

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to investigate the discourses employed by young heterosexual male and female university students in the constructions of sexual coercion within the context of focus group discussions. Talk was elicited through a semi-structured interview schedule that included questions regarding intimate relationships, the dynamics that arise within such relationships, and sexual engagement. Both the emerging dominant discourses employed in the construction of sexual coercion and those that functioned as contestation were analysed by means of a critical approach to discourse analysis. This research is situated in a critical paradigm and makes use of social constructionist assumptions. The prominent themes that emerged concerned gender, sexual initiation, sexual refusal, reduction in culpability and rape. The research participants appeared to rely heavily on dominant gender discourses (male sex drive, sexual double standard, etc.) to negotiate their sexual interactions with limited ability to challenge such taken-for-granted assumptions. Attempts to resist dominant discourse were made but never fully realised, however resistance was provided through the use of the progressive male discourse. It is through the intersection of discourse that an environment that fosters sexual coercion emerges. Most significantly the research reveals that there is insufficient understanding of sexual coercion which may facilitate opportunities for its occurrence.

Keywords: sexual coercion; rape; discourse; social constructionism; discourse analysis; qualitative design; sexual violence; patriarchy; dominant gender discourse