144).

In line with the quoted section of her address, in her book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, Gqola (2015, p.21) asserts that rape is "sexualized violence". This is congruent with a large body of feminist anti-rape literature which aims to show that rape and sexual assault broadly, are 1) harmful and 2) forms of violence (Phillips, 2000). Offshoots of this idea include, as Gqola says, that 'consensual sex' and 'non-consensual sex' are misnomers because sex, by definition, ought to be consensual, and that sexual intercourse/activity without consent is either rape or sexual assault (Brownmiller, 2013; Gqola, 2015; Truitt, 2012).

As a feminist myself, I understand the necessity of this line of thought. As Lynn Phillips (2000) writes in *Flirting With Danger: Young Women's Reflections on Sexuality and Domination*,

> "Very often, those who advocate for women's sexual safety and equality are required to defend sharp lines and make unambiguous arguments—such as "No means no" and "Rape isn't about sex, it's about violence"—in order to debunk victim blaming myths and defend women's rights and safety. "(p. 14)

The problem with this, however, as Phillips further argues, is that women's experiences tend to "defy the very straightforward arguments many feminists have worked

1 Emphasized here to highlight the scope of this research.

so hard to promote" (2000, p.14). For instance, citing her fieldwork interviews, Phillips (2000, p.14). notes that, for some young women "rape *is* about sex, *as well as* about violence" (emphasis hers).

This complication within feminist anti-rape discourse is one of the ideas which has led me to do this study; it is my point of departure. In previous years, I have struggled to distinguish between my experiences of sex and sexual violence, and between consensual and non-consensual activity. This is despite (and I shall argue, due to) understanding sex, sexual violence and consent as clearly defined, distinct concepts, theoretically. As a result, I am interested in the possible middle-ground of these dichotomously constructed concepts. Rather than trying to resolve my confusion about my experiences by seeking more rigid definitions of these concepts, my aim is to resist a 'sex vs. sexual violence' binary and learn from the murkiness. In this study, I am interested in what we can learn from the contradictions between our theoretical understandings and experiences of sex and sexual violence.

Within the scope of this study, I seek to address consent and power, as they pertain to Black women university students' experiences of sex, sexual violence and anything in between. Within this, I am interested in how feminist discourse on sexual violence can be read with and against women's sexual experiences. In addition to this, I am interested in how women's experiences can challenge how we understand the impacts of sex and sexual violence. Here, I aim to challenge some of the assumptions embedded in dominant feminist discourse on sexual violence perpetuates, particularly when it comes to consent.

<u>Rationale</u>

My research questions are:

1. What can we learn from Black women's experiences about the relationship between consent and desire?
2. What can we learn from Black women's experiences about consent and the body?
3. How do Black women make meaning of their experiences of unwanted sex and/or unwanted sexual advances?

Key to this inquiry is an exploration of a central tenet in feminist anti-rape discourse today: consent. In a bid to prevent continued acts of sexual violence, feminists often use consent to distinguish between wanted sexual activity (consensual) and unwanted sexual activity (non-consensual) (Beres, 2007). Within such discourses, the presence or absence of consent is what distinguishes between what is classified as sex (understood as permissible, harmless, and nonviolent) and what is classified as sexual violence (understood as impermissible, harmful, and violent). Such discourse is at the heart of Gqola's statement that 'nonconsensual sex' is a misnomer.

The impact of feminists' deployment of consent to intervene within anti-rape efforts is seen in its inclusion in anti-rape laws in several countries. According to Mills (2010), where this has been the case, consent has been "defined explicitly to mean free or voluntary agreement with a non-exhaustive list of contexts that vitiate consent." In the South African case, the Sexual Offences Act 2007 defines rape and sexual assault as the sexual penetration and sexually violation (respectively) of a person without their consent (2007).

Whilst the concept of consent has had a large impact on anti-rape discourse, it is also a deeply debated, contentious concept (Beres, 2007). As a result, using consent to distinguish between sex and sexual violence opens up several complications, which, when considered, make it difficult to universally make unambiguous distinctions between sex and sexual violence. In this research, my aim is to use consent as a conceptual entry point to understand the complexity of sexual experiences. Here I am interested in both how consent is complicated, and howw consent discourses complicates how we understand our experiences.

As Phillips (2000) and others outline, women's experiences can be a rich source of information about the complexities of sexual violence and sexuality at large. Because of this, and because my own experiences have informed my thinking around this research, my research will draw primarily from Black women's narrations of their sexual experiences. Here, my first aim is to interrogate the consent discourse, reading it against my

participants' experiences. Secondly, focusing on experience may reveal "the constraining social practices and cultural discourses that have informed [women's] gendered development", without casting blame on women for how they have responded to these (Phillips, 2000, p. 31). This is important to me because I want to highlight the underlying constraints which characterize how women exercise agency, with the intention of affirming experiences which may not fit into dominant sex and sexual violence discourses.

Also central to this research inquiry is how sexual violence, sex, and any experiences which could fall in between the two) are connected to notions of power and agency (Gqola, 2015; Nyanzi, 2013, Phillips, 2000). As Gqola writes, "Rape is the communication of patriarchal power…it is an extreme act of aggression, always gendered and enacted against the feminine." (2015, p.21). In light of this, I use Gqola's and Phillips' work, along with that of MacKinnon, Brownmiller, Harris, and Gavey, as starting points into an interrogation of how power structures such patriarchy (at large) and heteronormativity (more specifically) influence Black women's experiences of/between sex and sexual violence.

Gqola's address, which I cited in this opening, shapes this research in an additional way: it is part of the context in which my research emerged. Her address took place in conversation with and in response to a series protests against rape culture in universities by Rhodes University students (#Chapter212 and #RUReferenceList). These protests were preceded and followed by numerous other anti-rape demonstrations at various universities across South Africa; these include #RapeAtAzania, #UCTSpeaksBack, #NMUShutdown/#NMURape #UPRapeCrisis, #Iamoneinthree, #RapeatUKZN, #RapeAtUWC and #EndRapeCulture. These protests were organized by Black, queer, (cisgender and transgender) women and non-binary activists.

These protests have prompted and shaped this research in several ways. For one, these protests have highlighted Black women university students' experiences of sexual violence, which has influenced my sampling choice (Black women located in the university space). As most of these protests emerge in proximity to the #FeesMustFall and

#RhodesMustFall movement, they situate anti-rape discourses within ongoing conversations about decolonizing South Africa's universities emanating in 2015 (Mũrĩithi, 2017). Thinking of these anti-rape protests as Fallist protests highlights the importance of thinking through sexual violence, taking into consideration the interplay of gender and race, and the connection of these to colonization.

Chapter outline

In the following literature review section, I discuss contemporary feminist thought on the connection between gender, heteronormativity, power, sexual violence, followed by a discussion of sexual consent and its varied implications. I round off this discussion though a look at the history of how African women's consent has been undermined through colonization. In the Methodology and Theoretical Framework section, I first set out the parameters of the research, focusing on agency, language, and power, then I outline the methodological as well as ethical considerations made in this writing process. Following this, I discuss my research findings, first outlining general trends in the interviews. In the following three sections, I discuss the findings in relation to consent. In the first of these sections, I argue that the role of emotions in consenting decisions is undervalued, and further, that emotion disrupts the consenting-wanting conflation. In the second of these sections, I document women's experiences of sexualization and then discuss their views on the possibilities of expressing consent through non-verbal language. In the third section, I look at how women respond to, understand and label their experiences of unwanted sex. Here, I argue that the binary way in which consent has been understood constrains some women's capacity to make sense of experiences of unwanted sex. I argue further against the prioritization of verbal language and legalistic frameworks as the primary ways of knowing about and defining one's experiences of unwanted sex. In the final chapter, I comment on the limitations of this study and make suggestions for future research. I then conclude by providing some final thoughts on this research process.

Literature Review

For this research, I drew from literature about gender-based violence, consent, sexuality, coercion, race, and colonization. From this literature, I was able to understand the complexities of using consent to distinguish between sex and sexual violence, and the challenges this poses for using consent in sexual violence legislation. In addition, I was able to identify a connection between violence against Black women in South Africa today and the legacy of colonization. In this chapter, I will outline these connections in three parts: a) contemporary feminist thought on the connection between gender, heteronormativity, power, sexual violence, b) a discussion of sexual consent and its conceptual and practical complications, and finally, c) the history of how African women's consent has been undermined through colonization.

Violence, power, gender and heteronormativity

To begin, it is important to understand the schools of feminist thought, which have outlined the relationship between gender, heteronormativity, power and violence (sexual violence, particularly*).* There are several important links feminists have made between the phenomenon of sexual violence, gender, and structural power. The first I will discuss is that theorized by Susan Brownmiller in in her 1975 book, *Against Our Will: Men, women and rape*. In her book, Brownmiller discusses various aspects of rape such as its use in war and rape myths. Her work is foundational in our understanding of rape as a way in which unequal gender relations are maintained. She argues that rape is "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (1975, p. 15).

Pumla Gqola (following scholars like Brownmiller in) argues that rape is "violence, not [inappropriate] sex" (2015, p. 21, 29 & 144). Gqola roots her analysis of rape within the broader landscape of gender-based violence within patriarchal societies, writing that rape is "always gendered and enacted against the feminine" (Gqola, 2015, p. 21). Whilst she refers to women in her book, she clarifies that "the feminine may not always be embodied in a woman's body" (2015, p. 21).

Gqola writes,

> "Part of violent gender power is in celebrating attributes associated with the masculine, and ordering the world in terms of opposites, or binaries. If masculine and feminine are opposites, and there is nothing in between, then when the masculine is celebrated, the feminine as its opposite has to be debased." (2015: 39).

Gqola's argument here can be related to Oyeronke Oyewumi's work on the way Western culture has led to the hierarchization of social categories such as gender in African societies (1997, p.1). Oyěwùmí, critiquing colonialism, argues that the colonial order also created the incorrect idea that gender is a biologically determined and universal concept (1997, p. 122). This understanding of gender is the basis for the idea that the masculine is superior to the feminine.

Gqola uses the term "female fear factory" to describe the impact of the threat of rape on women and femmes (2015, p. 79). "The threat of rape is an effective way to remind women that they are not safe and their bodies are not entirely theirs", Gqola writes (2015, p. 79). The female fear factory leads to women "curtailing their movement in a physical and psychological manner (2015, p. 79). The female fear factory is a "silencing" tool and a lesson in subjugation (2015, p. 96). Adding to this analysis, other scholars have outlined that the threat of rape has also been used as a corrective tool for some men. Gcobani Qambela (2016), for instance, argues that (the threat of) rape is used against men "as a stopping device for men and boys who do not fit the hegemonic moulds of idealized masculinity, boyhood and manhood."

A second link between sexual violence, gender, and power is made by Catharine MacKinnon, who argues that the primary shortcoming of the consent model is that it assumes men and women are social equals (in Mills, 2010). MacKinnon argues that "it is not possible for women to give consent to men due to the current power relations between men and women," and that it is vital to consider the "underlying structure of constraint and disparity" which hinders women's capacity to exercise sexual choice freely (Beres, 2007, p.98; Mackinnon, 1989; Mills, 2010). Mackinnon critiques Brownmiller's idea that rape is violence and not sex, arguing that such a distinction neglects to assess "the extent to which

the institution of heterosexuality has defined force [within sexual interactions] as [normal]" (in Rich, 1980, p. 642).

MacKinnon further argues that rape and sex are difficult to distinguish because "force and desire are not mutually exclusive under male supremacy… [as] dominance is eroticized". This occurs to the extent that people may consent/agree to unwanted sex where no force is present (Hakvag, 2009 & Mackinnon, 1989). MacKinnon ties this argument to the social status of women's sexuality as property. She argues that women's sexuality is socially, an object, which women can never possess (1989).

For Mackinnon (1989) and Louise du Toit (2008), consent models of rape erase women's desires and sexual freedoms. Hedda Hakvag adds, "The language of consent both presumes and sustains the idea of an autonomous, knowing subject whose sexuality and desires are free from social norms and socialization" (2009). Du Toit highlights that that traditional rape laws have been based on a liberal notion of free will, which "presupposes the freedoms of the subject" (2009). However, in practice, du Toit says "traditional rape laws simultaneously assume and undermine women's sexual subjectivity" (2008). Liberal consent models – with their emphasis on choice - are further critiqued for inadequacy in "dealing with the essential harm caused by rape, which is to be seen as a violation not just of the autonomy of the victim but of her very self" (Stannard, 2015, p.61). In furthering these arguments, these authors put forward a case for considering how liberal ideas of subjectivity, inscribed into consent-based models of understanding sexual violence, are inadequate in conceptualizing the factors at play in heterosex sexual relationss.

Mackinnon's ideas on sexual consent, gender and power have been very influential in contemporary critiques of heterosexual culture. This fits into a broader critique of compulsory heterosexuality by feminist theorists, as expanded on by Adrienne Rich (1980). According to Rich, compulsory heterosexuality describes a context wherein heterosexuality is considered natural and most desirable, whilst other sexual orientations are considered deviant (1980). For Rich, heterosexuality must be understood as "a political institution"; one which governs sexuality practices across the board in harmful ways (1980, p.637).

Following Mackinnon's work, Rich links sexual violence, compulsory heterosexuality and the maintenance of men's power. She argues that pornography, depicting hetero sex relays the message that "women are natural sexual prey to men and

love it, that sexuality and violence are congruent" (Rich, 1980, p.641). Pornography does "not simply create a climate in which sex and violence are interchangeable" she argues, "It widens the range of behaviour considered acceptable from men in heterosexual intercourse – behaviour which strips women of their autonomy, dignity, and sexual potential, including the potential of loving and being loved by women in mutuality and integrity" (1980, p. 641).

Based on Mackinnon, Hakvag also links consent to heteronormativity, arguing that heterosexual couples have "internalized discourse of sex as essential to heterosexual relationships" (p.124). The result of this, she argues, is the naturalization of consenting to unwanted sex, particularly by women, because sex is seen as an important part of couplehood (O'Sullivan & Allgeiere, in Hakvag, 2009, p. 125). These patterns reinforce the conception of sex as a form of property, particularly through language that sex is "given" (by women) and taken (by men) (Hakvag, 2009, p. 2009).

Robin West's work also uses compulsory heterosexuality as a lens through which to examine "social forces that influence decisions to engage in sexual activity", using compulsory heterosexuality as her analytical lens (Beres, 2007, p. 97). In *The Harms of Consensual Sex*, West explains that heteronormative discourses "produce situations where someone may have sex for the first time while quite young because 'everyone else is doing it', or have sex with their spouse because it is considered a 'normal' part of married life." (In Beres, 2007, p. 98).

One consequence of compulsory heterosexuality in scholarly research has been the assumption of consent's gendered nature (Beres, 2007, p. 97). She points out that much of the literature on consent follows the traditional sexual script approach to heterosexual relations, wherein men are initiators of sex and women's role is to respond to their advances (Beres, 2007). In this discourse, "men's consent is assumed" and they are viewed as "always desiring sex" (2007, p. 97). As Du Toit (2008) argues, the consent model fixes us in "the symbolic representation of women's sexuality as fundamentally responsive and secondary, and thus detract from women's status as full sexual subjects."

Much of the literature on sexual violence in the past 20 years in South Africa suggests that unequal power dynamics govern sexual interactions between men and

women (Shefer, 2016). It is a major limitation in the literature that power dynamics in queer relationships in South Africa have not been widely studied. As US scholars such as Girschick have pointed out, sexual abuse of women by women (for instance) is a problem which needs more attention in the academic literature and beyond (2002). Understanding woman-to-woman sexual abuse is important not only to ensure the safety of queer women, but also because, in acknowledging that women can and do perpetrate sexual violence, we can come to challenge heterosexist social norms and frameworks on sexual violence (Girshick, 2000).

Sexual consent

Sexual consent, as mentioned, is a concept of critical importance within feminist anti-rape discourses. This is evidenced not just in the academic spaces and in anti-sexual violence education, but also in anti-rape protests, where catchphrases such as "Yes means yes", "No means no" and "If I can't say yes, I can't say no" [2] are commonplace (Beres, 2014, p. 373; Ebrahim, 2017). In one instance, in the #KhangaUCT demonstration held at the University of Cape Town in 2017, students displayed the word 'Consent', painted in large letters on t-shirts in front of a university building (Ebrahim, 2017).

Gender researcher Melanie Beres has highlighted that whilst sexual consent remains a crucial concept for feminists invested in understanding sexual violence, the concept is "nebulous" and "undertheorized" (2007). She elaborates that, within academic literature, sexual consent is used often, usually without explicit definition, as scholars assume "a shared understanding of the concept" (2007, p. 93). In her review of consent literature, which spans across several disciplines, including "psychology, sociology and women's studies", Beres notes that there is no consensus on "what it is, how it should be defined or how it is communicated" (2007, p. 94). Following Beres and other scholars, I will outline the problems related to consent in greater detail.

2 A banner from a #UPRapeCrisis demonstration

Problems in defining consent

According to Beres (2007, p. 97; 2014), across the scholarship, "Sexual consent represents some form of agreement to engage in sexual activity." despite lack of clarity on its precise definition. In 2016, Humphreys, Jozkowski, Muehlenhard and Peterson reviewed the most prevalent conceptions of consent, as they "relate to sexual assault" within feminist theory and related fields (2016, p. 458). Their study, situated in the United States and Canada, was prompted by an increase of media reports about sexual assault in recent years (2016). Much of their review focused on college students, who in recent years, have engaged in anti-rape activism on US campuses, most often centred around opposing Title IX[3] violations.

Setting the parameters for their review, Humphreys et al. begin by outlining that definitions of sexual assault and rape vary, but generally "refer to sexual acts that are obtained by force or threat of force or without the victim's consent" (2016, p.458). For their purposes, they define sexual assault as "sexual penetration of sexual touching done without the victim's consent" (2016, p. 458). Whilst statistics on sexual violence prevalence remain contested, Humphreys et al (2016) argue that women college students are highly vulnerable to experiencing sexual assault (2016, p. 460). In this context, they discuss factors which could contribute to this vulnerability, such as limited knowledge about sex, gendered sexual expectations and party culture (2016, p. 460).

Humphreys et al. cite that consent literature tends to define consent in one of three ways: (1) as an internal state of willingness, (2) as an act of explicit agreement to something or (3) as behaviour that someone else interprets as willingness (2016, p. 462). In the ensuing discussion, they highlight each conception's limitations. With the first definition, for instance, a huge problem is that "others' internal states are private and unknowable". This complicates attempts to create legislation around sexual offences, as legislation needs to "be framed around behaviour" (2016, p. 462). In the second definition of consent, a key limitation is that many people prefer to use nonverbal cues during sexual interactions (Beres, 2014; Humphreys et al, 2016; Obioha & Sunday, 2016). This creates

3 Title IX is a federal civil law in the United States, which seeks to protect citizens from gender discrimination in education programs.

potential for misinterpretations over what counts as agreement. Beres (2014, p. 100) also outlines that relying on behaviour as indicative of consent could potentially inhibit people who "express consent in non-conventional ways, such as those who practice sadism and masochism". Finally, with the third definition they have outlined, it is highlighted that this definition is reliant on the inference of the person seeking consent and assumptions about sexual scripts (Humphreys et al., 2016, p. 463). This could lead to problems as a result of miscommunications or misinterpretations of behaviour (2016, p.462).

Coercion and consent

Coercion is an important concept within this study due to its prevalence, which is thought to be particularly high (although underreported), among South African youth (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2002, Coffman, et al., 2015,). Within literature about sexual violence, whilst the word rape is often "reserved for encouters that involve physical force", sexual coercion is "any nonconsensual sex involving penetration acquired through the use of force" (Coffman et al. 2015). For Byers and Glenn, sexual coercion is refers to a wide array of behaviours, "from the sexually inappropriate to being sexually aggressive, through the use of emotional or verbal pressure of physical force" (2011, in Buikema et al., 2016).

The implications of coercion in sexual interaction include physical health and emotional health outcomes. For instance, it has been found that sexual coercion impairs one's ability to ask to use condoms, particularly for women, thus increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (Anderson & Bhana, 2013; Coffman, et al., 2015, p. 673; Clüver , et al., 2013).

Coffman et al (2015) believe that amongst children, sexual coercion is more common amongst boys, whilst later on in adolescence it becomes more common among girls (2015, p. 674). Other studies of coercion focus heavily on women's experiences of coercion, particularly in relation to health risks (See Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Dumisa & van der Riet, 2016; Anderson & Bhana, 2013, Buikema et al., 2016). As Jewkes and Morrell note, "Studies have highlighted age-differentials in young women's relationships and the problems of coerced and transactional sex and observed that young women are unable to negotiate safe sex because of the way gender inequality plays out in the realm of intimacy" (2012, p. 1729).

Buikema et al. s (2016, p.145) work reveals "ambiguity and ambivalence in the interpretations of sexual consent". Whilst sexual coercion by intimate partners had clearly negative impacts (pain, trauma, depression), they argue that it was often normalized and not viewed as criminal (2016, p. 142). When coercion was perpetrated by strangers or non-intimate partners, it was "was more likely to be considered rape" (2016, p. 142). Their study also suggests that internalized guilt and feelings of shame hinder women from reporting incidents of sexual coercion (2016, p. 145) In addition, identifying as having experienced sexual coercion could "contribute to feelings of passivity and helplessness" (2016, p. 145). Buikema et al. (2016) suggest that this may mean "legal definitions of sexual coercion are not necessarily socially agreed upon or understood and may not have a substantial influence on how individuals interpret coercion and consent" (2016, p. 146).

A prevailing critique which has shaped the consent discourse is the matter of how coercion comes into play in instances of sexual violence. This factor was considered in deliberations around the development of the Sexual Offences Act 2007 wherein women's rights organizations argued for a definition of sexual offences based on "coercive circumstances" rather than consent (Mills, 2010; Mills and Strong, 2006). Here, it was argued that defining rape through consent would reproduce harmful victim-blaming attitudes as it would place the initial burden of proof on victims, rather than requiring the accused to prove that consent was present (Mills & Strong, 2006).

As a result of these critiques, some activists and scholars have argued for a definition of sexual crimes through coercive circumstances, in order to highlight the experiences of people who submit to sexual acts under coercion. For instance, Mills (2010) argues that the traditional idea of rape within the law "[conceptualizes] the ideal rape victim as one who puts up the utmost resistance.", usually viewing physical resistance as the benchmark. Du Toit (2008) also argues that the law construes consent using "incidental facts relating to the behaviour of the complainant", which is harmful as it can be used to argue that the complainant consented.

This type of feminist work regarding consent and coercion is related to broader concerns about how to classify sexual acts where coercion is involved. Much of such discussion revolves around whether consent can occur (and be valid) with the presence of force or coercion (Beres, 2007, p.96; Humphreys et al, 2016, p. 465). Some of the scholars Beres cites highlight forms of consent which involve constraint described as "non-full consent", "coerced consent", "quasi consent", and "invalid consent" (2007, p. 97). These qualifications suggest that "agreement to have sex as a result of coercion (for example) is still consent" (Beres, 2007, p. 98). Other scholars, however, believe "it is not possible for someone to consent when they have been coerced or threatened" (Beres, 2007, p. 98).

The affirmative turn

One of the ways in which scholars have attempted to address the issue of coercion within sexual violence discourse is through affirmative consent: a model of consent where explicit agreement is required. This model has received increasing attention and in some instances, is viewed as best-practice in anti-rape education. Humphreys et al (2016) note that affirmative consent standards are encapsulated by the slogan, 'Yes means yes", and aim to highlight situations "which in the woman is unable to say no" and recognize these as violations (2016, p. 465). In such a model, the responsibility of obtaining consent falls on the person initiating sexual activity, rather than relying on "the other person's responsibility to refuse or resist" as previous 'No means no' models have tacitly required (Humphreys et al, 2016, p. 465). Although the affirmative consent model has enriched the literature, the affirmative framing of consent is still limited in that there is no consensus about "how much duress is required to render consent" illegitimate (Humphreys et al, 2016). This complicates cases of sexual violence involving coercion, as some forms of coercion can be extremely subtle and difficult to quantify.

Legal scholar Janet Halley is particularly critical of the affirmative consent model, arguing that in practice, affirmative consent standards would likely be "over inclusive" and lead to the perception that those accused of sexual assault are 'guilty until proven innocent' (2016, p. 272 & 277). Halley seems particularly concerned that affirmative consent would "authorize randomly distributed punishment", which would "fall disproportionately on groups thought to be sexually dangerous" (2016, p. 278). Halley also sees the push to

implement affirmative consent standards as an instance of "criminalizing as a first resort to achieving social change" (2016, p. 264).

In her analysis, Halley (2016) distinguishes between different kinds of consent to illustrate the lack of clarity contained within affirmative consent models. She uses "subjective consent" to describe situations where one agrees "to something because one positively and unambiguously wants it" (positive consent) or alternatively, where one agrees "to something because one perceives it as better than the realistic alternative" (constrained consent) (2016, p. 266). Halley uses "performative consent" to describe "the semiotic communication of agreement to something" (2016, p. 266).

The problem she outlines with these different approaches to defining consent is that the performance of consent does not necessarily correlate with positive consent: that there can be a disconnect between what one expresses and what one actually desires (2016). The performativeness of consent here is problematized because things that could be seen as consent (e.g. lack of protest, lack of resistance) do not "mean" consent (Halley, 2016, p. 269). This muddies things further, as Halley argues, as it is "unclear whether an affirmative standard means that one must obtain a signal of agreement or if "you have to have the other person's internal state of mind of agreeing to the sexual activity: either constrained or positive consent." (2016, p. 269). Even where consent has been expressed/obtained, circumstances such as coercion, complicate whether it can be seen as valid (Halley, 2016: Humphreys et al., 2016).

Further complications with the concept of consent

As has been shown, the literature suggests that relying on consent does not "guarantee unambiguous and sexual encounters" (Miko, 2016, p. 40). There are also several matters that, aside from its definitional issues, consent does not adequately explain. For instance, consent assumes that "sex is either wanted or unwanted" (Humphreys et al. 2016, p. 463). This does not leave room for ambivalence, or for situations where consent is "contingent on something" (Humphreys et al., 2016, p. 464). This consideration creates room for me to investigate instances where contradictory emotions and desires may influence one's decisions agree to sexual acts.

Related to the problems regarding consent which emerge in coercive circumstances, is that one has to give 'informed' consent, for it to be considered valid (Humphreys et al., 2016). For instance, significant omissions of information may mean that the person consenting to an activity has not been given sufficient knowledge about what they are consenting to. In some literature, if consent is uninformed, this renders it meaningless (Humphreys et al., 2016, p. 466).

Stannard's (2015) contribution to these critiques relates to legal applications of consent. Stannard's critique of the application of consent law is that it treats the law as an "emotion-free zone", despite consent operating in the "emotionally-charged" realm of sexual relations (2015, p. 423 & 430). Stannard importantly outlines how emotions such as love, fear and hope can influence decisions to grant consent (2015, p. 431). This intervention is crucial in this discussion, especially in light of the work by feminist scholars such as Sara Ahmed, who have illustrated the importance of social analyses which centre emotion (Ahmed, 2014).

Other scholars and activists have critiqued the application of consent as a way of understanding people's behaviours and feelings in sexual situations. Halley, for one, calls into question the extent to which people can be seen to act reasonably (by legal standards), given the view by some, that sex is "inherently irrational" (2016, p. 275). In studies by Beres (2014), Miko (2016) and Buikema, Cooper and Stern (2016), it emerged that people's conceptions of consent and their behaviours[4] are not always in line with legal definitions. Whilst some understand consent as "a minimum standard for acceptable or non-criminal sex", they tend to have a much more complex understanding about how willingness to have sex is expressed and communicated (Beres, 2014, p. 382). This discrepancy points to a core idea in consent literature: the conflation between desiring a sexual act and expressing consent.

Wanting vs Consenting – a conflation within consent models of sexual violence

Crucial to my discussion is the literature which undoes the conflation between consenting to sexual activity and desiring or wanting sexual activity. In a 2007 study based

4 Other research has suggested that people use different consent cues in different situations, depending on what kind of relationship they are in (Humphreys et al., 2016).

in the United States, Muehlenhard and Peterson found that "it is useful to conceptualize wanting and consenting as distinct concepts" (2007, p. 73). By their definition, "To want something is to desire it, to wish for it, to feel inclined toward it", whereas "to consent to be willing or to agree to do something" (2007, p.73). Despite the common conflation between consenting and wanting, Muehlenhard and Peterson show that nonconsensual sex can be wanted, whilst consensual sex can be unwanted (2007, p.74).

The women in Muehlenhard and Peterson's study who had experienced unwanted consensual sex, reported not wanting it for reasons including worrying about pregnancy and lacking confidence (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007, p. 81). Reasons for wanting sex that was reported as nonconsensual included "feeling sexually aroused or finding the other person attractive" (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007, p. 81).

Building on their findings, Muehlenhard and Peterson view "unacknowledged rape" as a result of the "wanting-consenting" conflation (2007, p. 73). Unacknowledged rape refers to an experience which meets "operational" definitions of rape, but is not labelled as rape by the person who has experienced it (2007, p. 73). In Muehlenhard and Peterson's review, they cite multiple studies where high proportions of participants were considered "unacknowledged rape victims" (2007, p. 73).

Explaining further, Muehlenhard and Peterson suggest that women may refrain from labelling their experiences as rape for two reasons (2007). They first suggest that in cases of acquaintance rape, the experience may not be completely wanted nor completely unwanted (2007, p. 74). Their second reason, related to the wanting-consenting dominant model, is that perhaps, unacknowledged rape victims may "believe that wanted but nonconsensual sex is either impossible or [that nonconsensual sex] is possible but not rape" (Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2007, p. 74).

In addition, they outline that the implication of conceptualizing rape as unwanted sex is that "any evidence that the victim wanted to have sex (e.g., flirtatious behaviour prior to the rape, sexual arousal during the rape) can be interpreted to mean that the incident was not really rape." (Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2007, p. 82). The repercussions of experiencing unacknowledged rape are thought to include a lower likelihood of seeking support services and negative mental health outcomes for unacknowledged rape victims (2007, p. 82).

Muehlenhard and Peterson (2007) and Robin West (2008) all push for the distinction between wanting and consenting, and a consideration of them "as distinct concepts that sometimes correspond to each other but sometimes do not" (Humphreys et al. 2016, p. 463). Importantly, Muehlenhard and Peterson add that "Desire for intercourse [is] distinct from the desire for the consequences of sex" (2007, p.81). Given how common discrepancies between wanting to have sex and consenting to sex are, Muehlenhard and Peterson argue for a broader definition of rape where all nonconsensual sexual acts are considered rape, whether they were unwanted or wanted (2007, p. 73 & 74). Understanding the contention emanating from their arguments, they clarify,

> "At first glance, it might seem inappropriate or harmful to claim that some rape victims actually wanted to have sex. After all, 'She wanted it' is a rape myth used to blame rape victims or to dismiss claims of rape…. We argue that, to the contrary, this concept can actually be helpful… "Rape is about the absence of consent, not the absence of desire" (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007, p. 84).

Unwanted sex

Given the above arguments, I think it's important to hold 'unwanted sex' as a potentially useful category, especially given its prominence in sexual violence literature (See for instance, Bay-Cheng & Bruns, 2016; Gavey, 1999; Hakvag, 2009 & Miko, 2016). Beres (2007) notes that, like 'consent', one problem with the phrase 'unwanted sex' within the literature is that it is used to refer to two types of experiences: 1) when someone engages in "sex when they do not desire it, but are willing to engage in sex" and 2) "instances when someone is forced or coerced into having sex" (2007). Within this literature (including work on unacknowledged rape victims), Kahn (2004) Bey-Cheng & Bruns (2016)'s work in particular, highlights that amongst women who experience unwanted sex, women may label such experiences differently, some classifying it as rape while others do not (depending on their understanding of what counts as rape). In the rest of this paper, I will be using unwanted sex, referring to sex which is not desired (regardless of whether it is forced, coerced or neither).

African Black women's bodies, colonial discourses and consent

For the purposes of my research, it is vital to understand the context in which my research participants operate. As Black women, our blackness and gender are inextricably linked as they have historically been used to justify violence against us. Any matter pertaining to Black women's sexuality is linked to their gender status, and as Sylvia Tamale says, analysing sexuality reveals "deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems." (2011, p. 11).

In addition, an analysis of Black women's sexual experiences is linked is an analysis of race too, due to how the colonial project has framed African sexualities throughout history (Tamale, 2011, p.12, McFadden, 2003). Discourses from the West – taken from early records by colonial explorers in the 19th century – have had a huge impact on how African sexualities have been understood in research (Tamale, 2011, p. 12). African people's sexualities were construed by colonists as primitive, immoral, bestial, and libidinous, for the sake of justifying the domination of African people (Lewis, 2011, p. 2000; Nyanzi, 2013, p. 477; Tamale, 2011, p. 14).

African women specifically, were seen as "insatiable, amoral, barbaric beings…the antithesis of European mores of sex and beauty", which created the idea that African female sexuality was dangerous and excessive (Nyanzi, 2013, 490; Tamale, 2011, p.14). Such stereotypes were used to justify rape of slave women by colonial settlers. This is by design, as Gqola writes, "[Because] Empire imagines itself as rapist of land and people…[thus] the centrality of rape as a weapon of colonial war is not an accident" (2015, p. 49). In the colonial era, rape was used to debase Black women, whose enslavement denied them self-ownership, meaning that consent was considered impossible for them/us (2015, p. 41 & 43). Gqola links the construction of these colonial stereotypes about African sexualities to the current scourge of sexual violence against Black women (2015). In South Africa today, Black women are likeliest to be raped, which Gqola attributes to the collusion between patriarchy and colonialism (2015, p. 53). Gqola writes that contemporarily, the criminal justice system is inadequate when it comes to redressing rape because it is based in Roman Dutch law, "the same law that once labelled Black women unrapable" (2015: 53).

This history is important to consider in writing about sexual violence against black women. As Tamale outlines, there are remnants of this colonial discourse on African sexualities in contemporary academic and policy work (Tamale, 2011, p. 19). The approach within the production of such work is to "apply a knee-jerk reflex to 'fix'" the dangerous sexual cultures in African societies (2011, p. 19). This later became evident in public health research focused on "risky cultural practice", which Tamale argues is tied to colonial myths about the inherent dangerousness of sexual practices in Africa (Tamale, 2011, p.21). In framing laws to curb HIV, policy makers focused on "sexual immorality and reducing incidents of sexual violence against women" (Tamale, 2011, p. 21).

Nyanzi argues that the dominant ideologies on African sexualities still control and constrain sexualities (2013, p. 484). McFadden (2003) adds that such discourses (particularly in response to the HIV pandemic) "impose hegemonic notions of sexual behaviour and heterosexist expectations, whilst reinforcing the deeply embedded notions and claims that define sexual pleasure and freedom as "dangerous" and "irresponsible. Apart from this, McFadden condemns the silences around African women's sexualities (2003). For McFadden, the first step in redressing these problems is to "reassert feminist agency as the most effective response to sexual violation, abuse, femicide, and all naturalized patriarchal and heterosexist patterns of behaviour" (2003). In critique of McFadden, Charmaine Pereira (2003) underscores the importance of mapping the silence in theorizing African women's sexualities, rather than just critiquing them. In addition, she notes that whilst these silences exist, "African women's sexualities may vary across space and time and across regions" (2003, p. 1). Thus, it is vital not to consider African women's sexualities as a fixed and generalizable category, which has the same meanings across the continent.

Theoretical Framework & Methodological Framework

Theoretical Framework

In discussing this project, I will frame the discussion on my fieldwork in relation to the research questions. As I started out with a much broader set of questions, I have refined my original questions, focusing on these three, which I thought were most pertinent. Thus, this discussion and these questions are not an exhaustive representation of my fieldwork. The questions framing this discussion were chosen because of the possibilities they could produce in relation to interrogating concepts such as desire, consent, language, and power.

To begin, in this study, I will be examining experiences of heterosex relations. According to Johnstone (2016, p. 276), heterosex refers to the "normative behaviours associated with heterosexual sex and is not to be confused with sexual identity (Gavey, in Johnstone, 2016). I have chosen this lens in order to interrogate my research participants' experiences in relation to prominent feminist theories on sexuality, gender and consent (Gavey, 2005).

The questions I have decided to focus on in this report were motivated firstly by my quest to understand sexual violence better. As stated in the Introduction, the questions are influenced primarily by my own sexual experiences and the questions that these have left me with. The questions at the heart of this investigation also stem from my experiences as a feminist activist. As a feminist activist, I see interrogating social constructs and structures as a crucial part of my life's work. Finally, as a feminist Political Studies scholar, I am particularly interested in understanding how power structures such as cisheteropatriarchy shape personal, everyday life experiences. My research questions also stem from an intention to carefully respond to the pervasive victim-blaming attitudes women are subjected to because of how they navigate experiences connected to sexual violence.

The first question I will be discussing is what can we learn from Black[5] women's experiences about the relationship between consent and desire? In this instance, and in the

5 In this report, the word Black refers to people who would have fallen under the apartheid categories of "African", "Indian" and "Coloured".

rest of my report, I will be using the word "consent" to refer to the understanding of consent as "an act of explicit agreement" or a "verbal agreement to" a sexual activity (following Humphrey's et al. (2016) review and Halley's (2016) definition of subjective consent). Whilst I understand the reasons that the concept of consent is contestable, for my purposes, I will be defining it in this way, because as Beres writes, most understandings about consent frame it as an agreement to sexual activity (2007, p. 97).

Here, I have been guided by the work of Muehlenhard and Peterson (2007), who, in their exploration of the conflation of desire and consent, provided a framework to understand why an act which is consented to could be experienced as a violation or cause harm. Most importantly, this work has enabled me to, in my fieldwork, pose questions which can capture experiences where consent was granted without desire or where desire was present, but consent was not given.

The second question I have posed is what can we learn from Black women's experiences about consent and the body? As scholars Nyanzi, Tamale and Gqola have argued, Black women's sexualities have been used historically as a tool of subjection; myths about our sexualities have been used to justify the violence against us. In such a context, where our bodies were the basis for arguing that our consent was not important historically, I am interested in a discussion about what our bodies can mean in relation to our sexualities and in relation to violence (and their possible intersection).

Because of the historical baggage which connects Black women's consent to their bodies, I am also interested in the possibilities of communication through the body. As Humphreys et al (2016) outline, most affirmative models of consent require that consent be expressed verbally. With this in mind, it follows that communication is an important idea to consider in trying to understand debates on consent. Part of this has been examined through research that focuses on what kind of cues (verbal or non-verbal) people use in sexual interactions (See Jozkowski, et al., 2014). Another way the importance of communication emerges as significant here is in through the myth that sexual assault is a result of miscommunication (2016, p. 476). Whilst this belief has been discredited,

communication remains important because models that focus on consent focus on verbal expression – a form of communication. Further, as Halley (2016) outlines, affirmative consent models rely on obtaining some sort of performance of expressing consent – most often, verbal consent.

The third question I have posed is how do black women make meaning of, understand and articulate their experience of unwanted sex or unwanted sexual advances? This third question became important to me firstly, because of internal conflicts I faced trying to understand and articulate my experiences of unwanted sex and unwanted sexual advances. In this instance, *unwanted sex* is taken to mean any sexual activity which is not desired (Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2007). Such a concept is potentially inclusive of a range of experiences: from those which could legally be classified as rape to those which would legally be acceptable. Whilst remaining sensitive of the political reasons it can be harmful to conflate such a wide scope of experiences, I employ "unwanted sex" or "unwanted sexual advances" in order to avoid re-inscribing understandings of definitions of sexual violence which conflate wanting/desiring and consenting to sexual activity.

This question is about how we understand "sex" and how we understand "violence": how do our understandings of these challenge the sex vs. sexual violence binary within feminist discourses. Centered around experience, this question informs one of my main arguments, which is that sexual experiences should be evaluated in a more flexible way: that their harmfulness should be evaluated based on how they are experienced, rather than *solely* on whether they fit into consent-based definitions of sexual violence. Here, I am interested in the meanings instances of sexual violence have for those who experience them.

As Beres (2007, p. 99) points out, the literature existing on consent suggests that there is spaces for experiences of "sex that are neither consensual nor criminal or violent, although they may be socially problematic." Hakvag (2009, p. 124) adds, "just because a particular sexual experience cannot be defined as sexual assault, it does not mean that the experience is okay". Given this, I would like to de-emphasize legal definitions to make space for experiences that are problematic, harmful but not necessarily legally wrong.

Further, this discussion on how Black women understand their experiences, some of which could be legally termed as rape, is not intended to recuperate the concept of consent for legal purposes. This direction is due to considerations the legal system's embeddedness in the prison industrial complex. Feminist scholar Angela Davis describes the prison industrial complex as a phenomenon wherein social problems are framed as crimes, from which a negative cycle of punishment arises (2000). In a context where criminality is often racialized, and classed, Davis highlights, "prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings" (2000). Following this, I think the legal system's goal of prosecution and imprisonment of sexual offenders is a punitive approach to sexual violence and I find this approach to dealing with sexual violence inadequate. In contrast to legal and punitive approaches to handling sexual violence, I am interested in rape and sexual violence not as crimes, but as experiences.

Towards a complex feminist discourse on sexual violence

In my desire to understand women's experiences of unwanted sex, I was guided primarily by the work of Nicola Gavey (1999). In her essay, "I wasn't raped, but…", Gavey (1999) grapples with a few issues that have been critical to framing my research questions. Gavey begins by tracing the development of research on "unacknowledged rape victims", underlining why their (perceived) victimization was deemed politically important for feminists. As discussed in the literature review, this refers to women who had reported experiences which "matched behavioral definitions of rape" but were not labelled as such (1999, p. 59). This category emerged after methodological practices were adjusted in order to "be sensitive to women's reluctance to report rape" (1999, p. 60). Related to this, Gavey writes, feminists began to name certain "practices as victimization" (1999, p. 63). This political move was made in order to bring to light the impact of unequal power relations, cementing that rape is "a serious social problem" (Gavey, 1999, p. 61). The move to categorize a variety of experiences of sexual coercion as "victimization" would also give 'victims' an avenue to claim sympathy and legal recourse (1999, p. 61). These developments are what Gavey argues brought into question what was previously considered "just sex." (1999, p. 60).

Gavey questions "if being the object of violence or coercion always the same thing being the *victim* of such violence or coercion" (1999, p. 57 & 78). Whilst answering this question is not the aim of my research, it is of importance to the discussion because it allows for us to acknowledge unwanted sex without conflating it with victimization. Secondly, Gavey asks, "How should we conceptualize and judge the myriad coercive sexual acts that lie somewhere between rape and consensual sex?" (1999, p. 57). Here, Gavey acknowledges existing "confusion and ambivalence….at the interface between (hetero)sex and sexual victimization" (1999, p. 57). Later, Gavey coins the term unjust sex, to describe such experiences (in Cahill, 2014).

Whilst it could be useful, especially for legislative purposes, to try to find a universal way of classifying experiences of sexual coercion along a spectrum of consensual sex and rape, this is not my current aim. Rather, in this report, my aim is to use any emerging confusion and ambiguity as a site of knowledge. Following Kate Harris (2011), in this report, I am de-prioritizing labelling as the most important way through which we can understand women's experiences of unwanted sex. This, however, is not to dismiss Gavey's claim that there are material cultural effects of "the language of sexual victimization" (Gavey, 1999, p. 62).

Deepening the analysis, Kate Harris closely examines dominant feminist rape discourse, acknowledging her own discomfort with two ideas she holds: that women should label certain instances of forced or unwanted sex as rape and that labelling an experience as rape can be limiting (2011, p. 43 & p. 54). Part of the dominant feminist discourse on rape, Harris (2011, p. 43) argues, includes attributing women's reluctance to label their experiences as rape to self-blame, being "ill-informed about definitions of rape, or denying reality". In evaluating these, Harris (2011, p.43) concludes that we (those invested in ending sexual violence) need to ask "questions about the ways in which the feminist discourse surrounding rape might fail women or might not fully describe their experiences of encounters that meet technical definitions of rape", rather than attributing the (perceived mis-) labelling of their experiences to self-blame or to misunderstandings of sexual violence concepts.

Research suggests that labelling practices are influenced by hegemonic discourses about rape. For instance, according to Fischer et al (in Harris, 2011), factors which increase the likelihood that a woman to label an experiences as rape includes if "(a) the woman had previous experience with attempted or completed forced intercourse, (b) the woman used forceful, verbal resistance, (c) the incident occurred less recently, (d) the offender used or threatened to use physical force, (e) an injury (other than the rape) was sustained, or (f) a weapon was used." This suggests that women are more likely to label an experience rape if it fits closely into the stranger rape script, wherein the incident involved an unknown perpetrator and moderate physical (Ryan, 2011). Axsom and Littleton (2003, p. 467) suggest that this understanding of rape is likelier to be held by unacknowledged rape victims, compared to acknowledged rape victims.

In sum, Harris' research (2011, p. 47) found that, whilst the rape label was helpful for some participants, helping them to "remove self-blame", for others, it was limiting. For instance, whilst the rape label helped several participants "transform their own sense of culpability", for others, the label denied them agency, requiring "them to acknowledge a complete lack of control over what had happened" (Harris, 2011, p. 51). Further, Harris' study highlights the possibility of the way the word rape is used in the creation of a "framework that implies a neat distinction between rape and not rape." This binarization was observed in the rape discourses available to participants, which included other dichotomous categories, such as "victim= perpetrator, innocent=guilty, rape=not rape, good person=bad person." (2011, p. 59). It was further suggested that this dichotomy "lumps many different kinds of nonconsensual sex together", which made it more difficult to acknowledge varying types of harm (Harris, 2011, p. 53)

Harris (2011, p. 44) writes, "If the discursive framework for nonconsensual sex does not accurately reflect the complexities and nuances of women's experiences, a revised vocabulary not only may allow women to be more comfortable seeking both formal and informal support but also may lead to more successful prevention strategies". Given this, in my research, I aim to follow Harris' aim to "open space for a vocabulary of sexual violence

that is informed by both the politics of naming and the complexities of lived experience" (2011, p. 45). Harris suggests that moving away from implied dichotomies held within dominant feminist rape discourses could open up the possibility for women "to speak about ambiguous, contradictory parts of their experiences" (2011, p. 53).

In highlighting these issues, feminist researchers have been careful of the repercussions of making arguments which could be used to victim-blame women. Phillips, Gavey and Harris all express concern about the potential (mis)use of their arguments which would "hold women responsible for their own mistreatment, casting them as fickle, confused, or sending mixed messages" (Phillips, 2000, p. 31). Whilst sharing this hesitation, I follow their lead, aiming to avoid perpetuating women's victimization by steering away from the complexity erupting from their unique circumstances (Phillips, 2000, p. 31)

Sexual violence and language

As Harris (2011) and Gavey (1999) have indicated, language is plays an important role in how we understand matters of sexual violence and power. As Betty Friedan brought to the fore in her essay *The Problem That Has No Name*, how social problems are labelled (or not) is significant in how we understand them (in Herman, 1992). Naming social phenomena is one way in which feminists have uncovered the "real conditions of women's lives" which had been relegated to the personal sphere (Herman, 1992, p. 28). Thus, as discussed, feminist movements advocating for consciousness-raising aided women in overcoming "barriers of denial, secrecy and shame that prevented them from naming their injuries" (Herman, 1992, p. 29).

Whilst the feminist movement has "offered a new language for understanding the impact of sexual assault", feminist psychiatrist Judith Herman has made the case that making sense of experiences of violence and violation through language is still a difficult process (Herman, 1992, p. 30). Herman illustrates that in cases where people have experienced traumatic experiences, including sexual violence, language often fails (1992). Memories of traumatic experiences, Herman argues, exist outside of language, and are stored as "vivid sensations and images" (1992, p. 38 in Harris, 2011).

Building on Herman's work, Harris (2011) further critiques the static way feminist discourse has understood women: separating them into the binary of "women who use the label rape and those who do not." Harris shows that naming practices can be more complex than our existing discourses indicate. She further argues, "naming is not a final moment of truth recognition but a dynamic process of interacting with a set of discourses that shape meaning- making practices." (Harris, 2011). This is supported by research suggesting that women are more likely to label an experience rape retrospectively, after some time has passed (Gavey, 1999 & Harris, 2011).

In addition to the problem that individual's definitions of sexual violence do not always correlate to legal definitions, as well as the general complexity of the naming process, Jewkes, Lambert & Wood (2007, p. 296) indicate that in different languages, such as isiXhosa, words such as rape have "a significantly narrower referential field than [their] legal or technical English meaning." This means that it is crucial to "look beyond literal translation of terms from English and of avoiding assumptions of semantic equivalence cross-culturally between apparently similar terms and categories." (Jewkes et al., 2007, p. 296). In light of this, it is evident that an approach which privileges making meaning of experiences of sexual violence through verbal language is inadequate.

Central to my investigation of how Black women understand their experiences of unwanted sex, is Nthabiseng Motsemme's work on silence as a form of articulation. In her paper, *The Mute Always Speak*, Motsemme critiques the Westerncentric valorization of verbal language, arguing that this limits "narratives of remembered violence" (2004, p. 915). Motsemme calls us to reject this hierarchy of "silence and speech", in order to open up "frameworks where words, silence, dreams, gestures, tears all exist interdependently" (2004, p. 910).

Without dismissing other feminist conceptualizations of oppressive manifestation of silence, Motsemme pushes for a reinterpretation of silence in other contexts: in situations where it can be an expression of resistance (2004, p. 917). In approaching my

second and third research questions particularly, I will be using Motsemme's work as an entry point think through Black women's experiences, moving away from the idea they are "only knowable through words" (2004). In this way, Motsemme's work encourages exploration of hidden meanings of experience, embedded in nonverbal language (2004).

Subjectivity, power and choice

Phillips and Gavey provide more guidance on how power and agency can be understood for the purposes of my report. In her research, Phillips conceives of women's subjectivities as "sites of tension among multiple and competing discourses" (2000, p. 17). Gavey adds that despite being socially determined by these discourses, none of us are "totally shaped" by them (1999, p. 63). Phillips elaborates that our relationship to the discourses we encounter affect what we "imagine is possible and what we take for granted" (2000, p. 17). In addition, she adds, "our senses of our social realities are not static", because we are exposed to "multiple and often contradictory" discourses (2000, p.17).

Elaborating on how this impacts women, Phillips argues that women today are exposed to discourses that hold that "today's woman" is sovereign, whilst simultaneously being "encouraged to aspire" to images of objectified and commodified women (2000, p. 18). Phillips writes,

> "To further complicate the matter, they are flooded with classist, racist, and hetero-sexist messages that tell them that only certain women (white, hetero-sexual, middle-class or affluent women) are entitled to speak out, worthy of advocacy, or even believed when facing injustice in their personal lives." (2000, p. 18).

Phillips writes that, despite immersion in these contradictory discourses, women are not "passive recipients" of them: they also "use and engage" in resistance against them (2000, p. 19). Such a sentiment guides me in my quest to examine how women make meaning of their experiences, as I intend to do through my third question.

Phillips takes this discussion on subjectivity further, locating it in a broader conversation about power and choice (2000, p. 19). Phillips' intention is to recuperate the concept of power from its Western appropriations: a conception which defines power as a property of the person (Gatens, 1992 in Phillips, 2000). Rather, she offers an alternative, which she employs to emphasize "the ways in which power infuses our relationships, social contexts and the choices we make" (2000, p. 19).

Mirroring how Phillips believes we operate in relation to discourses, she writes that power is something we "exercise in relation to others, through both resistances to and compliance with the discourses available to us" (2000, p. 20). As I made note of earlier, as outlined by Coffman et al (2015), women are confronted by multiple, conflicting discourses about their sexualities. Phillips' work elaborates on this idea more, as she contends that the discourses available to us constrain us in different ways (2000, p. 22). How we exercise our power is shaped by our senses of "what is possible, appropriate, and desirable" in different moments: the choices available to us determine, in many ways, whether and how we exercise power" (2000, p. 22). These framings of power lie at the heart of my research.

Agency

Agency is an important area for this research given the consideration that women's agency is severely constrained, especially in (heterosexual) romantic relationships (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). For instance, Coffman et al. (2015, p. 675) argue that "For South African girls, sexual agency within a romantic relationship is rare" and that "girls often submit to their partner's will even when they know the behaviors are unsafe or painful" (Mantell et al., 2009 in Coffman et al. 2015).

Contextualizing their study, Coffman et al. (2015) argue that adolescent girls face coercion and constrained agency in a context wherein they receive conflicting cultural messages about their sexuality. On one hand, it is suggested that young heterosexual men and women in South Africa uphold beliefs consistent with the traditional sexual script. These include ideas that men are responsible for initiating sexual activity and that women must wait for men to initiate sexual activity (Buikema, et al. 2016; Clüver , et al., 2013; Gmeiner, 2014; Mills, 2010; Obioha & Sunday, 2016). On the other hand, whilst they are encouraged to be passive in their sexual relationships, "sexuality can be a symbol of status

for girls, resulting in tremendous pressure to engage in sex." (Coffman et al., 2015, p. 136). Because of pressure to have sex from peers, coupled with cultural taboos about sex, Coffman et al. (2015) argue that youth are unlikely to practice safe sex "out of fear that [these] will leave evidence for parents of their sexual activity such as condoms or birth control prescriptions" (p. 675). Coffman et al.'s argument echo anthropologist Carole Vance's view that women's "pursuit of pleasure in contexts of danger resulted in women being placed at risk by the very actions they took to affirm femininity "(1984, in Jewkes & Morrell, 2012, p. 1730).

Agency, therefore, in this context, is important, as it comes into operation in encounters of wanted and unwanted sex. How this happens has been theorized at length by Nicola Gavey. Building on Gavey's work, feminist philosopher Ann Cahill makes the case for recognizing different ways agency is in play when women experience unwanted sex (2014). Cahill credits Gavey for building on Mackinnon's theory that consent is an inappropriate mode of forming an ethical analysis of sexual interactions, without repeating Mackinnon's mistake of eradicating "the very possibility of female (hetero)sexual agency" (2014). This intervention is particularly insightful, especially as it connects to critiques of MacKinnon by sex work advocates. Sloan & Wahab (2000), for instance, have argued that domination theories such as Mackinnon's, which inaccurately consider sexuality to be the basis of all women's oppression, inscribe the idea that women cannot have sexual agency. Gavey's elaborations allow for critiques of heterosexual relations which leave room for women's agency and autonomy in creating their sexualities (Cahill, 2014; Sloan & Wahab, 2000, p. 462).

Cahill's contribution to this discussion is her elucidation of how agency features in experiences of unjust sex[6] (Cahill, 2014). Cahill's formulations are a pertinent addition to this discussion especially in light of Tamara Shefer's work (2016), which critiques South African academic literature on heterosexual relations, for forcing women into a limited victim-agent dichotomy.

6 Gavey's term for sexual experiences which do not count as mutually consenting sex nor as rape or sexual coercion.

Cahill's argument rests on insights from Gavey's 2005 book *Just Sex: The cultural scaffolding of rape.* In it, Gavey documents women's experiences of unjust sex: ambiguous experiences of sexual activity, which were unwanted but consented to. These include,

> "situations in which a man applied pressure that fell short of actual or threatened physical force, but which the woman felt unable to resist, as well as encounters where a man was rough and brutish, and the woman described letting sex happen because she felt unable to stop it. They also include stories of situations where a male partner was not directly coercive at all, but where the woman nevertheless found herself going along with sex that was neither desired nor enjoyed because she did not feel it was her right to stop it or because she did not know how to refuse." (Gavey, 2005, p. 136 in Cahill, 2014)

The area of unjust sex is an important area of inquiry for Cahill (2014) because it recognizes many different kinds of harm which are possible in the heteronormative sexual continuum, speaking to Harris' (2011) concerns regarding using the rape label (2014). Cahill supports Gavey's view that "acts that occur within this grey area are both different from and related to acts of violence." (2016). In addition, she argues that unjust sex's key feature – ambiguity – can be a site of knowledge: making clearer the distinctions between desire and consent (Cahill, 2016).

In unjust sex, Cahill finds that "the situation does recognize and continue to construct [the woman] as a sexual agent, as someone whose contribution to the interaction matters significantly." Thus, her sexual agency is in play, but it is hijacked. Sexual assault on the other hand, involves a nullification of the victim's sexual agency by the perpetrator (Cahill, 2016). In both cases, she concluded that decisions made under coercive circumstance (social pressure or direct coercion)– whether consent or acquiescence – are still expressions of agency. In line with Phillips's work in explaining how choices can be constrained by different discourses, Cahill (2014 & 2016) cements the case for resisting the victim-agent binary approach to understanding unwanted sex (Shefer, 2016).

Methodological Framework

On sampling

Turning to feminist methodology and postcolonial feminist theory context led me to centre Black women in my study (Beckman, 2014 & Gqola, 2001). In particular, Gqola's work (2001) underscores my reason for focusing on Black women: she makes the case that "Blackwomencentric" writing offers exciting opportunity to refashion the world (2000, p. 11). In allegiance with the Gqola's 'blackwomancentric' frame, I chose to centre Black women in this research 1) in order to write back against narratives which totalize us and 2) in recognition of the need for our experiences to be documented and theorized for us, by us[7].

For the purposes of this report, I conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded, in-person interviews with eight Black women, most of them aged between 19 and 26. Although not all of them were enrolled as students at the time, all of my research participants were situated at the University of the Witwatersrand and have some degree of university education. Most of these interviews were conducted on Wits campus.

Most participants had volunteered to be interviewed after I sent out an invite for participation on the Black Womxn Caucus mailing list. Black Womxn Caucus is a Wits-situated collective of Black women I became part of shortly after starting this research. I attended the collective's weekly meetings, where we discussed different topics, watched documentaries, and played together. We also spent considerable time discussing what the collective's purpose and goals would be. Whilst these conversations are ongoing, I view Black Womxn Caucus as a collective both espousing and building upon a combination of Black/African/feminist/womanist/Fallist political frameworks.

Following Phillips' (2000) approach to interviewing young women, I did not specifically set out to interview women of any specific sexual orientation. As Kennedy and Davis (in Matebeni, 2008, p. 90) write, labels for sexuality can "'freeze human sexuality into dichotomous fixed practices [which does not reflect] reality".

7 Here, I am also guided by Solange Knowles' work F.U.B.U – from the album A Seat at the Table.

The inadequacy of viewing sexual orientation as fixed became evident as I spoke to my participants about how they understand their sexual orientation. For Busisiwe[8] and Zinhle, it was not important to have a label to describe their sexual orientation.

> Zinhle: I don't have a label for it. I don't even think it should be labelled. I don't think it should be a category. Sometimes I struggle to understand what purpose that serves.

Nicole described her sexuality as existing "on a spectrum", connecting most with the terms "asexual, greysexual and demisexual". Sam and Summer described themselves as queer, but indicated that they had struggled to come to this descriptor. For Summer, neither of the labels "bisexual" or "lesbian" sat well. Sam said she previously hesitated to identify as queer, particularly when she understood "sexuality as a property of the person". Whilst the nature of sexual orientation is nebulous, it is still important to note that most studies on consent have often been limited to heterosexual participants (Humphreys et al, 2016). This was factored into my sampling decision as I did not want to limit my study in a heterosexist way.

Researching from the inside

My relationship to my research participants as well as my positionality inevitably shaped this research process. I started considering this after reading Linda Beckman's assertion that to employ feminist methodology is to recognize that "the self-mediates all knowledge" (Beckman, 2014). Taking this further, I was led to consider my position in the research as "both an insider and an outsider" through Danai Mupotsa's work on African feminist standpoint theory (2007, p. xx). This framework is important as it allows for an appraisal of the influence of one's positionality, whilst simultaneously working against universalism (Mupotsa, 2007).

Drawing from African feminist standpoint theory, I believe the traits I share with my participants; that I am Black, African, a woman and attending/working at South African university, are crucial to this research in that they solidified my 'insider' status (Mupotsa,

8 All names are pseudonyms.

2007). These positions allowed me access to particular shared discourses, which overall affects how I mediate the knowledge I encounter through them (Mupotsa, 2007, p. xviii). With this said, these commonalities do not make it possible for me to generalize about the experiences of my participants and it is not my aim to do so. As Mupotsa suggests, sharing experience should not be the sole basis for establishing the validity of one's standpoint, due to the heterogeneity existing among people who share particular positions or identities (2007, p. xiii). For instance, whilst we shared experiences of being Black, women and university-situated, the research was informed by my other positions which are not shared by all, such as being a Motswana and being middle-class.

Struggling with power

In approaching this research, I was sensitive to the fact that conducting such fieldwork often leads to a strong power dynamic, where the researcher is considered more of an authority than the research participant (Beckman, 2014; Matebeni, 2008; Mupotsa, 2007). When deciding how to conduct my fieldwork, I chose to use semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, hoping this would lead to a mutual conversational interview, and giving participants more power in determining the trajectory of the conversation.

In trying to redress the power balance, I also tried to make sure the participants understood the possible implications of my research through the following: I sent participants information sheet, explaining my background, the purposes of the research and the types of topics which would be discussed in the interviews. In person, I went over this information, also providing a printout of the participant information sheet. After explaining the purposes of my research and obtaining the participant's consent (through consent forms), I explained to each participant that they could elect to skip any questions they did not want to answer, withdraw from the interview at any time and pause the interview at any time. This was in consideration of ethical concerns such as the concern of exploitation and the concern of researcher-participant hierarchy (informed by Ahrens et al, 2010). I also encouraged participants to ask me any question I had asked them. I did this following Oakley's recommendation that interviewing works best when "the relationship

between interviewer and interview is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest [their] personal identity in the relationship (1981, p.41).

Despite my attempts, breaking down the power imbalance between researcher and participant was really difficult. For instance, I think the checklist-style and orderly manner in which I communicated the parameters of the interview – accompanied by my nerves – often betrayed the intention to have a conversational-style interview. Whilst my intention was to make sure my participants knew that they could opt out of the interview freely – in order to address issues of power and choice – I think way I expressed this set the tone to be a bit more formal than I had wanted. The end result was that, when the conversation was being recorded, interactions between me and some of the participants were, at times, more serious than usual.

That these interviews were conducted as part of an academic research project also made some of my participants nervous, especially for those conducted their own fieldwork before. For Sam, participating in the interview was initially uncomfortable because, as a researcher herself, it meant a shift in power dynamics: "normally I'm the one asking questions". Weeks after our second interview, Zinhle disclosed that she had been concerned about "test-retest reliability" of what she had said, as this was something she had focused on in her own research (personal communication). As our interview began, Nolwazi disclosed feeling anxious that her responses "wouldn't be useful" to my project as she battled "intellectual insecurity". I tried to be reassuring, emphasizing to Nolwazi that the interview was more about personal experiences. I interpreted her and Zinhle's anxieties as symptomatic of our experiences academic contexts wherein empirical knowledge is valued above experience (Mupotsa, 2007b).

Seeking experiential knowledge

My question schedule was geared towards producing accounts of personal experience: it consisted of questions about experiences of womanhood, sexual orientation, romantic and sexual relationships, sexual expression and un/wanted sex. I chose to conduct individual interviews because I believed it would provide an appropriate space to

facilitate conversations about the personal matters my questions deal with. My emphasis on experiential accounts is, following Mupotsa, aimed at using narrative "as a means of overcoming the obsession with spectacle" (2007, p. xii). As evidenced in the literature review, writing on Black women's sexual lives has often followed the spectacle form. In addition to this, Lisa Vetten (2016) points to the use of spectacle in writing on sexual violence, "rape survivor speech has been …reinvented as motivational speech, or the sensational stuff of true horror". In focusing on experience, my aim is to not reproduce these kinds of spectacle accounts, of Black women's sexuality or of sexual violence.

In order to avoid the sensational narrative Vetten points to, I thought carefully about the tension in trying to separate (hetero)sexual experiences into the categories consensual/nonconsensual, rape-or-sexual-assault/sex and legal/illegal. Whilst statistics on sexual assault and rape are deemed unreliable because of underreporting (Jewkes, Gqola, 2015), it is believed that sexual assault is prevalent. Following this, and the research on 'unacknowledged rape victims', I entered this fieldwork expecting that some of my participants had experiences that could be classified as rape or sexual assault and that these could have caused negative emotional reactions.[9]

At the same time, as Gavey indicates, "whilst there are several common negative psychological reactions to rape, not all women who are raped experience them." She outlines "that it may be possible to experience rape and suffer no lasting devastating psychological effects": a narrative which has been overshadowed by the discourse of harm (1999, p. 70.) In factoring in these possibilities, I constructed my question schedule taking into account that framing my questions around the terms "rape" and "sexual assault" may lead to the exclusion of experiences which were considered harmful by participants but would not meet the (real and perceived) legal definitions of these labels. This framing allowed for ambiguous experiences – those falling in the in-between space - to be documented.

9 The psychological results of such experience include anxiety, sexual dysfunction, self- esteem problems, substance abuse, self-harm and increased likelihood of suicide (Harris, 2011, p.47; Gavey, 1999).

On Memory

In drawing on my participants' accounts of their experiences, memory was a central part of my research. Following the work of Motsemme (2004) and Herman (1992) on memory and trauma, using interviews to document narrations of potentially distressing experiences means that my investigation can only capture what is verbally explicable from what is remembered. This means that my findings are limited not just in the sense that they are what my participants *chose* to reveal, but also in that they are shaped by what details of this my participants could remember and verbally express**.** In thinking about this, it is important to consider that the aim of this research is to bring to the fore and affirm knowledge which has been considered contestable, particularly if viewed within positivistic frameworks. My choice to do proceed with this investigation despite the limitations introduced by the process of re-calling memory, is due to my desire to affirm the subjective as a valid and rich site of knowledge.

Difficult feelings

In asking my participants about consent and about details of their past relationships and sexual encounters, I was sensitive to the fact that recollection of traumatic experience could occur. Nthabiseng Motsemme writes that while speaking about traumatic experiences may be cathartic, "it may also simply serve as a replay" of the event (2004, p. 14). Referring to Rosh White's work on Holocaust testimony, she argues that vocalizing such events can lead to feelings of humiliation and powerlessness (1998 in Motsemme, 2004, p. 915). Given this finding, the type of questions I asked in the interviews had the potential to threaten the emotional integrity of the participants. This caused ethical concerns. Like Phillips (2000, p. 29) I was concerned about the possibilities of discussions which would lead to re-traumatization or personal dissonance for participants.

In order to address the possibility of re-traumatization in the interviews, I turned to strategies employed by feminist researchers who deal directly with people who have experienced rape (Ahrens, Campbell, Sefl & Wasco, 2010). Consistent with Motsemme's and Herman's research, Ahrens et al (2010) found that participating in sexual violence research could be upsetting for people who have experienced rape. Their review, however,

also established that it could be "helpful [for participants] to be able to talk about their victimization and be heard and validated (2010, p. 62). In light of this, they set out to find in methods could lead to such positive outcomes (2010).

Ahrens et al (2010) concluded that several strategies could help researchers facilitate a positive research experience for participants: answering the research questions and sharing experiences with the participants, helping to normalize the interviewees' experience, giving participants adequate time to "tell their stories in their own words" and responding empathetically to the participant's emotional reactions. It was also found that practicing empathetic listening, whilst understanding your limitations as a researcher, could lead to beneficial outcomes. In this regard, Ahrens et al recommend that feminists link "linking participants to resources." (2010. 74)

In my interviews, I followed the above guidelines where applicable. Part of my participant information sheet listed support service contact details, in the event that the interview left any of my participants distressed. I generally followed up with research participants: most often immediately after the interview. If I thought it was needed, I also checked in with them in a few days after the interview, particularly if they had disclosed information they had not ever disclosed before or had struggled with a memory triggered by our discussion.

Overall, while the interviews did generate material that was difficult to speak about or painful to remember, from my observations, none of the participants were severely distressed. In situations where I observed the participants struggled – where the discussion turned to consent or distressing memories of unwanted sex - some participants (Unathi and Tshegofatso) elected to take a break from the interview. When this happened with Busisiwe, I took a step back and shifted the interview in a different direction, paying attention to her discomfort. At the end of our interview, reflecting on what she had said, Nolwazi visibly became more emotional. In this instance, after ending the interview, we continued talking and I shared more of my own experiences with her.

One of the things I struggled with whilst conducting this fieldwork was speaking about my own encounters of unwanted sex, struggles of labelling such experiences, and their overall emotional impact. Apart from Nicole and Zinhle, who were the participants I was least familiar with, I disclosed details of my experiences of unwanted sex, to all participants at some point. With some, I had mentioned it in casual conversations about what informed my research. With others, I mentioned it during the interview.

Upon further reflection, I realized that the reason I felt particularly uncomfortable speaking about this experience, was not because I was uncomfortable with my participants knowing about it. Rather, it was because I knew that speaking about it in these interviews would mean including it in this report and that unlike my participants, I would not have the option of anonymity. I was afraid of revealing any information which could be taken to mean I had experienced sexual violence, due to the stigma associated with such experiences. The interviewing experience also forced me to confront my fear that acknowledging the source of the emotional knowledge which informed my work could be used to discredit me as a "too-easily-hurt student" (Ahmed, 2014).

These feelings of anxiety encapsulate for me something important that Unathi and Tshegofatso both briefly mentioned in their interviews. They spoke about a sense of dissonance between what you know/believe and how you act/feel in everyday life: the contradictory space we exist in, in our encounters with competing discourses. For me, engaging in feminist activism has meant working hard to support people who have experienced sexual violence in dealing with their experience[10]: speaking/writing against discourses which shame and stigmatize people who have experienced sexual violence. While I fervently believe in the value of this work, this knowledge/understanding has not fully relieved me from struggling intensely with feelings of shame and self-blame regarding my experiences.

10 Where such support is needed. Here, I do not assume that everyone who experiences sexual violence necessarily needs/wants certain types of emotional/community/psychological support (Gavey, 1999).

This research would not be possible without the emotional risk my participant's took in agreeing to speak to me about their experiences. In this light, writing about my feelings uncomfortably and openly seems like the most fitting way to reciprocate their vulnerability. In addition, acknowledging the role of emotions in producing this work is intended as a rebuttal of the premise that writing about all of our "individual consciousness and suffering" is anti-intellectual and invalid (Ahmed, 2014).

On Friendship

In addition to emotional dynamics, friendship also played a role in this research (Matebeni, 2008, p. 92). This presented me with both gifts and challenges. On the one hand, apart from being rewarding for their own sake, my budding friendships with some of my research participants helped me build the kind of rapport that would not otherwise have been possible. Several of the participants indicated they chose to participate because of the familiarity we had established in BWC meetings or in other settings. The friendship dynamic also meant that after each interview had been recorded, the conversation it sparked tended to continue over the following days and weeks, in more casual fashions.

At times, friendship dynamics contributed to some complications. Although I made efforts not to disclose my research participants' identities to anyone, friendship dynamics within BWC impacted and compromised the extent to which I was successful in this. Some participants chose to disclose their participation in conversations at BWC meetings or on social media. In addition, I found that participants discussed their participation amongst each other. One instance in which this was evident was when two of the women I interviewed proposed having a joint follow-up interview[11] . In another instance, one participant alluded to having discussed her interview with a participant friend: when she sensed my slight discomfort, she continued to speak in very general terms, not prompt me to disclose anything that would violate her friend's privacy. Whilst all of this happened organically, it meant any ability to guarantee my participants' anonymity was further out of my control.

11 This was not possible due to time constraints.

Collecting and interpreting the data

Most initial interviews lasted between an hour and two hours. The follow-up interviews I did were significantly shorter, with only one of them lasting over an hour. The interviews were mostly conducted in English. Some of my Tswana or Sotho speaking participants would, on occasion, elaborate in Setswana or Sesotho.

While I relied heavily on audio recordings, I also made written notes about gestures and general impressions during some interviews. Borrowing from grounded theory, I used analysis of transcripts to further guide "empirical explorations" in interviews (Atkinson & Delamont, 2004, p. 833, in Harris, 2011, p. 47). After completing each interview, I thought about what themes had emerged which may be useful to bring up in other interviews. During the interviewing process, I was focused heavily on listening actively to what my participants said and thus, I struggled to really pay attention to all their gestures. I noted laughter, where participants seemed uncomfortable, and silent pauses, whilst I transcribed the interviews. I also took my own personal audio notes, reflecting on the interviews and on the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework.

Making selections

I chose to analyze the data through thematic analysis. In my preliminary analysis, emerging themes included virginity, sexual pleasure, language around experiences of unwanted sex, unequal power in heterosexual sex encounters, consent as being revocable and, the interplay between sexual expectations and love.

Selecting how to write about and quote from the interviews brought up unexpected discomfort. During my interviews, several participants disclosed and detailed experience which had been quite distressing for them. When I first started writing about these in the Findings section, I struggled to choose how to represent the stories that were shared with me. I recognized that whilst I had obtained consent to quote them in full, I was hesitant to include most details that had been shared with me. I think my hesitation was based on the belief that detailing graphically women' recollections of unwanted sex, particularly those that had caused distress for participants, could feed into the spectacle-of-

horror narrative Vetten speaks about (2016). This led me to paraphrase or summarise a lot of the accounts I included. Whilst solving one problem, this contributed to another, as I had wanted to, as far as is possible, represent the participant's stories through their own words. Striking a balance here was hard sometimes.

One of the critiques of academic literature on unacknowledged rape victims is that labelling someone an unacknowledged rape victim "privileges the perspective of the researcher over that of the research participant" (Johnstones, 2016, p.276). This sparked my consideration of an important ethical issue. Whilst I could not represent the participants completely in their own words in this report, I tried to write in a way which was faithful to what they had said. Where relevant, I included the context in which they spoke, particularly if what they said had been prompted by me sharing my own experiences with them. Also, I was careful to pay attention to the labels they used to describe their own experiences and to describe their relationships with other people, as far as possible not imposing labels that they had not used.

The criticism about the participant-researcher power dynamic are also what motivate my use of the term "unwanted sex" to describe the general scope of experiences my participants spoke about. As stated, I used the term "unwanted sex" to focus on a framing of sex and sexual violence which is not centered on consent. With this said, I acknowledge that unwanted sex is a label I have chosen to describe a specific phenomenon, which may "not necessarily reflect the identifications of the participants" (Johnstone, 2016, p. 275)

Findings

First impressions

The motivations to participate in this research varied for the women I interviewed. For some, the interview was a chance to learn more about themselves and to reflect on their experiences. For others, their reason for participation in the research indicated our investment in production of Blackwomancentric knowledge, in feminist work and as a way of community building.

> Nolwazi: "I wanted to do it after like, reconciling with my own things because I put myself aside and I recognize that this is another black woman who was doing important work, and so it's necessary for us to […] help another sister out."
>
> Zinhle: "I agreed to do the interview because I have been conducting my own interviews. People have been kind to me, so I also have to pay it forward. On a serious note, I have seen you around and I am aware of the work that you do with gender and this is another form of building networks amongst black females within and out of the university community. This gives me a chance to network."

Overall, the interviews revealed the complex terrain in which these Black women navigated their sexual lives. This highlighted a similar finding to Bennet, Boswell, Hinds, Metcalfe and Nganga at the University of Cape Town, regarding the environment Black women students are operating in. Bennet et al (2016) describe this context as one "where women's human rights and gender equality discourses prevail" while campus contexts are "marked with high levels of gender-based violence and a culture of hegemonic masculinity" (Bosch and Holland-Muter 2012 in Bennet et al., 2016). In such a context, "Black womanhood remains devalued" (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 37). What emerged in the interviews was evidence of this: that young women face multiple contradictory discourses as they move through the world (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012, p. 1730; Coffman et al., 2015, p. 136). In contextualizing the rest of this chapter, I will discuss a few themes that stuck with me.

One of the first themes I noticed was the social expectation for women to suppress or fear their own sexuality. Whilst Unathi had been encouraged to suppress her sexuality in respect of her family's Christian faith, Nicole spoke about receiving these messages from the media:

> N: "Most of media and the way you talk about sex, is always like this eeevil thing, that like, is your job to run away from. Like, you're designated as a female, to a job, because men aren't gonna run away, men are the predators and you're the prey, so your job is to avoid sex at absolutely all costs."

The pressures of compulsory heterosexuality were also brought up. A few participants mentioned feeling pressured to take men as romantic partners, some of them from as early as primary school. As Unathi pointed out, one's relationship status reflected on one's womanhood and appropriate femininity:

> U: "The way society views girls that have, that are in relationships - they are considered more of a woman, than us people, that don't have relationships and have big mouths."

Not having boyfriends, for Summer and Nolwazi in particular, led them to ask themselves what was "wrong" with them. In addition to this, it also became clear that within romantic relationships, having penetrative sex was a social expectation. When Nolwazi spoke to me about a period in her life where she was unable to have penetrative sex with her boyfriend, she mentioned,

> N: "Every time we were together, I'd still have the fear that he would either cheat on me and eventually leave me."

For Tshegofatso, "giving" your partner sex was part of her understanding of womanhood. She also indicated that men were expected to be able to sexually satisfy women:

> T: “It's a thing that when you're a woman, you're meant to be able to give your man sex all the time, and how he wants it. And as a man, you're also supposed to be able to do things to this woman, there's nothing worse than a man knowing another man is eating his woman, like, it would kill him.”

Nicole encapsulated the weight the expectations of sex in relationships had on her, in relation to her asexuality/demisexuality:

> N: “There is a very long time that I'm just not feeling sexual, at all, and I can't explain it, I can't like understand it, there's not a mood that I can get into to make myself sexual. […] it's just a thing, I'll have months where I'm just like I'm, I'm fine. Then I'll have other months that are completely different. So there were times where I would be like okay, this is a time in which I should be doing this, because it's like - because it's like my duty as a girlfriend or whatever, but then, it doesn't - my body is just not into it. “
>
> G: Was that - had you already been feeling pressure from like a partner or was it like an internal …
>
> N: “No, definitely internal, it's insane how much internal stuff there is. Like, *exhales* it's, it's awful how much men don't need to manipulate us *laughs* because we already have the voice in [our] head before they say it. Like, we already have the manipulation in our heads before they even try do stuff.”

At the same time as they expressed being socially expected to be in heterosexual relationships and to have sex within these, participants also expressed that having sexual desire, having sex or in other ways, being seen to be inappropriately sexual was seen as deviant and had negative social repercussions for women. Nolwazi recounted having a classmate, in Grade 6, who was classified as a “hoe” because “she was dating boys in high school”.

For Nicole, the prevalence of sex-shaming attitudes manifested in feelings of guilt when she experienced desire.

> N: “So even though I'm in an asexual space a lot, when I'm not in that space […] the first thing I feel is guilt. Which is weird! Like men aren't taught to feel guilty, but as a woman you're especially taught to feel guilty. I don't know why.”

For Tshegofatso, the negative repercussions for women who were sexually active were evidenced in several instances. In one instance, in her early teens, she was beaten by women in her family after it emerged that she had had sex. In a second instance, she expressed her recent observations about how men spoke about women they were having sex with.

> T: “I'm realizing that boys are the biggest gossipers because I hear how these boys I chill with, talk about the women they fuck and I'm always like wondering, what if they do same about me and I start guarding, like which men I'll start fucking now, do I wanna fuck anyone that anyone knows, you know? Those dynamics came into play.”

Zinhle came to experience the stigma that women face for being deemed inappropriately sexual, when her friend tried to caution her against going to staying at her lover’s campus residence.

> Z: “The men [at his residence] developed this this reputation for demeaning women and all those things, so largely women who were considered to frequent those spaces were deemed a certain way […] so this idea of me going to his res, by my friend, was seen as very taboo.”

Unathi reflected on the unequal power relations that result in this stigmatization of women.

> U: “[As a woman], you basically take the burden of the person you're having sex with, and hopefully they take the same, but that's not usually how it translates, because we obviously know that the power that men have over women, can never equate - women can never have the power that men have.”

The final theme I will discuss the ways in which women used sex for their own gain and challenged the power dynamics between men and women.

In one phase, Tshegofatso recalls:

> T: “These niggas think - like the same way you think you can fuck around women is the same way I can fuck around with you. So I'd have sex with niggas who'd be so in love and then just fucking leave. I was just at that stage where I was like hoe is life. In first year.”

For Summer, having sex with men was “a power thing”.

> S: “With women it's completely different. Like with men I’m more assertive and I’m more, I’ d even say I’m dominating.”

One of the ways women operationalized sex was as a source of validation. Tshegofatso said,

> T: “I also used sex a lot to cover up that that ugly phase I had. […] and maybe that's why I became so careless and reckless with the kinds of men I would have sex with. Because I felt like the only thing I could offer, right, was my body […] so sex became also a very important thing in my engagement, in my romantic engagement with the opposite sex.”

After being teased and shamed for not having had sex or romantic relationships throughout school, sex became important to Summer:

> S: "I reclaimed a lot of my power through sex. or I thought I was, at least., you know, and also just going back to, just always hearing that I won't have - I won't be good enough for a man, and all those boys in high school and just like, always just being not wanted."

Overall, thematic findings correlated with other research, which outlined that, in regards to sexual interactions, women are limited but not defined by social norms on gender and sex. Whilst not an exhaustive representation of my findings, the themes discussed set the context for the rest of this discussion, which will delve further into findings on related to sex, sexual violence, consent and violence discourses.

In the following three sections, I discuss the interview material in relation to three issues. First, I analyze the political implications of emotion, arguing for a recognition of the role emotion plays in regards to sexual consenting practice, in instances of unwanted sex. The second issue I discuss is that of the body's language. I explore this through two frames: first, how Black women's bodies are read through a sexualizing lens and then, through an exploration of the possibilities of communicating consent through non-verbal language. Thirdly, I look at the complexity of meaning making practices, pertaining to experiences of unwanted sex. In particular, I look at practices of labelling such experiences, discussing the personal motivations behind different meaning making processes. I discuss these issues in relation to prominent feminist rape discourse.

Catching feels: the relationship between consent, desire and emotion

In this section, I consider what my research participant's narrations of their experiences of unwanted sex can reveal about the relationship between emotion, consent and desire, which I believe has been taken for granted in hegemonic feminist rape discourse. I make the argument that it is crucial for feminists to move toward more complex understandings of consenting/nonconsenting practice in intimate sexual

relationships. In arguing for this, I shall reflect on the factors my research participants discussed as influencing them in situations where they did not want to have sex.

Crucial to this analysis, I take into account feminist work on politicizing emotion/recognizing emotion as political. As Sara Ahmed has argued, emotions are important in that they "work to shape the surfaces of individual and collective bodies." (2004, p. 1). Whilst emotion has been dismissed as being "beneath" thought and reason, Ahmed makes the case that emotionality is a valid framework through which power relations can be analysed, as it foregrounds networks of "meaning and value" (2004, p. 4). With this in mind, I aim to underscore how emotions rupture the consent-desire conflation in practice.

In my fieldwork, one of the first instances wherein a disconnect between desire and consent was evidenced was when I asked Zinhle if she had ever refused a sexual act she desired. Her response reflected Humphreys et al's (2016) finding that sometimes, consent was contingent not on desire, but on some other circumstance:

> Z: "I often...do want to do certain things, but obviously, like the conditions must be right. So it's not enough that I just, like, want to do it. So if you are not like, meeting, the criteria or like the conditions, so if I do want to have sex with you but you have not, you know, brought contraception, I don't want to do it."

Zinhle also spoke a lot about persuasion and negotiation as a part of her sexual experiences. Asked how her sexual partners respond when she did not want to participate in a sexual activity, she said,

> Z: "It's differed, but mostly it's very - it takes a while for them to get it, kuthi I'm not doing this - so there's been like a lot of persuasion. [...] I've had to explain[...] I haven't been able to just say "No, I'm not doing this" and then like "oh, okay, cool"."
>
> Z: "It's like "Just once." - you know, that negotiation – "We'll buy the morning after pill", you know, those things."

When I asked her if she has ever had her refusal not respected, she said,

> Z: No, but the thing is...ugh, it's not an easy question because the first no, initially, isn't listened to, so you have to keep on saying no, even like, a shove or something like that."
>
> Z: "I'm like, I prefer for us to have um, sex within the confines of some form of intimate relationship – like, can we establish an intimate relationship? Right? So people will be like "Oh no, I'd like to establish an intimate relationship but let's have sex now" and then I'm like ""No, no.""

This atmosphere of constant negotiation and persuasion led her to eventually agree to have unwanted sex. This occurred in a situation where she did not want to have sex without a condom.

> G: Have you ever said yes to a sexual act you did not want to do?
>
> Z: Yes...yes.
>
> G: Why?
>
> Z: Because I was just like tired like of negotiating right - I was like "Yeah, okay".
>
> G: And what was the negotiation around, the act itself or the contraception issue?
>
> Z: Um, it was around the contraception issue.

When we delved deeper into her reasons for consenting, she said her decision was based on previous encounters with the same partner. I asked her what she thinks would have happened had she refused:

> Z: "So because I know this is a situation where I had said no, prior, right, I think it would have just been the same..."
>
> G: "How was that prior no received?"
>
> Z: "So it was, I - I can't say that it was well received because there was some negotiation, tried some persuasion, and things like that, right, but I fought it. What then annoyed me is the fact that, it kept occurring. Yeah, so I think this would have been the same thing…"

In my interview with Nicole, she revealed that her intermittent sexual desire sometimes caused her confusion. Her shifts between feeling sexual desire sometimes and not feeling it at others, sometimes for months at a time, made it difficult for her to always be sure about whether or not she wanted to have sex. Asked whether she had ever consented to unwanted sexual activity, she said,

> N: "Umm... I don't think so, but I've definitely said yes to sexual acts I wasn't sure about."
>
> G: "Mm…"
>
> N: "I was just like, I don't know, but I don't know if I have the energy to fight it and I don't have the arguments against it anymore...which I, I think is not - It's scary to think that, like...it's not actual consent if you just don't have a reason to *not* consent. Uhmm *laughs a little* but I think, when it comes to sexuality, it's weird especially when you're young, cause you don't know what you're consenting to, if that makes sense."

This evidence of ambivalence brings into question whether it is useful to use dichotomous categories conflating desire and consent (consensual-wanted and non-consensual) to evaluate the acceptableness of sexual interactions, as hegemonic feminist rape discourse would have us do. Such binary conceptions, as indicated, would not leave room for experiences of ambivalence and confusion (Humphreys et al., 2016; Harris, 2011).

Nicole also spoke critically about the formal sex education she received in high school, describing its focus on the need for women to avoid predators as "rape-proofing" and "victim-preparation therapy".

> N: "The amount of self-educating I've had to do about sex is just not acceptable."

The lack of adequate sex education meant that she was underprepared to face situations where she did not want to have sex with romantic partners. She also indicated feeling pressure to always have to explain and justify why she did not want to have sex.

N: "… When I didn't wanna have sex, it was very awful to have to deal with. Because all they tell you is "No, just say no and if he cares about you, he'll stop asking and if he doesn't you should just dump him." But that's not what it is, because sex is discussion, it's not a question, if that makes sense, in relationships. You can't just be like "Sex? No." then move on."

N: "Like, guys want nine billion reasons. They wanna have a ten-point plan, they want a forward structure […] Like as someone like me, whose been focused a lot on staying away from sexuality, because I need to spend a lot of time on work, it's - the transition is an emotional one, it's not just a – like, I can't just turn my penis on or that sort of thing. It's difficult. So that means I have to give reasons, and like, they never tell you how to give reasons or how to engage, or how to talk about it. It's just like "No, don't worry, just say no" and it's - "you don't need to give reasons. Cause like, you don't. Cause you'll be fine - it'll be easy." And that's just not true. At all."

Having to explaining her lack of desire to partners exhausted Nicole.

N: It got to the point where I was done with relationships, not because I was like tired of relationships. I was just tired of the sex conversation, cause it always ends up the same way […]"

G: How does it end up?

N: "It always ends up with - eugh - no one can understand why you don't want to have sex, if they do. And vice versa."

She elaborated on the types of responses she had received when she expressed not wanting to have sex:

N: "It's always the same, it's a rearrangement of one of [these] in some concoction or formation. and usually, that's why I would either avoid or just push through. Cause it was just - it was frustrating, you know. It's always "How will you know if you - we - haven't tried it" or […] "Well, you have to do it eventually, so eventually might as well be now.""

She added,

> N: “It’s all really huge logical fallacies […] And the worst part is you try and break those down and then the other one pops up, and you're just like okay [inaudible] you get tired.”

For both Zinhle and Nicole, the work of explaining their reasons for not wanting to have sex is tiring to the extent that they chose, in specific instances, go ahead with the act or in Nicole’s case, to, at other times, avoid it all together.

Fear also played a huge role in how the women said they responded to unwanted sexual advances. How fear mediates women’s decisions first came up when I asked Zinhle how she responds to street harassment. Depending on how she feels on the day, she said, she “swears or calls out everyone who does it”.

> Z: “It can be very exhausting, but if I've had a bad day, everyone - each and every person who tries it, can get it.
>
> G: You're swearing at them?
>
> Z: Yeah, yeah, and I often have to caution myself because I know that town is very dangerous so you don't wanna - you know - resist it too openly so you'll do like gestures, you'll just take your hand back *swatting hand gesture* or things like that, but sometimes, it really is, “Stop, fotsek” or “What are you doing, what do you think this is?””
>
> G: So why would you say you can't resist it too openly
>
> Z: Um, because, Black women aren't safe, they aren't protected. People often protect perpetrators, so even communally, there's this idea that Black women don't own their bodies, so anyone seen to be taking that ownership back - it's just like, what are you doing? So if anything, you're asking for it. It just goes back to victim blaming. So I often have to negotiate with myself to see, is it really something that - am I willing to die for it? Because it could easily get to a point where you're dying for it.”

Tshegofatso also described the impact of fear, when I asked her if she had ever consented when she did not want to have sex. In that instance whilst she was attracted to

the man, she also felt pressured to, because he had a car and she was depending on him to get a lift home. She feared that if she didn't have sex with him, it would compromise her ability to get home safely.

> G: And what were your reasons for saying yes?
>
> T: "Uhhh *sighs* I needed to get home…I knew you liked me, and yeah, I thought you were cute, but I just didn't want to have sex with you at that time."
>
> G: Yeah
>
> T: "But now that we in this situation, and I need to get home, why not, kind of a thing."
>
> G: What do you think would have happened had you said no?
>
> T: "I think he would have – men - I've been in several encounters and I know of several friends who have experienced men being dicks because you don't want to give them sex."
>
> G: Yeah
>
> T: "They will leave you at the party, or they will chase you out of their car, and I'm also like, okay, I'm quite far from home, not too far but a twenty-minute walk, but it's at night, ke ngwanyana (I'm a girl), I just got mugged a couple of weeks ago, I ain't trying to."

Generally speaking, Tshegofatso related this experience to the general experience of womanhood.

> T: "[As a woman] you're constantly negotiating - it's one big negotiation, you always have to put something down, it's a... you take something, I take something."

Nolwazi also recounted agreeing to a sexual act she did not want to do. For her, the fear of social repercussions of refusal played a role in her decision:

N: “I felt obligated, because we had chemistry, and […] like we were making out, so it felt like...and we were vibing, so it was just like, “Yeah, well, we've gotten to this point. Why would we like - you need to finish what you started” and that's what it was.”

G: Was that something they said explicitly or was that just...

N: “They said it, explicitly.”

G: Oh, okay. What do you think would have happened if you had said no?
N: “In that particular instance...I think I was just afraid that, at the time, word would get around that “Ah, this girl is a waste of time” and that it would ruin my chances of having any other relationships, with any other guy who happened to frequent that space with those people.””

What also comes up in Nolwazi’s example is what Wendy Holloway (in Phillips, 2000) terms the Male Sex Drive discourse. Part of this discourse holds that for men “the desire to have sex is a strong, almost overwhelming drive” (Gavey, 2005, p. 104) and that men experience unbearable physical pain if they do “not ejaculate once aroused” (Phillips, 2000, p. 59). Whilst this discourse is also evident in other participant’s narratives of their sexual encounters, in relation to consent, it is articulated most lucidly by Tshegofatso:

T: “Consent is also seen like once you say yes, it's yes, you can't change your mind and say no. I've been many positions where, yeah, I was enjoying it and I wanted to stop, but I felt like, even when I said stop, my ‘no’ wasn't taken seriously. Precisely because, we had agreed, and you can't change your mind in the middle, the contract has been signed. We must...you know?

G: Have they said those words?

T: “What?”

G: have you ever verbalized it and then had someone say that?

T: “Yeah! Several, ah, several times.”

With Summer, what stood out in our conversation was the circulation of shame/shaming as a consequence for not engaging in sex or in romantic relationships with men. At the centre of this, was the pressure to perform (compulsory) heterosexuality. As early as Grade 5, Summer recalled being the only girl in her friend group who didn't have a boyfriend:

> G: Was it a big deal that you didn't have a boyfriend?
>
> S: "Yeah, it was a huge deal! […] My sister told me - I was 11 - she told me that it means I'm gay if I don't have a boyfriend and I freaked out. Oh shit! […] and then I went through so much time just trying to induce these feelings."

Later in her schooling career, she began dating boys.

> S: "I was always just dating boys, and more because it was like heterosexuality was the most natural and easiest thing and everyone around me, and even when I had my first boyfriend, and my second and my third, and my fourth… *laughs* it was just like, it's expected - not because I actually really wanted to."

Once she had a boyfriend, the pressure to have sex with him began. In one incident, in high school, she was mocked by her boyfriend and his friends, after she refused to have sex with him at a sleepover.

> S: […] I can't even remember the word he used but like kea bora (I'm boring), ke steif. I didn't want to have sex and he's going around telling his friends that - and there's nothing wrong with not wanting to have sex with a person - but yeah.... I was the joke.

Later in our conversation, she referred to an earlier conversation we had, where she had told me in her first years at university, she was shamed, online, for not being sexually active:

> S: “I told you about that time I got dragged for not having sex […] In the same way that some people ask like “have you graduated [yet]?” Mine was “have you had sex yet?” […] Everybody knew that I was a virgin. *Everybody* knew! […] All my friends had had sex and most of them had had sex in high school. Everybody knew!”
> G: […] Did it feel like you were walking around with a giant V written on you?
> S: “Yes, and also because I wasn't dating and I wasn't just...I wasn't sexual...so I got so tired of that label.”

For a period of time, she started going on dates often:

> S: “At least twice a month, if not every weekend, I was going on a blind date. Because people were just like "nah, there's something wrong.""

After she had gone home with a man she met on a date, he fell asleep and she could not get home, so she decided to sleep at his house. The next morning, when he wanted to have sex with her, she agreed.

> S: “[…] then the next morning he tried to have sex and I was just like "Look, take this motherfucking virginity!""

Summer said her first time having sex with a man was painful. Elaborating on the experience she said:

> S: *laughing* I was just like, when do we finish? cause I'm not having sex. I’m...sex is being had...

Overall, being ridiculed for not having (hetero) sex was confusing and frustrating:

> Summer: “It became an amalgamation of so many things that it shouldn't have been […] I didn't think it was a bad thing and I didn't understand why I

wasn't being respected - my decision wasn't being respected and I was a joke because of it, and I was called childish and stuff like that like that."

S: "It was shitty, and at some point, I was ashamed."

While Summer had sex with women before this encounter, she did not feel comfortable in speaking about it at the time, due to cultural attitudes of homo/queerphobia.

G: […] So you had sex with the woman before that?

S: "Yes, more than one" *laughs*

G: So you didn't feel you could contribute with that experience with this peer pressure situation?

S: "Yeah. I was also just like struggling with my sexuality and I didn't know where to place myself [...] it was just so confusing. And also just the stigma of being gay…"

As several authors noted, sexual relationships tend to be "integral to young people's identities" and further, sex and dating are spoken of interchangeably (Sofika & Van der Riet, 2016; Jewkes et al., 2007). Sofika and Van der Riet point to sexual relationships as a site where young people are exposed to and reproduce risk (2016). As mentioned, most participants indicated that sex was an expectation within romantic relationships. During our conversation, Tshegofatso connected issues of consenting to expectations of sex within relationships:

T: "You must think of, historically where we come from - Black families and how rape has been so normalised and consent has never really been a thing. Once you're in a relationship, you are bound to... you know. There's comments some days, my boyfriend will say, "Yoh babe, if hao mfe, ke mang yo tlo mfang?" (If you don't give me [sex], who will?). So immediately, the burden is put on your shoulders and you say, I don't want to get cheated on, I want to keep my boyfriend and he needs sex.

> [...] By virtue of me saying ke jola le ene (I'm dating him) consent ke eo (there's the consent)"."

This investment in maintaining hetero-relationships falls under what Phillips labels the Love Conquers All discourse (2000). This discourse posits that "hetero-relationships (and ultimately marriage) are central to women's wellbeing and that every woman needs a man in order to find true fulfilment." (2000, p. 73). In this context, "keeping" a man becomes a primary occupation, which appears to take priority over one's own sexual desire and ultimately, can influence whether or not consent is given.

In several instances, feelings of romantic love also heavily influenced participant's experiences of sex. Tshegofatso's first experience of sexual intercourse took place when she was thirteen, with a man who was six years older. In referring to this experience, she described it as traumatic, explaining that she felt pressured into it and that in addition, she did not quite understand what was happening.

While she was visiting the man, he had asked her to help him with something in the kitchen. They started kissing. Shortly afterwards, when he started to penetrate her, she asked him to stop, because it was painful:

> Tshegofatso: "And then he stopped. Like I didn't know that was sex. I kind of knew it was sex but I was like...ahh, guys…"
> G: It couldn't have been sex
> T: "It couldn't have been sex, maybe ke sex mara gase yone, gase yone (maybe it's sex but it's not sex, that's not sex)"

At the same time, she expressed feeling "in love" with the man. When I asked her what the relationship had been between them, she recalled:

> T: "We were vibing, we were vibing, and he knew I liked him. I'd come there to where he's staying […]and I'd check up on him and stuff like that. I'm 13.

> He's 19. He looks like Ludacris, I am so in love, you can't tell me shit, I'm smitten!"

Nolwazi also described her first sexual encounter – which she labelled "coerced" - as being influenced by love. She was sixteen and her partner was approximately five years older than her. They had a romantic history.

> Nolwazi: "He was actually my first love, so we had that like weird on and off energy, chemistry, still-meet-up vibe."
>
> N: "Actually...we had already broken up at that point. Me being an idiot at the time, because I was a child, and because he had such a hold over me, emotionally."

Whilst she emphasized the emotional hold he had over her, she also mentioned the impact of the age difference[12] between them.

> N: "I think he took advantage of the fact that at the time, I was still not as mature as I am right now. It made it easier for him to justify [unprotected sex], the fact that he was older, and he had experience and that he would obviously [not] do something that would jeopardize my health."

Busisiwe also described her first experience of intercourse as unwanted, especially as her boyfriend at the time as "forceful" and "manipulative":

> B: "I wasn't consulted with what I wanted, or whatever. It was just whatever he wanted."

With this same partner, she said,

> B: "Also there have been times where - I don't know - where it just happened so I allowed it to happen […] I wasn't even sure what was going on to be honest."

12 Whilst she never spoke about it in the same way Nolwazi did, age difference may have influenced Tshegofatso's first sexual intercourse experience. She noticeably repeated the age difference – that she was thirteen and he was nineteen – whilst relaying the experience.

Asked if she had any reasons for not refusing or trying to stop these encounters, she attributed this to her general complacency:

> B: "I think my complacency was taken for acceptance."

As we delved deeper into the factors that influenced these encounters, I asked her if there was any fear which led to her remaining in the relationship with this partner.

> B: "Fear is not the term I would use. No, it wasn't fear. The reason why I stayed was - I was like; this is the person that deflowered me."

Busisiwe's admission here reified the concept of virginity 'loss' – 'deflowering' - as an important moment. In several interviews, first-time sex had been mentioned in detail – impressing its significance upon me. In analyzing the data, I found Busisiwe's elaboration about this particular moment to flesh out the kinds of meaning that this moment had and how this connected to sexual desire, love and consent. Her experience echoed the way a few of the other participants understood how (particularly first-time) sex ought to be – sacred, special, occurring within a loving relationship – as well as revealing the discourse of prioritizing romantic heterosexual love as a form of emotional security. Busisiwe said,

> B: "I wanted the first person that I slept with to be someone that I loved and he loved me. And not that, necessarily we have to get married or whatever. But I just wanted it to be real… So it's like you work so hard at making - you know, you just want it to count [...] And it was also at a time when my idea of virginity was very rigid."
>
> G: What did it mean to you then?
>
> B: "[…] It was like that transition going from girl to woman and you're opening your gate - *sings* avulekile amasango - *laughs*"

It was important that she was in a loving relationship with the first person she had sex with:

> B: “It was so important to me that the first person that I slept - I knew I was gonna go out hoe-is-life, after number one, but it was very important to me that the first person that I slept with was someone that like [I loved and loved me]- because I'm giving myself to you, literally.”

First-time sex also evoked the fear of unreciprocated attachment: this had influenced Busisiwe’s decision not to have sex with someone else prior to being in this relationship:

> B: “I wanted to wait for the right one, which is why - because if I didn't want to wait, it would've happened when I was like 14 or something.”
>
> B: “Before [the ex- partner], I almost slept with someone else, and this was like just going to be a hook up. I liked them, they were cool, they were smart, they were attractive and stuff, you know, but then I was like, noooo. Like I was also afraid that I'd get attached - like sleeping with you now, I'd get attached to you. So I wanted that - in case that happens - I'm already with you, so it's okay if I get attached.”

Overall, the experience of unwanted sex left Busisiwe disappointed. Her experiences, particularly in relation to the expectations and attachments to love, were the opposite of what she had hoped.

> B: “The sad thing is like, on the one part, I really did like this boy a lot - I thought I loved him and stuff. But like I also realized that like […] what's happening here is not okay though. This boy doesn't make me feel like I thought I was supposed to feel, when in love.”

These disclosures of fear, love, ambivalence and shame point toward a need for an expansion within sexual violence discourse which seriously considers the sphere of emotions. Particularly as feminists, we must work to dispel the conflation that consenting and wanting always correlate as this creates the inaccurate impression that sexual decision

making, particularly within intimate relationships is straightforward and not affected by emotion.

Following Stannard's work on the emotional dynamics of consent, it was unsurprising that romantic love was shown to have the significant status participants gave it (2016). The attachments love represented – security, validation, fulfilment – appeared to have substantial sway in how participants reacted when faced with unwanted sexual advances. On the other hand, Nicole's reflections on feeling ambiguity in sexual interactions – not being sure whether or not one desires a sexual act - evidenced Sianne Ngai's argument that negative, noncathartic emotions are also key in structuring and maintaining the social world (2005).

Acknowledging the dynamic of fear – the female fear factory - in particular proved illuminating as it connects to structural issues (Gqola, 2015). In Tshegofatso's case – in the instance where she had sex in order to make sure she could get home safely – it could be argued that an additional dynamic was her relative economic vulnerability (as it coalesced in conjunction with her gender status). In Summer's case, I argue, compulsory heterosexuality intensified the shaming she experienced, as it limited her to only feeling she could disclose details of her hetero-sexual experiences.

Bodies

But what about the NO I uttered with my mouth
Not once but twice
And the please no I said with my body
What about the tear that ran down my face as I lay stiff with shock
In what sick world is that sex
In what sick world is that consent

- Extract from the poem "I am Khanga" by Fezekile Kuzwayo

-

In this section, I discuss the fieldwork discussions in relation to two aspects of the non-verbal: 1) how Black women's bodies are sexualized, seen as indicators of their sexuality and 2) whether they believe it is possible to express consent without verbal language. I begin by documenting experiences of sexualisation to reveal the ways in which consent to sexual advances is societally considered to be implied through a woman's body. In the second part, I speak to Halley's (2016) observation that affirmative consent models, considered progressive within hegemonic feminist discourse, are reliant on consenting through verbal language. I speak to Halley 's idea (2016) in conjunction with Motsemme's (2004) critique of the prioritization of verbal language as a way of knowing. With these arguments in mind, I discuss my participants' views on whether consent can be communicated nonverbally. In considering all these ideas jointly, I critique the heteropatriarchal notion that women's bodies automatically signify their consent, without prescribing that consent ought to always be communicated verbally.

Body Conscious

As Gqola has made clear, the female fear factory manifests in women's awareness of their bodies as "dirty", excessive", needing to be "disciplined, hidden and worked on obsessively" (2015, p. 39). In addition to this, the female fear factory entails governing women's movements and their sexualities (Gqola, 2015, p. 92). In addition to governance of movement Gqola (2015, p.146) and Phillips (2000) write that women are viewed as perpetual sex objects, which in turn, leads to the policing of their sexualities. One of the ways this happens is through policing clothing, which connects to the idea that for women, the exposure of flesh is an expression of sexual desire – hence the rape myth that wearing revealing clothing is "asking for it".

With this in mind, in my interviews, I asked questions speaking to the issue of body presentation and sexualization. At different junctures, the participants spoke about ways in which they had come to understand what their bodies meant in terms of how they moved in the world. Three participants, Tshegofatso, Summer and Zinhle spoke particularly about how different sites impact their experiences, particularly in regards to being in town. What their responses had in common was that, in the city centre, they became more conscious

how their bodies would be received. Summer was particularly aware that her unorthodox presentation – including having visible tattoos– influenced the intensity of the harassment she received in public spaces. Zinhle spoke specifically about experiencing street harassment: she spoke to an awareness that "town is very dangerous" and that in this context she had to curtail herself.

The city was an important site for Tshegofatso:

> T: "I'm a city girl. So I spent a lot of my time, in the taxi, at the taxi rank going to the city centre."

In speaking about sexual attention and its potential to be validating, she mentioned:

> T: Everybody wants recognition of some sort. so yes, I'm no longer largely dependent on people, but I do like the validation I receive from them.
>
> T: And for me, it's - the validation is different, not to necessarily affirm. It's to say "how does my presence evoke some sort of …like how do I agitate you?", So when I wear short dresses, and I get into the taxi, and when I have to come out, I'm not even trying to pull my dress down, I'm bending out and I wanna know, how am I making you feel? And I love it!

In other interviews, sexualization was discussed through the idea that participants needed to cover up. For Busisiwe, she had managed to negotiate these expectations by speaking openly about it.

> Busisiwe: "[My family] don't like me wearing short things, because they would say that noo, like, you know, the world is dangerous, whatever whatever."
>
> B: "I addressed that with my mom recently, I was saying that the problem isn't with me, but it's with other people who sexualize me. Against my will. You know, so yeah, she understood that."

Unathi, speaking about her relationship with womanhood as a category, recalled always being encouraged to sit with her legs closed. Her description of this signaled a connection between expectations of her femininity with modesty, which had been emphasized as a way to be a "respectable girl" in her Christian upbringing.

> U: "When I was young, for instance, even now, I'm sitting with my legs open. I just sit with my legs open, it's nothing sexual, but I remember my brother always used to say close your legs, close your legs, close your legs, and that ...and I always felt like less of a woman because I can't do this woman thing- I don't know how to perform this woman thing correctly."

For Nicole, being sexualized during puberty led to extreme discomfort. She recounted the first time she noticed it:

> N: "It was other girls who were the first to like, to actively sexualize me and it was like, I was still uncomfortable, like that's what was sad. There was a first part of me that was like "okay that's cool" and then another part of me that was like "Like, if this is what it is, now I have to spend all my time hiding it, like this is my new job". You can already feel it, I was like yeah, this is what I was trained to do, cause this is what you're trained to do, like the moment you're sexually appealing, like now it's your job to protect and put it under lock and key and hide it."

She spoke about investing a lot of time picking out her outfits, in order to avoid 'sexualizing herself'. This included buying lots of oversized clothes: she struggled with not being able to wear "pants without it being sexualized".

> N: "I can look nice but still having to try to think of how do I balance - how do I balance the me looking nice but also, this could be too much. [...] That's the problem, it feels like it's just this thing I have to hide just in case I turn someone on by mistake, like I have to be careful. *laughs* which doesn't make sense."

Whilst at first, she tried to hide her body to deflect attention, she later realized that sexualization was not contingent on what she wore.

> N: “I've been using the "try not to sexualize yourself" bridge - that doesn't work.”
>
> G: Why doesn't it work?
>
> N: “Cause men choose to sexualize you because of your existence. Your existence is sexual. Just the way, just the way whiteness is violent in its existence before its racist, like femaleness is sexual in its existence.”
>
> N: “The problem was not me […]. there's no, there is physically nothing I can do, there's nothing I can wear […] It's my gender, and my sex specifically that's doing this, and I can't throw that away.”
>
> N: “As a woman, if you're walking around in any scenario, you're sexualized, going to get bread, in pyjamas, or going to like - I don't think like sexuality is evil, but I started to loathe it and hate it because it was becoming a barrier for my engagement and for my success.”

She said she had realized early on that sexualization had a negative impact.

> N: “Probably one thing that became obviously like with gender, was that I had to try avoid sexualizing at all costs, even if I liked it, even if I wanted it, cause I wanted to be taken seriously.”

Like Nicole, Busisiwe’s experience of bodily change during puberty signified that she needed to behave differently.

> B: “I had no curves so then suddenly they came and it was like this thing just brings so much attention. It’s nice having it but it's nice having it when I want it. At times I’m not tryna.... but you can't turn it off!! is the thing, so people are just attracted by this thing.”

B: “It's confusing and then, now you have to start thinking about like when you interact with men […], you have to be more conscious of your interactions with men, more than with women […] I'm a very open and friendly person, right, that's just in my nature. But then now when I'm like interacting with men, I have to be more conscious of like - because it can be interpreted as like, I'm open for shela-rizing. You know, and I'm not. or I may be, it depends on the moment, but I'm not always.”

B: “I mean, I'm always sexualized. And there are times where I don't mind and times where I do mind, um, the times when I mind it's when it happens in a way where it infringes, when it makes me feel uncomfortable.”

Beyond verbal language

In the second part of this section, I turn to beliefs about non-verbal consent. I asked some of the participants if they believed that consent could be communicated non-verbally. For Zinhle, this was a difficult question.

Z: “I do think so. But yeah...it's very tricky […]. So I do understand that there are other forms of expression. Just like besides language and besides like verbal communications, right. And I think this question is speaking to sexual activities in particular, so the gestures. I don't think that consent can be implied.”

Z: “I think that it can be communicated through the body. but it would still have to be with the aid of either words or something else. So even if I take off my shirt, it doesn't mean I now want to get it. That's not implied consent. If I come closer, and maybe I start like, rubbing myself, umm, against you, it may be an indication of what it is that I want to do, but still for me to fully express that message, I would have to rely on like a verbal communique. Like if I can speak, why would then I not say, “let's do it.”? ”

Conversely, Busisiwe and Nolwazi spoke about the possibilities of consent being communicated non-verbally,

B: “I think consent - I don't even have to open my mouth for you to see whether I'm consenting or not. When you see that I'm frowning when you're touching me, unless I need to sneeze, like don't touch me. Clearly I don't want you touching me and that’s - that's me not giving my consent, you know what I mean.”

G: Um, do you think that [positive] consent can ever be communicated non verbally?

B: “[…] you can tell when someone is into you by the way that they look at you, the way that they touch you, body language. When I'm sitting with you, if I'm facing you, or my body is turned towards you. You know, and I'm engaging in you, I'm going into your space, you're going into my space. You can see that it's something that I'm actively doing it, of my free will. That is consent. The minute I stop doing those things, even though I did them before, then I'm revoking my consent.”

Nolwazi said,

N: “Consent is someone communicating their participation in an act and the communication is not limited to verbal communication. The communication is also not limited to the fact that it must happen at the beginning, and not in the middle. Or not even at the end, or halfway or whatever the case it.”

N: “It doesn't always have to be verbal - I think there's a way, that we can consent to something, you know where, he would maybe touch a certain part of my body and wait for me to respond, and should I respond in a way that says, “no don't do that,” he will not do that. like**,** so we've signed a contract.”

N: “So consent is also about reading someone's body, body language - it's important, you can't tell me that you cannot feel when someone tenses up, because you're doing something. That's a lie. That's when you know that it ceases to be consensual, it's not consensual. It's not normal for someone to tense up because now you're on top of them. It's not normal for you to now feel the need to thrust harder and faster, that in itself you're saying, “Okay, I get that you're feeling uncomfortable but I wanna finish” Right? So yes, it's, it's us agreeing to participate in something, that is not limited to a verbal communication.”

These findings present a rebuttal to the idea that in cases of unwanted sex, particularly through the legal system, expressing "utmost resistance" is the most valid indicator of a woman's unwillingness to have sex (Gqola, 2015). This also speaks against the valorization of verbal language as a way of communicating desires (Motsemme, 2015).

Those participants who expressed that it was possible to give consent non-verbally highlighted the importance in recognizing non-verbal body language and taking this seriously in anti-rape feminist discourse. This also addresses models which attribute sexual violence, particularly between intimate sexual partners, to miscommunication (Humphreys et al. 2016).

Given the frequency and everydayness of sexual harassment some participants spoke about, it is crucial to note that a recognition of non-verbal body language should be supported by a critique of the ways in which Black women's bodies in particular have been the basis of constructing misogynoiristic stereotypes of hypersexuality and of justifying sexual violence against us. This requires an acknowledgement of the way colonial legacies influence the treatment of Black women contemporarily (Lewis, 2011; Tamale, 2011).

Understanding Experience

In this section, I discuss the process of making sense of experiences of unwanted sex, as outlined by my participants. In this, I appraise meaning-making processes wherein verbal language is central, as well as looking at alternatives to this. In this, guided by Motsemme (2004), I argue for the de-prioritization of making meaning of such experiences through verbal language, in favour of recognizing other ways through which experiences of unwanted sex can be acknowledged.

As the literature suggested, how women label their experiences of unwanted sex (if at all) can change over time (Harris, 2011; Gavey, 1999). Further, as Harris argues, naming is a dynamic process of meaning- making (2011, p. 45). Guided by this, in my fieldwork, I was particularly interested in how participants were involved in such a

process, including but not limited to, through naming and labelling their experiences of unwanted sex or unwanted sexual advances.

In our interview, Sam told me about several experiences of rape and "bad sex". When I asked her what she considered to be the difference between the two, she responded:

> Sam: "For me, it's been the times when someone has drugged me on purpose."

In elaborating, she referred to an experience she had several years prior where she was drugged:

> S: "That (experience), I feel like, I can adequately refer to as rape. When it happened, the time it happened, my initial reaction was to say, "oh I drank too much and I wasn't paying attention and I had sex..."

This example (where Sam indicates how her understanding and label of the experience changed) illustrates the dynamism of making meaning Harris speaks to in her study (2011).

I tried to pay close attention to how participants labelled experiences of unwanted sex. Unathi and Nolwazi explicitly labelled their experiences "sexual assault" and "coerced sex" respectively. Other participants described unwanted sexual experiences, but did not use labels apart from sex to describe them. Tshegofatso for example, relayed multiple experiences of having sex that she felt pressured into:

> G: Is it important to you - or is it a thing for you to have any kind of label for those kinds of experiences?
>
> T: Nah.

Some participants spoke to the issue of meaning making in relation to how their understandings of sexual violence had evolved over time. Busisiwe and Zinhle both spoke about how, over the years, their understanding of what constitutes sexual violence had changed. In explaining further, Zinhle advocated for an understanding of sexual violence in broad terms, including street harassment.

> Z: "So I've come to understand how violent, umm, certain things are […] particularly in light of consent and being touched inappropriately and how this speaks to, how people believe that they have a certain level of entitlement over your body. So it's not necessarily things as - I don't wanna say as extreme - because I think its violent across the board - but something like rape, right? It doesn't even have to get there, just like when people grab you in town - I hate that, because for me it speaks to this idea that you feel like you own my body more so than I own it."
>
> G: Yeah
>
> Z: "Because why wouldn't you ask for my permission, if I'm the one who owns it?"

Busisiwe spoke about how exposure to feminist spaces had impacted how she understood sexual violence:

> B: "I've realized that the scope of sexual [violence] is very great, very great, and for me sexual violence is anything, anything that someone is either saying or doing towards me that I don't want, that is not merited […] that's inappropriate, that's rude."

Her responses also suggested that a focus on rape is related to a lack of recognition of other forms of sexual violence,

> B**: "**But like, sexual [violence], it often comes packaged as rape […] so anything that's less than that isn't really considered sexual [violence], by men's standards, let's say."

Like Nicole, Busisiwe felt that her school education had not been inadequate, regarding matters of sex and sexual violence.

> B: “Like in terms of my actual education, I feel like there's so much that they didn't teach us. Which is weird because we did LO (Life Orientation) for the longest time, but they actually didn't teach us anything, especially us as women […] They didn't talk about, this is what can constitute sexual harassment […] It's more about "Okay, once you've been raped" or "once you been hit”, these are the resources you can turn to.”

She also highlighted how the sort of sex education she received perpetuated the internalization of victim-blaming beliefs.

> B: “In terms of prevention, I feel like they go about it in a patriarchal way, where they'll be like "You should dress like a lady, and you shouldn't avail yourself so easily", which is not something that we should be teaching young girls, because we're teaching them to internalize the sexual harassment that they may go through or that they are yet to go through. And it's not our fault.”

Another way in which I addressed meaning making processes in interviews was by asking participants if they had ever expressed grievances about their unwanted sexual experiences or confronted the sexual partners they happened with. Tshegofatso had spoken to me about sexual encounters where she felt violated, pressured and/or uncomfortable, but said she struggled to talk about them with her previous partners.

> T: “In me being able to confront them, I've only been able to do so with my (current) partner.”
>
> G: Yeah…and with the other people, what do you feel...
>
> I: “It's difficult, Yoh, it's a very difficult thing to do. Like sex is a very touchy subject for male and female, maybe more so for men, bra. I just couldn't, I didn't know what to say but I knew I didn't like it, but I never had the guts to say [it].”

Nolwazi, on the other hand, confronted the partner who coerced her into having unprotected sex. She said she did so “a year or two” after it happened, indicating that it took her this amount of time to understand her experience.

G: After he coerced you, after the fact, did you ever confront him?

N: “I did. I did. I sent him a message on Facebook. […] I don't know why. I was just like "Well, you might not remember, but actually, now that I'm in the space to understand what happened, this and the other" […]”

G: Is there something about your understanding or your labelling of the experience, that changed, to get you to that point where you're confronting him or did you kind of always feel it was wrong but you couldn't say it until that point?

N: “So, immediately after it happened, I was chuffed. Cause I was just like, I just had sex for the first time and I thought it was amazing because it was my boyfriend at the time.”

N: “And then I'm not sure what triggered my change of heart, but then I just woke up one day and I was like "No, I'm actually not happy. I feel like you literally fucked up my life. ""

How Nolwazi viewed the experience changed upon her realizing that she had “serious issues with men and being in relationships”:

N: “I didn't want to be sexual with men. So, after I had sex, well...coerced sex...with this man, I started dating the guy that I mentioned [earlier] and I realized there that something was really wrong with the fact that I couldn't have sex […] it didn't feel normal for me that I would tense up. […] I would tense up and I would just, say stop. […] I had not had sex for a couple of years now, and here's this man that I'm in a relationship with, and we love each other and we're trying to have sex and it's not working because it's tense all the time, and I'm just like squeamish.”

N: “I even started doing research on... I can't remember what it's called but it is a condition for, um, women who have been sexually violated and experienced sexual trauma and how your - the muscles around your vagina would literally tense up in the moment of sex - And that was happening to me. That's why I just couldn't have sex after that.”

Nolwazi's recollection of experiencing physiological distress after her experience evidences further Motsemme's argument; that verbal language is not the only way in which someone can come to know about their experience (2004, p. 915).

Busisiwe spoke about this directly:

> B: "There are times where like, even if [sexual violence] happens to you, like when it happens to you, it's like, you can't find the language for it but the feeling - you know you don't like it, you know it's not something that you want and you know it's not something that you deserve or is called for."

Motsemme's framework for understanding experience through more than just verbal language is important here, and as evidenced by Nolwazi and Busisiwe story, silence does not indicate the absence of embodied knowledge.

In light of the challenges of using verbal language this discussion has spoken to, it is important to also consider the potential value this form of articulation can have. In my interview with Unathi, she spoke to this.

When asked why she had chosen to participate in my research, she said,

> U: "I agreed to do this because I think it would be therapeutic to me. I think I've experienced a couple of things that I still don't know how to put into words. Yeah, I'm trying to, I'm on a mission of finding the words, you know, yeah, I don't know [...] I think I'm doing this research because I want to step further into, you know, understanding these experiences, that are very like intrinsic to me, because I'm a black woman."

After we spoke about her first experience of sexual assault, she said,

> U: "I've never told this to anyone, by the way."
>
> G: I'm honoured you're sharing this with me
>
> U: "I'm using you strategically. Like can this exit me? Can I move on!"

In our second interview, she verbalized that she had been assaulted more than once.

> G: So you've never considered opening any cases...
>
> U: I've tried, you know. I think I've been sexually assaulted thrice.
>
> G: Yeah
>
> U: Geez, this is the first time I say that out loud. Fuck. that's a bit sad…
>
> G: It is hard; the only time I ever say it is if I'm saying it to friends […]
> U: "I just made that realization. Thrice. Sheesh."

When our final interview concluded, she reflected, saying:

> U: "I'm, I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm very happy. And thank you for enabling me to, you know, speak about shit like this. Already this is like, I feel like I'm doing the work of healing myself, which is super exciting. And surely, I'm not the only one, I know that for sure. I feel less weird."

In our interviews, Unathi spoke about various issues and complications accompanying the decision to disclose her experiences of sexual assault to other people. In one of the instances she spoke about, Unathi relayed that she was raped by a friend; one who people in her social circles were acquainted with. She said she had chosen not to tell other people about her experience as a way of protecting herself from being associated with the experience.

> U: "I haven't told anyone about this thing, I'm not even going to unleash these people's names, because like, I mean…I don't also know why I'm protecting them... I'm not even protecting them; I'm protecting my god-damned self! […], I don't want society to know […] he ain't shiit."

She also expressed that telling people he sexually assaulted her would mean having to identify as someone who has experienced rape, and that she did not want to face the social repercussions of that:

> U: "And I think, if I have to tell society I'd have to push the rape narrative, which is definitely true, but like also, I don't have the, I don't have the strength to be that girl, that's coming out. Like no, I don't want that strength, I don't want that […] I really like who I am in society, I like the fact that I'm really incognito […] I don't like to be popularized. I don't think I wanna be known. I'm fine the way I am and I feel like coming out and saying this that and the other was done, will give me fame that I don't want, and for me that's the biggest thing with coming out and reporting. I just wish we could do it in secret."

Here, Unathi's decision is reflective of one of Harris findings that disclosures of rape demands "appropriate performances" (2011, p. 48). In Unathi's case, she was concerned about how disclosing her experience would attach meaning to her own identity. Harris found that women she interviewed were reluctant to label their experiences rape as this would attach meanings to the identities of the men who they had unwanted or forced sex with, labelling them as "bad" people:

> "Although the women in the study readily affixed judgment to the man's behavior, they did not want to conflate that behavior with an identity." (2011, p. 50).

One of the expected "appropriate performances" Harris found came with labelling an experience rape was the expectation that one would cut contact with the perpetrator (2011, p. 47). Whilst Unathi did not express this in relation to her experience, nor comment on whether or not she wished to be in contact with the man who raped her, in other parts of the interview, she outlined how sex comes with "social capital" and how sleeping with people accused of sexual violence can have negative social outcomes.

> U: "Who you're fucking kinda does determine how people treat you, especially as a woman, and who you're fucking can totally end your life […]"

G: […] and when you say, who you have sex with determines your social capital, is that, that a positive thing or a negative?

U: Both.

G: In what ways?

U: “It can be positive in the sense that […] if you are fucking someone that has positive social capital, then you obviously have positive sexual capital. Let’s say for instance, if you're fucking your professor - it would be good for your marks, sorta. But if you're fucking one of the EFF rapist boys, it's now, [you’re] this anti-feminist woman that doesn't have rules. […]”

Another complication to disclosing sexual assault she outlined is the difficulty posed by being in the same social circles as your rapist.

U: “Also the tricky thing is that - you know, intersections in varsity is very difficult, you know, in in the sense that people are having sex with each other. We're all having sex with each other, you know, and sometimes you'll find that the rapist is someone else's boyfriend and this person is your friend. Also, he's like a friend and like, how do you come out? It's just like[..]like how?

How one understands their experience of sexual assault can play a role in their decision to disclose or report it. Unathi revealed that the second time she was sexually assaulted, she opened a police case but later dropped it:

U: “Because of the dynamics of that sexual assault, like I was - the way in which I viewed rape was not how I view it now, you know? I was very much within the gaze of thinking that maybe I brought this on to myself, “Am I sure?” like would I be able to defend myself in court type of thing.”

Unathi and I spoke more about experiencing sexual assault and not being able to put words to one’s experience.

G: I think another thing that is very confusing when people are like "You should report, you should report", firstly you don't have to, because it's traumatic.

U: Mmmm

G: But secondly, I think a lot of the way people talk about these things is like you know – in my situation […] I, um, I didn't understand what was happening and like, I didn't call it sexual assault for months.

U: Mmmm, yeah

G: And so there was no way I could report it, because I didn't know what it was. I was just like "Oh, maybe this is just what happens and I just felt bad..."

U: Yes

G: And then one day my friend said to me like, so and so was sexually assaulted, and whatever my friend [described], I was like "Hmmm, is that sexual assault?" and they said it was and then I Googled it and I'm like....it had to like set - in…it was confusing.

U: Because you didn't have the words for it...I get what you mean

G: Yeah, like I feel like I couldn't be the only one in a situation where, there were no words.

U: Mmm, yeah, you not. [It's] a lot of us. And I guess, that's how it actually repeats itself, because you don't have the words for it so you can't actually, decisively, know what it is.

G: Yeah.

In her critique of affirmative consent models, Lauren Halley argues that adopting affirmative consent models into sexual assault policy would expose many alleged perpetrators to unfair punishment (2016, p. 277). Halley outlines that, in sexual encounters,

> "The complainant can be mistaken or confused or conflicted about her state of mind, can change it, and can forget it. She can "be of two minds" at the time—that is to say, ambivalent—and put forth only one of them. She is not necessarily—except in dominance feminist frameworks—an always reliable witness to her past state of mind" (2016, p. 275).

Because the complainant is the only one who has witness to her state of mind, Halley argues, affirmative consent models would make it more difficult for defendants to defend themselves (2016). In her view, such models also allow complainants who are ambivalent or "find the social costs of saying no too high" to "wait and decide later, in the form of an accusation." (2016, p. 277). Halley cautions that this over-inclusive approach will likely lead to "people punished who did nothing wrong." (2016, p. 277)

In her critique, Halley discusses the possibility of complainants who act in good and bad faith:

> "This includes complainants who say *now* that they didn't consent *then* but whose memory was destroyed by the voluntary consumption of mind-altering substances at the time, or whose memories have morphed since then; complainants who have been convinced by friends, boyfriends, or parents that "what happened to you was assault" when they didn't feel that way at the time; complainants who were ambivalent at the time but have since become more negative about the episode, to the point where they are now convinced, sincerely, that they did not consent then; and complainants who feel angry or shameful feelings now that convince them that they could not have consented at the time, or that they should not have so they must not have." (2016, p. 272).

What Halley (2016) argues here is fairly consistent with the findings discussed in my report, which are that 1) ambivalence is important to consider in conversations about unwanted sex between intimate partners and acquaintances and 2) that meaning making is a complex process, which develops over time, and as one is exposed to different discourses. However, I argue her approach undermines the complexity of meaning making, framing ambiguity and "unreliability" as inherently negative, and undermining women's accounts of their own experiences. She writes,

> "It is near anathema in feminist circles to say that these women should sometimes not be believed when they state that the sex was wrongful under the legal rules." (2016, p. 272).

Halley's suggestion here is understandable in legal contexts to the extent that, as pointed out by other authors, unwanted sex does not always meet legal definitions of rape and sexual assault (Humphreys et al, 2016; Gavey, 1999; Beres, 2007). In addition, Halley (2016) critiques the punitive approach to using affirmative consent in policy, which I agree with. Halley's work is valid if we want to understand sexual violence primarily through legal and/or policy-geared frameworks. Based on Harris' work (2011) and my participants' responses, I think the problem with this approach is that it prescribes that only certain acts can be recognized as harmful, which perpetuates the view that all nonconsensual sex is harmful, whilst failing to validate the possibilities of consensual sex to be harmful. Given the problems that emerge with using such models to differentiate between acceptable and harmful encounters, my argument is that a major flaw of the consent models of understanding sex and sexual violence is that they conflate consenting with a lack of harm. Where I strongly differ with Halley (2016) is that, whilst she focuses on how women's unreliability in sexual encounters creates legal problems, I think the 'unreliability' she points to is a key site of knowledge which needs further attention from feminists and anti-rape activists. Further, I disagree with a possible implication of her work, which is that if a person views her experience of unwanted sex more negatively after some time has passed, this change in her views should not be taken as valid. For this reason, I argue that it is important to de-emphasize sexual violence as a legal problem, and consider it in more holistic ways.

Whilst I understand Halley's (2016) critique of the discord between an expression of consent and an inner state of willingness, I think locating such critiques within a legal approach serves to undermine justice. Rather, I argue that it is important to focus more closely on women's accounts of their experiences – even if unreliable and contradictory – in order to better understand sexual violence.

As evidenced in my discussions with Nolwazi and Unathi specifically, recognizing negative impacts of unwanted sex (where such impacts exist) is a complex process, which can take time. In addition, in dichotomizing experience into acceptable and unacceptable, consent models within feminist rape discourses foreclose possibilities of acknowledging

conflicting emotions (e.g in Nolwazi's case, the initial feelings of being "chuffed" that she had had her first sexual experience and the emotional pain of being coerced) (Harris, 2011). Incorporating this finding into mainstream feminist discourse, I feel, would make it more difficult to use evidence of a person's contradictory emotions (e.g feeling chuffed, then feeling hurt) to argue that there was no harm done to them or to say that their account is unreliable because of their emotional response, which is to ultimately invalidate accounts of consensual sex experienced as harmful.

Discussion and conclusion

This report addressed the ways in which consenting, communicating willingness to have sex and making sense of unwanted sexual experiences are fraught with complication. These findings were made possible through interviewing eight Black women situated at Wits University about their sexual histories.

Based on this fieldwork, I made the case for the uncoupling of consent and desire in feminist rape discourse and broadly; an acknowledgement which would take seriously the power of emotion. In the second section, I discussed the sexualization of Black women and how these experiences impact us. In this, I was speaking to how having a Black woman body impacts how one can move through space. I also presented evidence against the idea that consent can be implied through clothing and presentations of the body, linking this critique to Gqola's conceptualization of the female fear factory (2015). In the second instance, I relayed some of my research participants' definitions of consent, in relation to how they opened up possibilities for communicating consent through non-verbal language. Finally, I looked at the dynamic sense-making processes for participants who had experienced unwanted sex. In light of what my participants detailed about their own meaning making processes around these experiences, I argue for a recognition of the complexity of such processes within feminist rape discourse and activism.

In all, my critique is of the emphasis of using consent as a standard to differentiate between acceptable/legal/harmless and unacceptable/illegal/harmful sexual experiences. Firstly, this dichotomizes such experiences and I believe, makes it difficult for women whose encounters of unwanted sex do not meet legal definitions of sexual assault to find ways to make sense of their experiences, particularly if experienced as harmful (Harris, 2011). Secondly, I critique the binarization of such experiences, through consent models of sexual violence, which I feel conflate consenting and experiencing harm. I argue that this conflation serves to erase experiences and further, that failures to acknowledge the sometimes contradictory feelings around unwanted sex undermine our efforts to validate and affirm women's experiences.

Future Studies

There are several ways in which this work could be taken forward in future studies. The first limitation of this study is that it relies on a small sample size. Thus, the scope of my study could be expanded on by other researchers. In addition, that this study was conducted with Black women who have some degree of tertiary education means that this research is not generalizable and that further work is needed to understand how these issues may apply (or not) to Black women who live and/or work in other contexts. Whilst my participants were not all heterosexual, this study focused on power dynamics in heterosex relations. Thus, there is still room to ask these same questions, focusing on women's experiences of unwanted sex in queer relations. It is also my hope that this study could be expanded on with a focus on people of different genders, as sexual violence affects all of us.

Further interrogations could be made about what therapeutic interventions women who experience distress following unwanted sex find beneficial. In addition to the above, legal and philosophical research can be done to hone in on what my and other authors' arguments mean in regards to the concept of justice. Finally, an important aspect, which was beyond the scope of this research, was the challenges of recalling experiences of unwanted sex. This would particularly be insightful if studied, with a focus on people who experience incapacitated or drug-facilitated sexual assault.

Final Thoughts

The process of writing this report has been an enlightening experience. I started this project feeling anxious about interrogating consent, which I understood at the time, to be the best way to validate experiences of harmful unwanted sex. Through reviewing the literature on this topic, I was comforted to find that several authors before me (Gavey and Harris, for example) faced similar anxieties but still proceeded through their discomfort, to create their groundbreaking work.

What I have learned here cannot be captured in this report alone. Each interview I conducted expanded my understanding of womanhood, sex, violence, power and resistance

in ways I could not anticipate. I view this report as an entry point to these issues, which I hope to expand on in future work.

To borrow Unathi's words, embarking on this project was my own "mission of finding the words". I sought to put words to feelings of discomfort I had about the use of consent in the feminist, anti-sexual violence activism I am involved in. I sought words to speak about the ways in which slogans like "Yes means yes!", despite their good intentions, made it difficult for me to speak about my pain. During this process, I believe I found some of these words that I was looking for. Beyond this, however, I also found also that words are not the only way to know. This insight has enabled me to appreciate the things I have known in new ways.

In light of this, I hope that this report can contribute towards the kind of work that recognizes emotion and other ways in which the body knows. Finally, I hope this work will enable other feminists to continue the difficult conversations that help us make sense of our contradictory existences.

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