

A dark blue vertical bar on the left side of the page, with a blue arrow pointing right from its center, partially overlapping the word 'Sexual' in the title.

Positive Sexual Consent

*An investigation into
perception and
communication of positive
sexual consent in
heterosexual couples in the
UK*

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Abstract

This research examines sexual communication and positive sexual consent shared by sexually intimate couples. Sexual consent here is defined as both, the internal choice to engage in a sexual act with another and the communication of that choice to that other concerned.

Primary research comprised of conjoined interviews with six British, heterosexual couples between the ages of twenty one and thirty five. The methodological approach to the research was qualitative with a strong emphasis on participant lead interviews to ensure participants were able to relate their experiences freely and to minimise any risks of an oppressive process. Secondary research closely examined Sexual Script Theory and other primary research in the field from the past twenty years.

Findings suggest that participants shared a good literacy of each other's means of communicating their consent. A dominance of non-verbal, mostly physical means of communication were used by participants to express initiation and consent. The exception here was the use of clear verbal signals to express non-consent. Whilst some adherence to traditional sexual scripts was present, participants described a dominance of behaviours and attitudes that departed significantly by the gender norms ascribed by the traditional script. Other factors deemed important in the functioning of positive sexual consent in the participants relationships included creating acceptance of and space for non-consent and having conversations about sex apart from the act.

The research concludes that perception and communication of positive sexual consent can be fluid within any given relationship and often departs partially or fully from the traditional sexual script.

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Definitions of Terms

The terms defined below clarify the meaning of words and phrases within the context of this work.

Term	Definition
Cultural Scenarios	Instructions received through the process of socialisation which informs people how to behave in a sexual situation dependant on their identity, particularly gender.
Degrees of Sexual Intimacy	Referring to the perceived levels of intimacy of any given act presuming genital penetrative intercourse or oral sex to be the most intimate.
ECS (External Consent Scale)	“behavioural or verbal indicators that externally express one’s willingness to engage in sexual activity” (Jozkowski, 2011:4) Including nonverbal behaviours, passive behaviours, communication and initiator behaviours, borderline pressure and no response
Emotional/Interpersonal Intimacy	Involving communication, physical closeness, touching, caressing or kissing for the relational, non-sexual purposes such as comfort or companionship
Erotophilia	Positive associations with sex as a consequence of positive experiences
Erotophobia	Negative associations with sex as a consequence of negative experiences
FWBRs/Friends with Benefits Relationships	Where people have a platonic relationship but also engage in sex with each other on a casual basis
Heteropatriarchal	Where dominance of both men/masculinity and heterosexuality is assumed and/or demanded

Term	Definition
ICS (Internal Consent Scale)	“the internal feelings of willingness which inform the decision to engage in sexual activity” (Jozkowoski, 2011:4) including: Physical Response, Safety and Comfort, Arousal/Excitement, Consent/Wantedness, and Readiness
Intrapsychic Scripts	The internal rehearsals individuals use to help them plan and govern how to behave in a sexual situation. These often take the form of sexual fantasies
Non-consent/ing	Where an individual does not desire to engage in sexually intimate acts and expresses it
Physical/sexual intimacy	Involving touching, caressing, kissing or penetrative acts for the purposes of intimacy and/or sexual gratification
Polyamory	The practice of engaging in non-monogamous relationships with the consent and equality of all parties involved
Positive Consent/Consent	Where an individual does desire to engage in sexually intimate acts and expresses it

Introduction

In recent years the issue of sexual consent has been brought into the public consciousness more so than ever previously. UK universities such as Bristol, York, Warwick, Oxford and Cambridge have followed in the wake of their US counterparts in introducing sexual consent workshops for their students (University of Bristol, 2016, Ali, 2016, Amoah, 2015 & Weale, 2014). This has engendered both controversy and celebration from media outlets and across social media platforms and is no doubt reflective of a growing concern that young people don't understand sexual consent.

For many years the message of anti-rape and sexual consent education was 'no means no'. The state of California have been in the vanguard in their moves towards a policy of 'yes means yes' in investigations of rape and sexual assault, it is certainly a positive, if limited move; the legislation applies only to post-secondary educational institutions rather than the wider populous and law enforcement (Associated Press, 2014). More recently California have also required that this be part of state school sex education (Decarr, 2016). Although 'yes means yes' is a hopeful vision for the future (Friedman & Valenti, 2008) for society as a whole, there is little clarity on what 'yes' actually is and how it is communicated, although the Californian legislation does acknowledge that it can be 'non-verbal' (Associated Press, 2014). It would seem impossible to move towards a wider 'yes means yes' perspective on sexual consent without a fuller understanding of positive consent, both academically and socially.

A significant proportion of the literature and research on sexual consent relates to non-consent, rape and sexual assault, whilst what is available to clarify what 'yes' is seems to be limited to studies of American and Canadian university students (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999, Humphries & Herold, 2007, Jozkowski, 2013, Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013, Hust et al, 2013 & Jozkowski et al, 2014). Consequently, there has not only been a dearth of research and literature on the means and nature of positive consent but there is a definite absence of it relating to UK culture and society.

This research goes some way to addressing these gaps in knowledge and understanding by undertaking to investigate, from a British cultural perspective, how people perceive and communicate sexual consent. This undertaking was pursued by first, examining available research in the field and then carrying out conjoined interviews with six heterosexual couples between the ages of twenty one and thirty five. Details of the primary and secondary research carried out and the subsequent analysis and conclusions can be found in the following pages.

Literature Review

Defining Consent

In order to discuss the matter of consent in any meaningful way, it is necessary first to define it. The Oxford English Dictionaries (2015) define consent as 'permission for something to happen or agreement to do something.' This would constitute an acceptable generalised definition but this work requires a deeper consideration of what consent is.

Archard (1998) considers consent to be conditional, that is, he considers consent's intrinsic permission or agreement only to be valid when certain conditions are met. These are conditions which would also fall into the legal or statutory definition of consent which states '*if he agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice*' (Crown Prosecution Service, 2014). The relevant conditions for valid consent are therefore threefold; consent must be entirely voluntary, the person consenting must have the capacity to do so and must be fully informed about what they are consenting to (Archard 1998).

The question of voluntariness may differ depending on perspectives; in order to validate, or indeed invalidate consent, a court would ask if it was coerced under conditions of force or threats (Crown Prosecution Service, 2014). Archard (1998) furthers this with the addition of coercion achieved with offers but also insists that, for force or threats to be applicable in the invalidation of consent, the consequences must be 'significant, proximate, and real' (1998:50). Such definitions of voluntariness are closely associated with ideas of rape and sexual assault in that they are constructed solely to allow for the categorisation of conditions of non-consent or the invalidation of apparent consent. Social theorists, and most particularly feminists, would extend the question of voluntariness to ask if individuals are truly free to consent under the conditions of their socialisation. Humphries (2004) raises the issue of compulsory heterosexuality in the argument for individuals' inability to voluntarily consent,

suggesting that it is possible to argue that society's insistence upon what is deemed normal and natural sexual behaviour actually works to remove individuals' ability to choose to consent or not to consent. Reynolds (2004) further cites the argument of radical feminism which would maintain that women particularly, are unable to freely consent to sex since they are not able to choose not to consent to their participation in heteropatriarchal society.

In law, the question of capacity to consent would first address age and mental capabilities of the individual; deeming children under the age of 16 (in the UK) and adults with significant mental disabilities incapable of consenting to sex (Crown Prosecution Service, 2014). Whilst these conditions can be considered fixed, other temporary conditions may affect individuals' capacity to consent where the individual's mental state is altered to the degree that they may be unaware that they are consenting or unable to fully comprehend the decision whether or not to consent to sex. Although it is broadly agreed that, when an individual is drugged without their knowledge their consent is invalidated, the issue of individuals who have deliberately become intoxicated is more complex.

Needless to say, an individual's degree of intoxication is never an invitation for others to behave sexually towards them or to engage in acts with that individual that are unwanted. Nonetheless, intoxication's long history with sex and sexual intimacy cannot be ignored. The association of alcohol and capacity to consent has received much media attention in recent years (e.g. Hill, 2016¹, BBC, 2007², McAteer, 2015³, BBC, 2016⁴) and whilst law does take it into account in questions of capacity, the boundaries can be difficult to define. Archard (1998) draws our attention to two considerations of the role of alcohol (or in fact other intoxicants) in consent. In the first instance he cites the deliberate premeditated use of alcohol by individuals intending or

¹ Story of a UK undergraduate who was raped whilst intoxicated but was vilified by courts and press because she was too drunk to recall explicitly not consenting

² 'Three Court of Appeal judges said someone who consumed "substantial" quantities of alcohol could still be capable of consenting to sex. However, the judges said if a complainant lost the capacity to consent then that would amount to rape.' (BBC, 2007)

³ Story of Beth who was raped when intoxicated and unable to fight off her attacker

⁴ Details a report which states that the law should include clarity on the issue of intoxication's impact on ability to consent

hoping to have sex and identifies the cultural use of 'Dutch courage'. He points out that individuals tend to know what impact intoxication will have on their behaviour and their ability to reason and in this 'they 'consent' to their drunkenness' (1998:45). The question here is whether by extension, such individuals are also then consenting, to some degree to sexual acts in which they participate whilst drunk. This is a contentious question which can perhaps be, in part, answered in the second consideration. Archard's (1998) second consideration is that of degrees of intoxication. There is a continuum of drunkenness which might at one end be barely noticeable to the individual or others around them, and at the other end is defined by incoherence and unconsciousness. Whilst the law is clear that, in any instance, unconsciousness removes an individual's capacity to consent (Crown Prosecution Service, 2014), it is, arguably, impossible to define exactly what degree of drunkenness constitutes the point at which an individual loses the capacity to consent. Essentially, there must be a point at which any sexual intent prior to intoxication or 'consent to drunkenness' is invalidated by the degree of intoxication due to the individual's impaired faculties.

The legal definitions of consent dwell so much on capacity to consent because, it is this capacity which allows the individual to process information available to them in order to make the decision to consent or not to consent (Crown Prosecution Service, 2014). It is this issue of information that constitutes Archard's (1998) final condition of consent. He would argue that with the presence of voluntariness and capacity, consent cannot be present if the individual consenting does not have all of the relevant information or has been misinformed about relevant facts. The law upholds this in that it states that consent is considered to be invalidated if the consenter was 'deceived as to the identity of the person with whom (s)he had intercourse' (Crown Prosecution Service, 2014).

In the case of the law, this most likely refers to instances where individuals are led to believe they are having sex with one specific individual when the person they are having sex with is, in fact, someone else. The issue of the identity of the person with whom someone consents can be a question of degrees; the degrees could be said to be made up of the elements of identity. Certainly, in the West, for example, it would

be unheard of for someone to be prosecuted for rape on the grounds that they failed to inform their sexual partner of the fact they were married to someone else. However, marital status could certainly be considered to be a significant part of someone's identity and would likely constitute information that might influence someone's decision whether or not to consent. There is here, also a question of relevance; whilst someone's marital status is a relevant aspect of their identity in the question of whether or not to consent, perhaps their taste in music, their politics or their preference for a particular sporting team might not be, despite the fact that these could be seen as significant elements of their identity. Archard maintains 'the person does not need to know everything, only everything that would make a real difference to whether or not she consented' (1998:46).

The question of relevant knowledge is one of, not just who but what (Humphries & Herold, 2007). The 'what' can relate to the specific acts that are being consented to but also the meaning and consequences of those acts. Humphries (2004) points out the relevance of 'social meaning's' contribution to the decision making process. This meaning is cultural and time relevant; acts and activity that were once socially unacceptable such as premarital sex are now broadly accepted in most Western societies. However, even in the West, culture is not sufficiently homogenous that attitudes can be considered to be universally liberal or even, in any way universal. Many cultures and faiths would still shun individuals for engaging in certain sexual behaviours whilst others might deride or punish individuals for not engaging in sexual behaviour/s. This means that individuals need to understand the social/cultural context of their actions in order to be aware of the consequences of any decision they might make. They also need to know the personal consequences of what they are consenting to, if the individual they have sex with withholds the fact that they have a sexually transmitted infection or leads them to believe that contraception is being used, when it is not, this could invalidate any consent given (Sanghani, 2014).

Finally, the person must know what they are consenting to. In 1993 Antioch University launched a sexual consent policy; it stated that individuals should obtain clear verbal consent from their sexual partners and, critically, should continue to obtain consent 'at

each new level of physical and/or sexual behaviour' (Antioch College, 1996 cited in Humphries, 2004:212). The policy was subsequently widely derided, mocked internationally and deemed unrealistic. Whilst this policy was perhaps somewhat ambitious in its aims for full and explicit consent it does reflect the question of consenting to levels of sexual intimacy. Certainly Hall (1998 cited in Jozkowski et al 2014:906) found that individuals have different expectations of consent depending on the perceived intimacy of the act. The issue of levels of consent can be difficult for two reasons firstly, individuals may have differing perceptions of how intimate an act is deemed to be and secondly, they may lack clear cut definitions of what constitutes a 'level'. However, Archard maintains:

'It should be clear that in consenting to something, I do not consent to its being accomplished in any manner whatsoever. If I agree to have sex with you, I do not thereby agree to the form of sexual activity that you may prefer. If I consent to sexual activity in general, I do not consent to each and every possible particular act. If I consent now to an act of sexual intimacy, I do not thereby consent to sex on each and every subsequent occasion that might arise.' (1998:7)

Having defined conditions under which consent is deemed valid, it is necessary now to turn to how individuals experience it both as a consenting individual and one in receipt of consent. Many researchers and theorists suggest there are two distinct processes in consent although the language can be different, the core concept remains the same. Archard uses the terminology 'psychological' and 'performative' (1998:4), that is, what is thought and what is done. Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) meanwhile, prefer the distinction of mental and physical acts maintaining that both must take place for consensual activity. Jozkowski (2013) built upon this idea, developing the internal consent scale (ICS) and external consent scale (ECS) to assist in measuring intent, desire and action against perceptions of quality of sexual intercourse.

Others have argued that this binary definition of consent processes oversimplifies a very complex human experience. Humphries & Brousseau (2010) have reasoned that sexual consent can be an entirely cognitive act on the part of both partners and can exist in an entirely valid state without any observable or definable external act of consenting, save their participation in the sex act. Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007) further the argument against the binary in looking at 'wanted' and 'unwanted' sex, suggesting that research is flawed in

assuming that wanted equates to consenting and unwanted equates to non-consenting (an issue that will be discussed in more detail below). Whilst the binary is debateable, it is to the performative, physical or external aspect of consent that most research and theory has turned in an attempt to measure and delineate consenting behaviours.

This focus attends to the question of how individuals communicate their consent to others and how those others perceive that consent. It is broadly acknowledged that, in practice, sexual consent is rarely clearly, formally stated. This was supported by Hall's (1998) study which found that in most cases 'overt' consent was not given unless in the case of intercourse and even in these instances 'overt' consent was only given around half of the time. Archard (1998) acknowledges this, writing of express and tacit consent, explaining that whilst express consent is verbal or written, definitive and unambiguous, tacit consent is that which is implied through someone's behaviour. This concept is developed in McCormick's (1987 cited in Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999:261) schema which detailed acts as verbal, non-verbal, direct (unambiguous) and indirect (ambiguous). This schema has allowed for categorisation of consent behaviours which has assisted researchers such as Hickman & Muehlenhard (1999) and Humphries & Newby (2007) in charting and measuring consent behaviours.

A question which is always present in studies that attend to these consent behaviours, particularly in the case of heterosexual couples, is that of gender. In fact, Humphries & Brousseau (2010) point out that studying heterosexual consent is important precisely because it is impacted so heavily by gender differences. This is endorsed by other theorists, such as Beres (2013), who would point out that sexual intimacy is an important site for the reproduction of heteronormative discourses which generally serve to uphold and enforce patriarchal power relations. There is certainly a prevalence of what Carmody describes as 'discourses that view women as inherently and always potential victims of male desire' (2004:53). The persistence of the view that heterosexual relations are inescapably defined by unequal (patriarchal) power relations is regarded by Humphries (2004) as damaging to the prospect of either party ever being able to effectively communicate in a sexually intimate situation. Some however, would argue that the idea of an unchanging status quo of gender relations in sexual behaviour is not reflective of the Western post-feminist reality.

'Researchers argue that contemporary femininity has outgrown anachronistic notions of sexual passivity and responsiveness to men's advances to include assertiveness in sexual initiation, pleasure seeking,

influencing or coercing reluctant male partners and negotiating safe sex.
(Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2007:106)

Others however, take a dimmer view of the impact of post-feminist culture, pointing out that it can impose a sense of 'compulsory sexual agency' that must still function within a social context of the constant scrutiny of women's sexual behaviour, where they are just as likely to be vilified for being sluttish as for being frigid (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012).

Men fare little better in sexual discourses with their masculinity defined so distinctly by their supposed virility (in fact virility, is a word exclusively used in respect of men with no female equivalent unless pathologised as in the case of nymphomania). This requires men to be constantly wanting, willing and instigating sexual behaviour lest their gender identity be compromised. These 'scripts' for gendered sexual behaviour will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

This chapter has established a point from which consent can be further examined, providing an overview of theories, beliefs and assumptions that may be used as building blocks or may yet be dismantled. It has proposed that sexual consent must include voluntariness, capacity and information; that it is made up of thought and action and that that action may be verbal, non-verbal, direct, indirect or not present at all; finally, it proposed that consent is gendered.

Sexual Script Theory

The key theory relating to both thought and action in sexually intimate situations was introduced by Simon & Gagnon in 1973 and has proliferated the field in the subsequent decades. The sexual script theory describes how individuals develop their "blueprint" for sexual behaviour governing the: who, what, how, where, when and why. The theory minimises the relevance of the biological drives, emphasising social and cultural influences and identifying that individuals can continue to learn and adapt throughout their sexual lives. (Markle, 2008)

Simon & Gagnon (1984) explain that sexual scripts exist on three levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scenarios are the

instructions individuals receive through their socialisation process, they constitute what that individual perceives of socially accepted sexual norms. Of course these social norms are rarely enough on their own to govern or instruct behaviour in any given sexual situation this is where individuals introduce interpersonal scripts. The individual uses what they know of the cultural scenarios that might relate to the situation and combines this with their own identity and sexual desires to decide what an appropriate behaviour might be in that instance. Often however, responses to sexual situations and concepts may be complex, conflicting or ambiguous and this can be processed through “internal rehearsals” often as sexual fantasies, these are the intrapsychic scripts. (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, Markel, 2008)

Crucially, although interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts allow individuals to adapt and personalises their sexual behaviour (Masters et al, 2013), they are still grounded in the cultural scenarios. ‘Cultural scenarios not only specify appropriate objects, aims and desirable qualities of self/other relations but also instruct what the actor and co-participants (real or imagined) are assumed to be feeling’ (Simon & Gagnon, 1984:33). As cultural scenarios are intrinsically linked to the social structures from which they are derived, traditional sexual scripts are regarded as predominantly heteropatriarchal.

Traditional, or normative sexual scripts are strictly gendered casting men in the role of ‘initiator’ and women in the role of ‘gatekeeper’ who decides whether or not the proposed sexual act will take place and thereby consenting or not consenting to it. This is derived from the active passive binary which dictates the cultural scenario of men coercing and women resisting sex (Masters et al, 2013). As is the case broadly with gendered identities, the roles traditional sexual scripts provide for men and women are restrictive and often harmful. By casting men in the active role there is no space for them to not be sexual or desirous of sex, in order to maintain their masculine identity they must always be seen to be ‘up for it’ (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). This part of the role feeds into problems around male sexual aggression and certain forms of female objectification such as street harassment. The other aspect of this role that is problematic is that, as initiators, men are required to be well versed in the language of women’s consent; they must be able to identify a variety of verbal, non-verbal, direct and indirect cues that signify yes or no, proceed or stop. The reason that this is

particularly problematic is that the cultural scenario men receive about women's sexual behaviour is not always the same as the cultural scenario that instructs women as to how they should behave.

The woman's role of gatekeeper is no less complex or problematic than men's role of initiator. It requires of them precise knowledge of how to say yes or no, when to say yes (or no), what and who to say yes to and how often. The consequence of getting it wrong is equally complex and unpredictable and, at its worse, is evident in victim blaming in cases of sexual assault and rape (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). There are further associations here with another aspect of the gatekeeper role, that of token resistance. The notion of token resistance has its basis in the passive element of the binary and cultural scripts around female purity and the value of virginity. In token resistance women ostensibly give non-consensual cues when, in fact, they do desire the sexual activity that is being initiated (Krahé et al, 2007). This is supposed to serve the purpose of allowing women to still appear chaste or even enhance the ego of the man concerned by indicating their irresistibility.

Evidence that women actually widely engage in token resistance is inconsistent. Hickman & Muehlenhard (1999) found that a very small minority of women had actually engaged in the behaviour and Jozkowski & Peterson (2014) found that women who endorse it as an acceptable form of behaviour give less clear and explicit cues to indicate their consent. This could indicate that it is part of one of the cultural scenarios that is delivered to men to instruct them in their expectations of women's behaviour but not one that women generally use themselves. In her study into sexual miscommunication, Beres (2010) identifies a belief in token resistance as a popular defence in social and academic discourses around acquaintance/date rape. However, in her research she found that the casual sex partners, both male and female, she interviewed were generally very well versed in the language of consent and were able to correctly identify a range of contextually appropriate consent cues. Although they did associate token resistance with rape and sexual assault, none actually cited use or experience of token resistance, rather they indicated that they clearly understood signals of indifference, disinterest or dislike at every level of intimacy and responded appropriately. (Beres, 2010)

The focus here has been most particularly on the initiator/gatekeeper role and the presumption has been, for the most part, that the initiator role afforded its holder the greater share of power. Some would however, argue that whilst the initiator role might afford men the power in the early stages of courtship, in that women must 'wait to be asked', once the relationship is established their role as gatekeeper acquires the power as they deem whether or not sex (that the man desires) will take place (Laner and Ventrone, 2000 cited in Beres, 2013).

Whatever the share of power, there is no doubt that traditional sexual scripts are restrictive, unrepresentative and often damaging for individuals, it is perhaps, not surprising then that there are sites of resistance and evidence of transgression that can be seen in both research and mass media. Krahé et al (2007) argue that traditional sexual scripts can actually be interpreted through the individual's lens which allows for deviation and that 'knowing a socially shared script does not automatically mean endorsing and enacting it as part of one's own behavioural repertoire' (2007:317) . Whilst Markle (2008) cites HBO's *'Sex and the City'* as an example of a media text that offers representations of sex and sexuality that transcend, transgress and outright oppose traditional sexual scripts. She does however acknowledge that this is not necessarily representative of people's experience of sex in the real world and it cannot be ignored that, for the most, part the sex represented in this show was normative, heterosexual. Dissatisfaction with restrictive scripts is evident though in a study cited by Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2007) which found that although over half of the men interviewed initiated sex most or all of the time, most of these men would prefer initiation to be more equally shared between themselves and their partners.

There is indeed some evidence that new and adapted sexual scripts are emerging; Masters et al (2013) put this down to the "disjunctures" that individuals find between the cultural scripts that are available to them and the personal, dyadic scripts for their desires. In their research, Masters et al (2013) identified three reactions to the traditional sexual script: conforming, exception finding and transforming.

The role of conformer meant that those individuals' interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts fundamentally conformed with the cultural. Although some conformed without

question (even in some cases with satisfaction) others were conflicted. Proportionally, men were much more likely to conform than women but this is perhaps because the position of power the traditional script affords men is less likely to cause them to resist to established norms. Exception finders were individuals that largely accepted cultural scripts but created exceptions to the rules for themselves or sought out those who represented an exception to the rules. Although this 'type' was the smallest category overall in the study, women were significantly more likely to be exception finders than the men. Masters et al (2013) noted that part of exception finding, in some cases, was concealing the transgression of norms, indicating that those in question might fear the consequences. They cite examples of participants who sought to enact their own desires whilst attempting to avoid being branded with language such as "slut" or "freak". The final 'type', made up of one third of the men and one fourth of the women, was the transformer. The transformers not only acknowledged their departure from traditional scripts, they were accepting in the process of developing alternative interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts and open about their difference. There was also an unconscious/conscious distinction in this category where some exhibited a belief that their own non-traditional scripts could function comfortably alongside the traditional, whilst others demonstrated a desire for a broader, social and cultural shift away from traditional scripts towards their own more egalitarian arrangements. (Masters et al, 2013)

One of the participants Masters et al (2013) cite to represent the conscious transformers is a member of a sexual subculture (in this case polyamory). Several theorists have pointed to alternative (non heteronormative) identities and sexual subcultures as an important site for resisting, transgressing and transforming traditional sexual scripts. Reynolds (2004) points out that the growing acceptance of such identities and practices has created a platform for debate and for questioning established discourses around enacting heterosexuality. Beckmann (2004) argues that Sadoomasochistic (S/M) practices liberate practitioners entirely from traditional sexual scripts stating 'the context as well as the actual 'bodily practices' of consensual 'S/M' detach 'lived bodies' from their socio-cultural positions and limitations' (2004:196)

Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2007) identify that sexual subcultures are not the only source of resistance to traditional sexual scripts. They point to women's burgeoning emancipation in the shift away from the idea of initiation as the preserve of men whilst others have suggested that through third wave feminism women's sexuality has been reclaimed and transformed. Daley contends 'we are at our most extraordinary when free to express our most complicated desires. We have the ability to transform practices developed in patriarchal cultures into turn-ons, sexing up what would have tied us down' (2002 cited in Williams & Jovanvic, 2015:159-160).

This evidence represents a dichotomous society where traditional cultural scripts are both, reproduced and (re)enforced as well as transgressed and resisted. Undoubtedly, sexual script theory represents an important paradigm for sex researchers and especially those examining communication and consent behaviours. However, Beres (2013) cautions researchers that scripting theory can lead them into restrictive practices which then deny research participants the opportunity to express their individuality and the complexity of the process of intimacy. Traditional scripts can certainly be criticised again for unrealistic oversimplification of gender roles particularly in respect of the initiator/gatekeeper roles (Beres, 2007). It is perhaps, fair to suggest that sexual encounters cannot be boiled down to the unidirectional concept of give/receive or request/accept. This idea overlooks the fact that any given sexual act, by any person in a sexual situation may have multiple meanings and can simultaneously be an initiation and an expression of consent.

This chapter has examined a key theory as to how consent behaviours are socially constructed including how they might be perceived, experienced and expressed. The subsequent chapters will examine more closely the issues of internal experience and the external expression.

Internal Processes

When considering a definition of consent above, the concept of it as a two part process was proposed with one of those parts being referred to as the psychological, mental or internal. To examine this part of consenting it is necessary to consider how people process thoughts about sex, how this is impacted by external forces such as social discourse and how that relates to personality, past experience and desire.

Jozkowska (2011) examined this very issue in her doctoral research and established an internal consent scale (ICS) intended to 'assessed ... internalised feelings of willingness to engage in sex' (2011:156). In the initial phases, the ICS included a list of thirty nine items and in subsequent stages was worked down to five factors which were: Physical Response, Safety and Comfort, Arousal/Excitement, Consent/Wantedness, and Readiness. Jozkowska (2013) later used the measures of the ICS and accompanying ECS (external consent scale) to assess perception of quality of intercourse at last event. She found that there was a strong correlation between high measures on the ICS and high quality sexual experiences. Feeling comfortable/safe and their own wantedness were the only consistent and significant ICS factors that predicted good sex for men, suggesting that, arousal and readiness may increase the likelihood of sexual activity for men but not necessarily the quality of it. Whilst women also required safety and wantedness, physical response was also an important predictor of good quality sex. (Jozkowska, 2013)

This information is important, not only in defining elements of internal consent but also in understanding how individuals build associations between their internal senses and experiences to develop attitudes about consent and their sexual selves. Without doubt, the issue of wantedness was key in people's positive perceptions of sex and consent but as Peterson & Muehlenhard (2007) point out this is not a straightforward concept nor is wantedness consistently present in sex that is regarded by both parties as consensual.

The idea of sex being wanted or unwanted is another binary definition which allows little space for elements of both, or attitudes that fall somewhere between the two.

Evidence suggests that this is not reflective of people's experience; O'Sullivan & Gaines (1998, cited in Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007:73) found reported incidents of engaging in sex when experiencing feelings of ambivalence in 80% of those they studied. A further study by O'Sullivan & Allgeier (cited in Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007:73) found that 50% of women and 26% of men in committed relationships had consented to sex they didn't want in a given two week period. This indicates that people have other motivations for consenting to sex than their own desire to engage in the act. Humphries & Herold (2007) identify that previously having had sex with a partner is often perceived as an obligation to continue having sex with that person.

Peterson & Muehlenhard's (2007) research developed evidence for the case of seeing wanting as both, continuous and multidimensional. In their study, when the women who participated were offered a scale of wantedness in respect of specific encounters, they used the whole scale rather than definite end points. In addition, groups of women with both, experiences of consensual sex and non-consensual sex described feeling elements of wantedness and unwantedness simultaneously. Peterson & Muehlenhard (2007) further argue for a distinction between wanting the act and wanting the consequences, pointing out that individuals consenting (or not consenting) may want or not want either of these. For example, someone may not want the act but may want the increased intimacy they expect it to bring, conversely they may want the act but not want the consequences because the act, in this context, is deemed immoral.

This poses the question of what individuals' motivations for wanting sex might be (aside from the biological drive to procreate). Powell (2010) cites pleasure seeking as a key motivating factor and Lehmiller et al (2012) found that women reported sexual desire as the main motivating factor in seeking out FWBRs (friends with benefits relationships). These represent some of the more positive motivations for wanting sex whereas McCauley Millar (2008) points to more sinister motivations in the commodification of sex (and by extension bodies) where it is something to be acquired and in may be sought out to build status and social regard. He highlights the gendered nature of these phenomena, which can be linked back to the earlier stated conceptions of virility and masculinity and represents an attitudinal element.

The issue of motivation is inextricable from that of attitudes; many studies of consent have taken into account attitudes. Humphries and Herold link this to 'social psychology [which] has a long history of research delineating when attitudes predict behaviours and when behaviours predict attitudes' (2007:313). They argue that, in the case of consent, attitudes and behaviours are interdependent and as an individual's sexual experience grows, both their attitudes and behaviours can shift accordingly. When Humphries, along with Brousseau, (2010) revised his work on sexual consent it was developed with the inclusion of the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) which helps to examine the connections between attitudes and behaviours. The TPB makes the case that, the stronger the intent is to carry out a given behaviour, the more likely it is that the behaviour will be completed. Within this model, intentions are determined by three factors: the attitude towards the behaviour, the subjective norms and the perceived behavioural control. In the case of consent, the attitude might relate to how much an individual values their own consent and that of others; the perceived norms would relate to how that individual thinks society views consent and what expectations they might have; the behavioural controls might be how easy or hard that individual thinks it might be to give or obtain consent.

Attitudes, in turn, are often influenced by experience; when Humphries and Newby (2007) examined introducing new sexual behaviours in relationships they looked at the impact of erotophobia and erotophilia. Erotophobia and erotophilia exist on a scale where erotophobia represent negative associations with sex as a consequence of negative experiences and, conversely, erotophilia is positive associations with sex as a consequence of positive experiences. Erotophilia is linked to lower sexual guilt, greater openness, sociosexuality and, consequently, greater sexual script flexibility. Humphries and Newby (2007) made links between the attitudinal elements of erotophobia/erotophilia and both internal and external consent finding that, erotophilics (whatever their gender) were much more likely to use a range of initiation behaviours with their (potential) sexual partners.

Humphries and his colleagues are not alone in drawing on existing psychological theories to examine sex and consent. Dryden-Henningsen et al (2006) extended cognitive valence theory (CVT), originally applied more generally to the understanding

of developing dyadic intimacy, to examine gendered perceptions of potentially sexual situations. CVT proposes a perceptual process where, presuming a potentially sexual situation is not perceived as threatening, individuals will work through a series of cognitive schemas to decide how to respond to that situation. Three of the schemas are described as appropriateness judgements; the individual considers whether there is situational appropriateness, relationship appropriateness and cultural appropriateness. If one of these is deemed inappropriate, the situation is likely to be rejected but, if for example, the situation involved two single people of a similar age and apparent sexual orientation in a social setting such as a bar, it might be deemed appropriate. At this stage, the individual moves on to personal receptivity judgements which take into account personal predisposition (that individual's traits) physical or psychological state and interpersonal valence, that is, does the other person have traits which the individual finds desirable? (Dryden-Henningsen et al, 2006)

The process CVT describes can have a significant impact upon people's internal consent as it not only affects how they feel about a situation but also, how they perceive the behaviour of others in a situation. As Dryden-Henningsen et al (2006) identify, people who have broader boundaries in relation to sexual appropriateness are more likely to identify sexual possibilities and perceive others' behaviour as sexual. In their study, they found that men perceived more sexual interest from women than the women themselves reported. This might be seen to indicate that men are likely to have a looser definition of appropriateness. However, this is not the only possible reasoning, it might be argued that this could be a consequence of cultural sexualisation of women socialising (heterosexual) men in to assessing all women they encounter as a sexual prospect.

Whatever the reasoning, there is no denying that the elements of appropriateness play a large part in people's response to sexual situations and their own consent processes. The cultural appropriateness could be linked to aspects of sexual script theory, especially in relation to heteronormativity. For example, a man might react negatively to a woman explicitly initiating a sexual act because it doesn't fit with their cultural script. Equally, situation or context can impact heavily on the meaning and acceptability of behaviours. Humphries & Herold (2007) point out that context is

extremely important in categorising consent behaviours; a particular behaviour on a first date could be interpreted very differently than if it took place within the context of an established sexual relationship.

As CVT indicates, the nature of the relationship is a strong factor in the process. Humphries (2007) examined this issue in his research by presenting the same vignette to a range of participants, providing different relationship history to groups of them and then asking them to interpret the initiation and consent behaviours in the vignette. He found that differing relationship history had a significant impact on interpretation of the behaviours particularly in relation to appropriateness. He suggests that, as people have been in a relationship for some time, their knowledge of each other and the intimacy they share leads to more informal and individual sexual behaviours. This could indicate that consent communication is present but becomes more subtle and nuanced as mutual knowledge increases.

One element that CVT does not explicitly allude to is experience. Humphries & Herold (2007) measured sexual experience in relation to perception of consent and actual consent behaviours and found that those with less sexual experience had a greater need for more explicit consent in sexual situations. Humphries (2007) argued that this might be because experience creates more realistic perceptions and expectations of sexual communication, recognising subtlety and nuance that cannot be known by the sexually inexperienced. Beres (2010) found this to be the case in her research, identifying that participants learned sexual behaviours through a combination of trial and error and using knowledge of how to operate in other social situations.

This chapter has identified a range of processes that attempt to define and delineate internal consent alongside a variety of factors that influence those processes. The next chapter will consider how individuals then externalise that consent to communicate it to others.

External Acts

In defining consent, above, the discussion fell to the internal and external nature of consent. It was briefly established that external consent can be tacit or express, verbal, non-verbal, direct or indirect. This chapter will examine more closely the means by which individuals communicate their consent to those that they are sexually intimate with and how the consent of others is perceived.

The study published by Hall in 1998 is often cited as a key text by more contemporary researchers. Indeed, Hall's study represented one of the first of its kind in specifically and closely examining consent behaviours. Hall's (1998) hypothesis that a great deal of sexual behaviour was consented to by non-verbal means, often indirectly, was upheld. This, and subsequent research, found that passivity and 'not saying no' were common consent behaviours. Hickman & Muehlenhard (1999) found that participants in their study frequently cited conveying consent by 'not resisting', in fact, more than any other, both men and women indicated no-response as their way of communicating consent. Humphries (2004) confirms this stating that acquiescence is far more common than explicit consent. However, Jozkowski et al (2014) found evidence to challenge this assertion in their research where most of the participants identified that they conceptualised consent as more than just the absence of a no. This conflict could be attributed to the fact that conceptualisation and action do not always match; this links to Jozkowski & Peterson's (2013) findings where participants generally identified that they communicate their own consent verbally but interpreted the consent of others non-verbally. This in itself, by dint of its more recent nature, suggests a more (self-)aware generation who's sexual activity at least aims to be more explicit in its consensuality. Jozkowski (2013) did identify a potential area of sexual miscommunication here hypothesising that individuals might think that they are indicating clear verbal consent when, in fact, their partners find it far more difficult to interpret what they are attempting to communicate leading them to rely more heavily on non-verbal behaviours.

The incongruity between individual's perceptions of consensual behaviours in their encounters could also be linked to the research's structure and style. By dint of its quantitative nature it limited space for participants to identify the subtleties of non-verbal consent by only offering them predefined categories within which they had to fit their behaviours. Participants in Beres' (2010) qualitative research described consensual sexual intimacy where 'you just know' that the other is willing. It is unlikely here that they are implying some form of psychic connection with their sexual partners, rather, that the consent signals are difficult to define and verbalise and that they often function as an intrinsic part of the intimacy. Beres (2010) identified some of these behaviours as 'active participation'. This could be reflective of the problems at the core of the initiator/gatekeeper binary in that consensual sex may be simply two (or more) individuals actively participating in sexual intimacy.

Whilst there is some differentiation between results, almost all of the studies of this nature demonstrate a significant portion of individuals using non-verbal and often indirect behaviours in perceiving and communicating consent (Hall, 1998, Hickman & Muelenhard, 1999, Humphries, 2007, Humphries & Newby, 2007, Humphries & Herold, 2007, Higgins et al, 2010, Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013, Jozkowski, 2013, Jozkowski et al, 2014). For example, Humphries & Herold (2007) found that 47% of men and 35% of women preferred to assume consent unless it was otherwise indicated to them. This raises the question as to why people will choose the risk of miscommunication over explicitly requesting and providing consent. Certainly there is a risk present, Humphries & Brousseau (2010) point out that what might be perceived as a consent behaviour by one party could be a diversion behaviour or indication that the person does not wish to engage certain forms of sexual behaviour. For example, one party might perceive the intimacy of oral sex as an indication of consent to penial/vaginal sex, whilst the other party may not be willing to engage in penial/vaginal sex but they engage in oral sex because it is their preference at the time or because they believe this may divert their partner from the goal of penial/vaginal sex.

There is no doubt that people associate discomfort with talking about sex with their sexual partners which goes beyond the wider social taboo of talking about sex. When Humphries (2004) presented research participants with the famed Antioch consent

policy, they widely rejected it. When attempting to define what they found so problematic about it he found that 65% of both sexes agreed or strongly agreed that verbally asking for sexual consent is 'awkward'. Not only this but Humphries (2004) further suggests that direct sexual communication is deemed confrontational and makes us vulnerable. Krahé et al (2007) draw the link between vulnerability and the fear of rejection, suggesting that this is the reason for the implicit nature of a lot of sexual communication. Directly requesting something brings with it the risk of a direct refusal and even some form of shaming for desiring that act in the first place. Expressing desire for something specific from a specific person and being denied imbues the denier with power and the denied with a loss of power and esteem.

It is not an issue of power and saving face alone though, there are indications that people simply lack models of how to behave when directly communicating desire and consent. Jozkowski et al (2014) argue that the traditional sexual script calls for subtle indirect communication whilst Humphries (2004) suggests that the naturalised discourse of sexual behaviour insists that individuals will 'just know' what to do and won't have to talk about it. Mass media serves to perpetuate unrealistic expectations of sexual behaviour imbuing intimacy (especially where love is perceived to be present) with and almost magical power that transcends the requirements for normal human communication (Galician, 2003). This absence of discourses for communication builds on negative associations. Waldby et al (1993, cited in Humphries, 2004:210) found that the men they interviewed 'equated talking during sex with failure' as it didn't fit with their normal expectations of how sex would progress.

The evidence however, is that, when people have resources to allow them to build an internal concept of effective, explicit sexual communication they are more likely to use it. Higgins et al (2010) found that those who had experienced school sex education were more likely to use verbal consent behaviours during their first sexual encounter. This extended further into more informal settings; Humphries (2007) found that those who discuss sexual consent outside of their sexual relationships were more likely to use explicit forms of consent in their sexual encounters. Higgins et al (2010) and Humphries (2007) are not alone in making the case for greater sexual knowledge sharing. 'Plummer, for example, has argued for the importance of sexual storytelling in

the context of intimate citizenship that breaks down public silences on sexual experience, in a way that empowers rather than provides media entertainment. (1995, cited in Reynolds, 2004:105)

This is not, of course to say, that all sex is silent; just as there are individuals and circumstances that demand indirect, non-verbal sexual communication, there are also those that come with an expectation of greater openness or less ambiguity. Degrees of intimacy play a big part here, both in terms of the intimacy of the behaviour in question and the intimacy of the relationship.

Humphries & Herold (2007) found that, amongst the participants involved in their research there was a greater instance of seeking 'overt' consent in more intimate sexual behaviours. Jozkowski et al's (2014) work also endorses this, with evidence indicating that consent was required to be more verbal and more explicit where behaviours were deemed more intimate. In these examples, instances of any form of penetrative intercourse were much more likely to garner clear verbal requests and equally unambiguous consent than other behaviours deemed less intimate like kissing or petting.

Whereas the impact of a behaviour's intimacy seems quite clear cut, the impact of relationship intimacy has a more complex impact on expressions of consent; evidence indicates that greater relationship intimacy reduces the need for explicit consent yet, is perceived as increasing the likelihood of it. As was touched upon in reference to CVT in the preceding chapter, Humphries (2007) examined this by presenting vignettes to participants then contextualising them with different relationship histories. He found that individuals with a more intimate relationship were expected to require less explicitness in their sexual communication in order to convey intent and consent. This may however, pertain more to external perceptions. Byers & Demmonds (1999, cited in Humphries & Newby, 2007:80) maintain that longer relationships lead to more honesty regarding sexual preferences and pleasure which equates to more open discussion relating to, and during, sex. Humphries & Newby's (2007) results do not entirely support this hypothesis, although they found that participants believed that it would be the case in relationships general; what individuals self-reported in their own

relationships suggested that verbalisation did not increase as a relationship progressed although the use of direct non-verbal methods did. The correlations they did find in relation to the use of direct verbalisation related to number of sexual partners and sexual self-disclosure. Essentially, individuals who talked more openly about their sexual selves and had had a greater number of sexual partners were far more likely to talk about sexual intimacy with their partner.

When considering how consent is expressed in (heterosexual) relationships, returning to the issue of gender is inescapable. In the chapter on sexual scripts, the roles ascribed to men and women in the 'sexual performance' was closely examined, this text now turns to how that impacts upon and is reflected in how men and women express their intent or consent.

Although Hickman & Muehlenhard (1999) found that both, men and women had a clear preference for communicating consent through passivity, they did also find that women were more likely to use indirect verbal signals (e.g. asking their partner if they have a condom) whereas men were more likely to use direct non-verbal signals (e.g. touching/kissing). This tendency towards women being more verbal was borne out in Humphries & Herold's (2007) work where they found that 65% of women preferred to verbally request consent (in comparison to 53% of men). Jozkowski & Peterson (2013) also found more verbal cues were used by the women who participated in their study. Jozkowski et al (2014) further identifies the positioning of women as communicators and men as interpreters in sexual encounters. The use of verbal cues does not necessarily mean that women's communication is more direct (as suggested above). Athenstadt et al (2004) suggest that individuals use their 'gendered self concept' to inform their modes of communication and in the case of men, this tends towards direct communication as a reflection of patriarchal power differences. These power differences are then potentially borne out by women conversely; 'people with less power speak more tentatively and indirectly and they try to make others feel more comfortable' (Athenstadt et al, 2004:39).

If this disjointed communication is the lot of traditional heterosexual couples, it begs the question as to whether communication outside of the binary is more functional.

Powell (2010) has proposed that same sex encounters might free participants from the constraints imposed by traditional sexual scripts. However, Holmberg and Blair (2009) found, in a study of sexual communication amongst straight, gay and lesbian couples, that there were no distinct differences in preferred modes of communication between the individuals concerned that could be linked to their sexual orientation. Beres et al (2004) in their study of consent behaviours in same sex relationships also found no notable departure from the recorded behaviours in studies that focussed on heterosexual participants. There was a prevalence of passivity as consent and a greater incidence of non-verbal initiation behaviours (verses verbal initiation behaviours).

As was briefly referenced in the sexual scripts chapter, one site where the silence and obfuscation is being overcome is in the BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Sadism & Masochism) community. Modern BDSM champions explicit verbal consent negotiations, this is partly because 'scenes' may include one of the participants expressing resistance or non-consent (Pitagora, 2014). However Barker also argues that it serves another purpose: 'benefits in the negotiation of consent that occurs within BDSM interactions include the heightened sense of self-awareness and introspection participants can gain from discussing the scene and clearly stating their expectations and boundaries (2007, cited in Pitagora, 2014:34). This allows participants to engage in their planned sexual act feeling sure of themselves and sure of the other/s involved. Beckman (2004) also argues this point, suggesting that the practices involved in BDSM necessitate a degree of reflection that takes into account personal rights and responsibilities leading to a greater understanding of and respect for yourself and your sexual partner/s. This established a reflective cycle of external and internal consent which looks to improve both and represents a greater expression of the self which can supersede socialised boundaries.

This chapter has charted the various means by which sexual partners express their intent and consent, offering examples of influences on the form that expression might take including the sexual act concerned, the nature of the relationship and the gender identities of those communicating.

Literature's Implications for Research

This literature review has provided grounding for research with a key theory in sexual scripts alongside critiques of the theory. It also offers examples of past research on the topic which might be linked back to the findings of this study. Whilst the research will be approached with what went before in mind, it will also be important to maintain an open mind so as not to narrow the focus of the work excessively. As will be detailed in the chapter below the methodological position of this work requires that its content is, to the greatest degree possible, defined and decided by the participants. Consequentially there will be no specific research questions or hypothesis.

Methodology & Method

Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Position

The position of the researcher is a key concern in any research as it guides and influences all aspects of any project. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe the ontological, epistemological and methodological position of the researcher as their 'interpretive framework' (2003:33). This framework reflects the researcher's worldview which will impact upon overarching issues such as the topic the researcher believes to be worthy of study and specifics such as the choice of method and means of analysis.

The ontological position of this researcher is largely constructionist and this is reflected in the approach to the topic of sexual consent and, by extension, gender and sexuality. The position taken here is that culture and the realities those within it experience are socially constructed and are constantly interpreted and negotiated by the 'actors' participating in it (Bryman, 2012). This position holds that, although culture has an undeniable influence over the perspectives of those who participate in it, it is by no means a fixed reality but can be seen as being in a perpetual state of construction and re-construction (Becker, 1982 cited in Bryman, 2012:34). This position links to sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1984) whereby the 'actors' take what they believe to be the broadly socially acceptable norm of sexual behaviour and adapt it (to a greater or lesser degree) to fit a given situation or relationship and their own sexual proclivities. These deviations from the restrictions of the 'norm' give rise to alternative sexual scripts which can become pervasive and cause a broader shift in the traditional script (Masters et al, 2013).

It is this process of interpretation, negotiation and creating meaning which lies at the heart of this research. This leads to an epistemological position which incorporates interpretivist and phenomenological perspectives. These perspectives place value upon the experience of the 'actor/s' and their own point of view (Denscombe, 2007).

Pickering (2008) points to the relevance of experience maintaining that its role in research is one of 'highlighting the complex intersections between public culture and private subjectivity' (2008:18). This emphasis on experience is at the core of the phenomenological approach as is based on the premise that all social action is individually meaningful to the 'actors' and therefore their own point of view and experience of it is essential to understanding that reality. This approach must then, necessarily involve research that is highly participant centred in order for the researcher to have the opportunity to truly hear the point of view of the 'actors' in the phenomena they wish to examine and analyse.

This perspective places great emphasis on the idea that people create meaning through their experiences, where experience is both the process and the product (Pickering, 2008). Experience very often, especially in the case of sexuality, is made up of human interaction and Manning (2013) maintains that sexual research should focus on how these interactions serve to create meaning thereby establishing a sexual reality for the 'actor/s' concerned. As with this research, Manning's (2013) preoccupation is with communication, identifying that 'interpretive approaches to studies of relationships are unique in that they explore how relationships are *constituted* through communication' (2013:2509). This suggests that the communication that takes place in sexual or sexually intimate situations is of primary importance in examining the process of making meaning; one could certainly argue that sexually intimate acts are a form of communication and embody Pickering's (2008) definition of experience as process and product. Examining communication in sexual intimacy, and by extension meaning making, is particularly relevant because of the dichotomy of experience in sexuality: the public and the private. The positioning of sex and sexuality as 'private' and/or 'dangerous' means that real or honest representations of sexual experience are rarely available for broad public consumption or might not be spoken about in a familial or institutional setting. An 'actor's' public experience of sex and sexuality might then be made up of a combination of external influences which could be illusory, ambiguous, unrealistic and highly gendered meaning that their private experiences may be unlikely to reflect the public. This necessitates a great deal of meaning making at the site of sexual intimacy and within the context of sexual relationships.

The design of this research (as detailed below) is then, intended to acknowledge, examine and analyse the individual experiences of 'actors' in negotiating the nuances and boundaries of communicating sexual consent. In the decision to interview couples together the research hopes to uncover the multiple realities concerned with a lived experience that is shared (Denscombe, 2007).

Such a close examination of 'actors' experiences would, in itself, demand a qualitative approach to the research but there are other methodological justifications for such an approach. As detailed above the epistemological position demands that the point of view of the participant is key and as Bryman (2012) points out, qualitative research is preoccupied with seeing through participants' eyes. At its finest, it validates the perspective of the individual rather than assuming that researchers and academics understand the individual's experience better than they do (Denscombe, 2007). Some would argue that qualitative research is best placed to gather greater knowledge of our social world; Noland regards 'qualitative research as the process of using lived experiences and socially constructed performances to collect real time narratives that are transcribed and translated into a metanarrative of knowledge.

The value of qualitative methods does not however, lie solely in the product they create but also in the process from the perspective of the participants. Feminist researchers have long since raised the issue of positivist and quantitative methodologies reflecting oppressive patriarchal power. They have highlighted that the control and restrictions these methods place upon the participants prevents them from expressing their true experience (Bryman, 2012). Edwards (1993) warns that research, and particularly quantitative research, runs the risk of objectifying participants and reducing their experiences, thoughts, feelings and opinions to the status of 'research fodder'.

This heavily qualitative stance has not been taken by the vast majority of researchers in the field of positive sexual consent. In exploring past research on the subject fourteen studies were identified which sought to achieve similar ends. (Hickman & Muelenhard, 1999, Dryden Henningsen et al 2006, Humphries, 2007, Humphries & Newby, 2007, Humphries & Herold, 2007, Holmberg & Blair, 2009, Humphries &

Brousseau, 2010, Higgins et al, 2010, Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013, Jozkowski, 2013, Lehmler et al, 2012, Hust et al, 2013, Jozkowski et al, 2014 and Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014). Of these fourteen studies, all but two used a predominantly quantitative survey or questionnaire to gather their final data. The exceptions (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013 & Jozkowski et al 2014) took a more qualitative approach by asking open ended questions for which, the research participants were required to provide narrative response. Several studies did depend on qualitative means to inform the content of the quantitative aspect of their research (Hickman & Muelenhard, 1999, Humphries & Herold, 2007, Jozkowski & Peterson, 2014). This certainly evidences some recognition that researchers require the (relatively) unrestricted point of view of participants to establish criteria on which to base quantitative investigations.

Stimulus for questions broadly fell into three categories: Responding to an imagined scenario (Hickman & Muelenhard 1999, Humphries & Brousseau, 2010 & Hust et al 2014), responding to an example of the behaviours of fictitious characters (Humphries, 2007 & Humphries & Newby 2007) or responding in relation to an actual sexual encounter (Dryden Henningsen et al 2006 & Jozkowski 2013). The two former categories certainly deny participants the opportunity to voice their own experiences rather; they require them to imagine something based on criteria set by the researcher thus restricting the participants' self-expression.

Whilst there are epistemological and methodological criticisms that can be levelled at the above studies, there is no denying that they have gathered invaluable data and information to inform both academic and social understanding of the nature of positive sexual consent. Philosophical arguments notwithstanding, it is important to carry out research which offers a counterpoint to that which has gone before it. It may be argued that quantitative investigation of this subject would be less invasive; sexuality is generally regarded as a 'sensitive topic' since it can be regarded as threatening or posing a risk to the participant of exposure of guilt, shame or embarrassment (Lee & Renzetti, 1993). However, it must not be ignored that:

'Sensitive research addresses some of societies' most pressing issues and policy questions. Although ignoring the ethical issues in sensitive research is not a

responsible approach to science, shying away from controversial topics simply because they are controversial is also an avoidance of responsibility.’ (Lee & Renzetti, 1993:11)

This research holds that this responsibility must be met and that a greater understanding of sexual consent, despite its controversial nature, will contribute to better experiences and relationships for those who share it.

Method

The above position largely dictates the method of investigation for this research in that it must be participant centred, allowing for those sharing their sexual consent narrative to express their experience as they see it, focusing on aspects that are relevant to them. This naturally leads to the choice of using interviews that are mostly unstructured. As stated above the interviews will be conducted with couples to present a view of the multiple realities experienced by those who share sexual consent with each other. The relative merits and potential pitfalls of this approach will be discussed in further detail below.

Denscombe (2007) points out that an unstructured, phenomenological style of interviewing not only allows for a representation of experience close to that of the ‘actors’ that experience it, but also provides those ‘actors’ with the space to raise issues and questions that are important to them. This will be essential in gaining an insight into how the participants create meaning through their sexual communications and highlight what they identify as boundaries and crucial points of communication.

It is a great strength of unstructured interviews that they allow for the interviewer to be responsive to each participant whilst probing for a deeper understanding and checking or clarifying meaning when statements might be ambiguous (Patton, 2015). There is however, a risk that participants may digress to a degree that their narrative has little or no relevance to the subject at hand. Here, a balance must be struck between allowing participants to express themselves freely and ensuring that the

interview is of value to the research. Denscombe (2007) identifies that semi-structured and unstructured interviews exist on a scale and that any interview may move between these points during its course. It is anticipated that this will be the case for the interviews in this research so the researcher will be prepared to include some questioning and means to direct discussion. Whilst some direct questioning may be used, especially at the outset of the interview the focus will remain on probing and clarifying. As interviews will be conducted with couples together, they will be encouraged to communicate with each other, not just the interviewer; this is intended, in part, to carry the dialogue. Participants will be briefed prior to the interview on the purpose of the research and key areas of interest alongside an explanation of the interview style.

In order to optimise the interview experience for the participants, it will be essential to put participants at their ease and build a sense of trust and a rapport between interviewer and interviewees. Seiber (1992) advocates the use of transparency and openness in this matter consequently the researcher will ensure all relevant information is shared with interviewees and that participants have the opportunity to ask any questions they wish to, prior to and during the interview. It will also be essential to assure participants that they may speak freely, free from judgement or censure regarding anything they might share. The interview experience will also be aided by locating it in a 'safe space' where participants feel comfortable, assured they cannot be overheard and will not be intruded upon or interrupted in any way. This will be assisted by participants having a degree of choice in the location of their interview. The interview experience will also be optimised by emphasising valuing participants, ensuring that it is clearly communicated to them that the narratives they share are highly valued by the researcher and that they are each valued as an individual beyond the information they have to share. Gonzalez-Lopez (2011) reminds the researcher that the underlying reasons for research participants agreeing to be interviewed cannot be underestimated; people often have a strong desire to be heard. The researcher will work to fulfil that desire in participants by engaging with them and using appropriate body language and verbal cues to acknowledge their words.

The presence of a partner in the interview may also aid in putting participants at their ease although this is not the primary motivator for pursuing this method. In interviewing couples together, an opportunity is presented not only to gather the points of view of each of the participants but also to provide further dimensions of information in how the participants interact with each other (Denscombe, 2007) whilst providing context for the points they make (Racher, 2003). This acknowledges and makes use of the contextual relevance of the relationship of the individuals who share sexual consent (Torge, 2013). Gilliss & Davis identified that 'conjoint interviews or conversations with the couple, where partners jointly construct and negotiate their dialogue is a way to gain understanding of the experience of the larger unit and the interdependent or collective perspective of the partners' (1992, cited in Racher, 2003:66).

The virtues of conjoint interviewing are further extolled by Taylor and de Vocht (2011) when they point out that the presence of a partner in interviews essentially has the effect of an excellent and externally unbiased interviewer in that they can, not only 'corroborate or supplement each other's stories [but] they can probe, correct, challenge or introduce fresh themes for discussion that can result in further disclosure and richer data' (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011:1577). All of which can be achieved without the influence of a party external to the relationship who has not been a part of the experience being discussed. The researcher will work to capitalise on this virtue by encouraging and prioritising the communication between the couple themselves over direct communication with the researcher themselves.

Whilst the virtues of conjoint interviewing are numerous, it is essential, also to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of such a method. Key among these is the impact the partners' perceptions of each other may have. Although the presence of a partner may encourage discussion and disclosures, it may also restrict, silence or alter what an individual might share if the individual believes what they have to say may not be acceptable to their partner (Taylor & de Vocht, 2011). In the case of this research, this risk versus the potential benefits of conjoint interviewing is not deemed sufficient to revert to individual interviews. A possible solution might be found in conducting individual interviews in addition to conjoint interviews but the size of this study makes

this unfeasible. The impact of this pitfall will be mitigated by the focus of the research lying with the consent that couples share and the differing perspectives they are able to offer in each other's presence.

The question of what participants feel able to discuss highlights the issue of sensitivity. Sex and sexuality is broadly considered to be a 'sensitive subject'. Lee and Renzetti (1993) identify sensitive research as something that is perceived to pose a threat or presents a potential personal cost to the participants. In the case of sex and sexuality research this threat or cost is primarily the risk of participants experiencing guilt, shame or embarrassment as a consequence of what they share or questions they will be asked. A further risk relates to emotional or psychological trauma as a consequence of recalling negative sexual experiences such as sexual assault or rape, the mitigation of these risks in this study are detailed below in the section on ethics. The focus here then is on minimising the lesser risks of guilt, shame or embarrassment. Seiber (1992) counsels the researcher to make use of considerate and effective communication teamed with a sensitivity towards the comfort of the participants. This will in part be attended to by initially building rapport and creating a 'safe space' but will be continually attended to by interviewer reflexivity; the researcher will be careful to watch for signs of discomfort in participants that might be expressed by body language or verbally. If any such signs are detected the researcher will check with the participant to see if they are comfortable with what is being discussed and move the conversation on if not. This issue will also be pre-empted by providing participants with an opportunity, prior to interview, to identify any topics they would prefer not to discuss and a reminder directly prior to interview that they can, at any time, state that they are not comfortable and the researcher will respond appropriately.

Conversely, it is important not to become too preoccupied with the sensitive nature of the subject lest this be reflected in the behaviour of the researcher to the degree that it, in itself, induces discomfort in the participants. Comella and Sender (2013) suggest that there is a 'fallacy of misplaced scale' relating to the risks presented by sex and sexuality research and, in the case of this research, all participation will be entirely voluntary. Such a suggestion does not dispense with the need for rigorous ethical

procedures to be put in place to ensure participants are protected to the greatest degree possible. These procedures are discussed in detail in the section below.

Ethics

It is commonly acknowledged that the position of researcher is one of power and, in modern research, it is equally acknowledged that researchers must balance that position of power by exercising responsibility; in particular, responsibility for the impact the research process and product may have upon those who participate in it (O’Leary, 2009). It has been suggested above that the intent of this research is inherently ethical in that it is designed to gather information that can be used to benefit academia and society. It is also stated above that the ontological, epistemological and methodological position of the research is fundamentally rooted in considerations bound up with an ethical standpoint. Laudable as such ethical positions might be, they are meaningless without concrete, practical plans, processes and procedures designed to ensure the wellbeing of participants to the greatest possible extent.

The ethical processes and procedures for this research were developed in conjunction with, and approved by the Bournemouth University Ethics Committee and informed by the *Bournemouth University Research Ethics Code of Practice* (2014). Full details and documentation approved by the Ethics Committee can be found in the appendix, below an overview of the key areas of consideration is provided.

At the core of any research with human participants is informed consent, as Oliver (2010) points out, individuals are unable to make a true decision about anything without the full facts available to them in a way that they can understand.

Consequently, this research will provide every potential participant with several levels of information about the research they are interested in, what would be expected of them and what their rights are. This information has been written using

accessible language and lay terminology and will be made available in formats appropriate to the parties concerned. Confirmation of understanding will be checked in writing and verbally before anyone formally agrees to participate. Part of this will be ensuring that all participants are aware that they can withdraw from the research without any explanation or justification up until their interview has been transcribed and that they will have access to the research project upon its completion.

Ensuring that participant's involvement in the research is fully voluntary is more complex in this case than it would be in the case of interviewing individual participants. The risk of coercion by the researcher is mitigated by their own values, the values of the university and the governance framework within which they must operate. The risk of coercion by any given participant in persuading their partner to participate in the research was less easy to address. This challenge has been met by incorporating several levels of information and checks for participants at each level of the recruitment process, this will include that individual contact is made with each of the volunteers to ensure their willingness distinct from their partner's.

Informed consent is intended to ensure that participants are able to make a choice to avoid something they might deem potentially harmful to themselves but the responsibility also lies with the researcher to design research that safeguards those who do participate from harm wherever possible. The British Sociological Association (2002) state: 'wherever possible [researchers] should attempt to anticipate, and to guard against, consequences for research participants that can be predicted to be harmful.' The greatest risk of harm in this research was considered to be the chance that a person with previous negative experiences of sex and/or consent could experience trauma as a consequence of discussing the topic of sexual consent. It is therefore made explicitly clear in all materials that the subject of the research is positive consent only. Further to this, individuals with such negative experiences are to be advised not to participate in the research. As a further safeguard, all potential participants will be provided with contact information for support agencies.

A further risk of harm was deemed to be where information of a personal or sensitive nature might be compromised. To mitigate this risk, procedures to ensure secure data

storage, confidentiality and the anonymization of all data provided have been developed and implemented.

See appendix 1 for full details of all ethical procedure's put in place.

Quality

Were this research of a positivist, quantitative nature, it would be necessary to examine its quality through the lenses of reliability and validity. These criteria are difficult to apply to small scale qualitative study and as such the concepts have been adapted to more closely fit the needs and required outcomes of such research. Guba and Lincoln (1994, cited in Bryman, 2012:390-393) offered the alternative criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity. They suggest that in order for research to be trustworthy it must be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable.

In the case of this study, credibility will be attended to by ensuring good practice is followed in all processes particularly with regard to ethics as detailed above. Good practice will also be ensured by regular checking of processes with senior academics and in the final review of this research by the university. (Bryman, 2012)

The criteria of transferability of research can be met by ensuring that research has sufficient depth and detail. This allows the researchers or those reading the research to have the required information to make a judgement as to whether the information is transferable to other contexts. This research has been designed to ensure interviews will generate the required depth and detail and will be reflected in the analysis. (Bryman, 2012)

The dependability of this study will be found in accurate and detailed record keeping throughout, including full transcripts of each interview. This will allow for others to refer back to each stage of the research and track the data so that information and decisions made by the researcher can be audited if required. (Bryman, 2012)

The confirmability of research is concerned with the recognition that a researcher cannot have complete objectivity but can make efforts to ensure personal values do not unduly impact upon the research or its outcomes and that where influence is present it is recognised and analysed (Bryman, 2012). This is a key issue in this research as sex and sexuality is a particularly value laden topic. The researcher might be said to be in a better position than the layman in reference to this as a consequence of years of study into the topic which has required repeated questioning and challenging of personal and sociocultural values. This must not, however be taken for granted and the researcher will be checking their values and referring to others as a balancing counterpoint throughout.

Review of Research Process

Recruitment

The recruitment process included attempts to engender local media interest in the research in order to raise awareness of the study. Unfortunately this did not prove fruitful. Subsequent work to recruit participants included digital posters on the researcher's professional (separate from personal) social media feeds such as Facebook and Twitter. This worked alongside an e-mail campaign addressing academics at universities local to the researcher and large local institutions such as the public library. The e-mail requested that those in receipt of it would forward it on to appropriate contacts and request, where willing, that individuals post the attached digital flyer on their social media profiles.

The recruitment campaign elicited ten volunteer couples. Of those couples, three withdrew following guidance that individuals who had a history of sexual assault, abuse or violence should not participate. A further couple were unable to arrange a convenient time for interview. The remaining six couples were successfully interviewed.

Participants

The six couples' relevant information is as follows:

Pseudonyms	Ages	Relationship Status
Agatha Savka	24 31	Together 16 Months. Married 6 Months. Cohabiting (1 child under 6 months together. Agatha also has one child under 5 from a previous relationship who lives with them a majority of the time.)
Beth Mac	23 25	Together 3 years, cohabiting
Cleo Marc	35 30	Engaged to be married and cohabiting (one child under 1yr) Together –initially 6 months four years ago. 18 month break. Together 2 years since
Daisy Jay	28 35	Cohabiting and married. Together 6 years 8 months. Married 1 year 8 months
Emma George	21 22	Together 11 months. Living separately
Helen Paris	32 25	Together 13 Months. Cohabiting (one child under 6 months) Helen considers BDSM as part of her sexual identity

The individuals who participated traversed the specified age range of the participants and were diverse in terms of the length of their relationship, living arrangements, marital status and whether or not they had children. Diversity was not present in the race of the participants as all were white British.

Contact from the participating couples came, initially from the women of the couple in five out of six instances.

Interview Process

Interviews took place at locations which were identified as feeling safe for both participants and researcher and times and dates were arranged so as to be mutually convenient.

Prior to the start of the interview the researcher reviewed the participant information sheet (see appendix 1) and the consent form. The researcher then explained the interview process to the participants emphasising the following.

- The content of the interview would be decided predominantly by the participants
- The researcher would say as little as possible and rather than asking a lot of direct questions would direct, clarify or request more information on topics already raised by the participants
- Participants were encouraged to make it a discussion between themselves as a couple so far as was possible
- The recording devices used were explained as was the expected time the interview would take

The researcher began each interview by asking the couple how they met to allow them to start off talking about a topic they felt comfortable with which would lead with ease to discussing matters more sexually intimate. This allowed a conversational rapport to build and a topic area interviewees could retreat to if they found themselves uncomfortable with the degree of intimacy of conversation.

Most of the interviews were dominated by one member of the couple. Helen, Cleo, Beth and George were the dominant speakers in their interviews whilst there was a greater balance in the interviews with Agatha and Savka and Daisy and Jay. Where one member of the couple was significantly dominant, the researcher made attempts to address the other directly to encourage them to speak.

Whilst the researcher worked to express a neutral and open countenance in her behaviour, it is likely that apparent aspects of her identity would have influenced participants to some degree. As a sensitive subject, sex and sexuality can be difficult to discuss with a researcher and the researcher's identity characteristics, particularly gender could have either a positive or a negative impact. Catania et al (1996) suggest that participants are more likely to be comfortable making sexual disclosures to female researchers and that female participants are more affected by the presence of an opposite sex researcher. This would indicate that gender dynamic in these interviews was the best option but this does not rule out the possibility that participants would have responded differently to a researcher with a different gender identity.

An important aspect of the interview process that became immediately apparent was that the style of conjoint interviewing allowed the couples to construct and express a shared truth. This included the couples reminding each other of things forgotten, debating how experiences took place and offering each other observations of their behaviours which they had not discussed before. The couples sometimes made statements upon which they did not initially agree but came to a mutual understanding of. This process of communication debate and sharing added another dimension to the interview which represented dyadic sexual communication in action.

This process was broadly welcomed by the participants as every couple, following the interviews, observed to the researcher that it had been an enjoyable and interesting process which had made them reflect positively on their relationship and the communication they share.

Transcription

The interviews were all transcribed by the researcher herself and transcription was completed within one month of the original interview; all recordings were then permanently deleted. During the transcription process interviews were fully

anonymised with names changed and any information that could be used to identify the participants or anyone they knew was redacted.

The process of transcription allowed the researcher to fully review, absorb and reflect upon each of the interviews individually and collectively. This is the process which allowed the identification of four key themes which will be detailed in the subsequent findings and discussion chapter.

Findings & Discussion

This chapter will first, describe and represent the findings of the research grouped into the key themes identified during the transcription process. Following the detailing of the findings, this chapter will present an analysis and discussion of the findings in relation to previous research and theory within the areas of the key themes.

Findings

The following findings from the interviews have been grouped into four key themes: sexual scripts, modes of communication, spaces for non-consent and talking about sex. The findings within these key themes will be detailed in this chapter, analysis of the themes can be found in the subsequent chapter. Points made by participants relating to the key themes are mostly paraphrased with reference to their statement which can be found in the relevant transcripts (original transcripts can be obtained by contacting the researcher through Bournemouth University). In some cases these points are supported by direct quotes which are also referenced to the transcripts.

Sexual Scripts

The theory of sexual scripts including the concept, adherence and transgression was detailed in the literature review; the section below details findings from the interview that show acknowledgement of as well as adherence and resistance to the traditional sexual script. Whilst the participants demonstrated an awareness of and/or adherence to traditional sexual scripts, in all cases the couples cited examples of behaviours which transgressed or resisted the traditional scripts on some level. Whereas some individuals highlighted an awareness that their behaviours were a transgression, others did not.

Acknowledgement & Adherence

Agatha and Savka most explicitly acknowledged the traditional sexual script by contrast to their own behaviours; identifying that Agatha was more likely to initiate sex and Savka was the more likely of the two to decline sex they pointed out that this made Agatha the more male of the two and that this was a deviation from perceived norms (397-398).

Agatha: It is, because it's usually the man who's always... well, this is a stereotype

Savka: That's a stereotype

(397-398)

Most acknowledgement of the traditional sexual script was to be found in the normalisation of behaviours that adhered to the script. Several couples found that, after an initial period of intense sexual activity where both partners were equally initiatory, they settled into a pattern of behaviour more representative of the traditional sexual script.

Cleo and Marc reported this pattern in their description of the shift from an early period of intense sexual activity to one where Cleo felt less sexual desire. They described Marc's initial disappointment at the growth of Cleo's disinterest followed by an adjustment to this new norm where Marc desired and initiated sex with a greater frequency than Cleo but anticipated that he would be turned down often (230-245).

Cleo and Marc's acceptance of this as 'normal' indicates an internalisation of the discourse of a more active male sexuality. This pattern of behaviour was also reported by Beth and Mac; following a period where initiation was mostly balanced the shift moved to Mac although Beth is clear that this has been, in part, a consequence of medication she is taking but that it was also linked to their cohabitation where sex was more frequently available (463-476). This can also be seen in Helen and Paris's relationship, although in this case the reason is more due to Paris' greater confidence in initiating, rather than lack of desire on Helen's part (214-218).

Emma and George's descriptions of their sexual encounters and communications positioned Emma firmly in the role of gatekeeper with an early exchange regarding oral sex. Emma clearly expressed an unwillingness to engage in oral sex in the early part of their relationship; implicit in this exchange was George's desire to do so but he clearly stated an acceptance and that he would adhere to the boundary set by Emma (155-166).

George: When we first started having sex Emma wouldn't do oral

Emma: No. No.

...

George: Yeah, I knew verbally that that was a no go. I said 'that's ok, that's fine'

Emma: Yeah cause then you didn't force me into it like and I didn't end up doing it for quite a while so, yeah...

George: That, that's the key point. Because I didn't force you, it was only for a while (155-166)

This discourse of George as initiator was apparent when discussing the early stages of the relationship but there seemed to be a gradual shift away from the dominance of it as the relationship progressed. The couple linked this to Emma's relative sexual inexperience and their growing experience as the relationship progressed (509-529).

There were also some specific behaviours that could be seen to exemplify the internalisation of the traditional sexual script even in individuals who resisted it or transgressed it in other areas.

Whilst they each regarded themselves as regular sexual initiators, Helen and Agatha both indicated a degree of distress when they were refused by their partners. No such indications of distress were noted in situations where their partners' initiations were ignored, dismissed or refused. This can be linked to the expectation of men always being ready and willing to engage in sex; a rejection can then be perceived as signifying the woman's lack of desirability.

Agatha talked about the experience of initiating with Savka with frequency, explaining that on some occasions he would refuse her and she would be briefly upset (304-306).

Agatha: And if you say no, because some nights you do say no I'm like 'fine'

Savka: Or I'll just fall asleep sometimes. Sometimes I'm just so tired

Agatha: Yeah sometimes you do and then I get in a grump (304-306)

In Helen's case, she recalled one specific incident whilst Paris referred to the issue in more general terms. Helen described an occasion where she had attempted to initiate sex with Paris and he declined on the grounds that he was tired. She acknowledged that this made her feel sad and linked it to her self-esteem. Paris then pointed out that him refusing sex with her was comparatively very rare and that it was a common occurrence that he would attempt to initiate sex with her and be refused. For Paris,

these refusals did not have a negative emotional effect; his response was unconcerned (500-521)

A further example of behaviours that can be linked to the traditional sexual script was cited by both Cleo and Helen who both indicated that there were some occasions where they consented to sex when they didn't, initially, desire it.

Cleo referred to these instances as examples of needing to be reminded that she enjoys sex. She explained that she might not be feeling sexual or desirous but by engaging in some sexual activity with Marc, she began to enjoy it and consequently would be more likely to push herself to do it more. She clarified that she was aroused by Marc but that the demands of daily life had a negative impact on her levels of desire (449-453).

Cleo: Mmmm. And sometimes like, I don't really want it until like, we're actually doing it and then I'm like 'oh this is great! Why don't I do this all the time?' (464-465)

Helen also gave examples of these behaviours in instances where she was initially disinterested but came to enjoy the encounter stating: *'quite often, if prompted I'm like, 'well, yeah. No actually, I would like...' I sort of forget I would like a bit of sex and then I'm like 'no actually I would'* (Helen, 480-482). In other instances she described her decision to engage in sexual acts as motivated by a desire to offer a kindness to Paris. She identified providing Paris with a pleasurable sexual experience as a means of mitigating unhappiness elsewhere in life, indicating that this need to could override her own indifference (529-538).

For the couples in this study the primary site of adherence to the traditional sexual script was demonstrated within the active/passive gender binary regarding sexual drives and interest. These findings will now move from charting participants' adherence to traditional sexual scripts to presenting evidence for transgression of those scripts.

Whilst there was clearly a level of adherence to the traditional sexual script where gender roles were observed, much of the behaviours the couples chose to discuss provided evidence of transgression or resistance to the traditional sexual script.

Whilst Emma and George appeared to initially adhere to the traditional script, they linked this more to sexual experience and confidence than, necessarily, gender roles. George, in fact, pointed out that he consciously and deliberately avoided engaging in behaviour and attitudes he perceived as stereotypically male. He particularly pointed to his consideration of Emma's sexual needs and pleasure as a resistance to the perceived traditional gender role for men in sexual encounters (319-323).

George: ... I know I never wanted to be that guy that just um, and had sex and whatever and didn't care whether she enjoyed it or not because that's not the kind of guy I want to be. It's not kind of a relationship I want to be in with one of us just carrying on only caring about their needs. (319-323)

George was also clear that he was not always the driving force behind the sex they shared, indicating that when he and Emma were having sex, they both dictated what would take place (332-333).

Daisy and Jay were the couple that cited the fewest examples of behaviours that adhered to the traditional sexual script with Jay stating that in the initial stages of their relationship, he was keen not to rush into physical intimacy. Daisy identified that she picked up on these cues from Jay and responded to them accordingly but admitted that she was used to moving forward with physical intimacy at greater speed (155-168).

When Daisy and Jay described both, their first instance of sexual intercourse and how they have engaged with each other since, they indicated that it was mutual and fluid and that they were consistently responding to sexual cues from each other (216-224). Daisy and Jay's descriptions of the mutuality of their sexual initiation and acts echoed

the difficulty many of the couples had with the binary concept of initiator and responder. This was especially apparent when they described stages in their relationship where both parties were feeling highly sexual.

Cleo identified this in the early stages of the relationship explaining that she and Marc were both in a constant state of arousal in each other's presence in the early part of their relationship and this led to an expectation of sexual activity by both parties: *'I mean, I think we just kind of attacked each other... and it was just like understood that we were both pretty much permanently horny during that time period* (Cleo, 143-145). She further clarified that she felt it was a common belief that initiation and consent would be both explicit and verbal in the early stages of a relationship but that she and Marc had an unspoken knowledge of each other's mutual desire. (155-157).

Beth and Mac furthered this point on mutuality when they explicitly verbalised how problematic the binary concept was.

Mac: Who was initiating it, I'm not sure.

Beth: Yeah, I think it was like, joint...

Mac: Mutual

Beth: ...joint consent. I think because we'd had such a great time before and then we were meeting up again, it was more like the anticipation of it.

Mac: Yeah, it can never be joint consent can it? Because there's the one that mentions it first or something like that isn't it?

Beth: I don't think we mentioned it. Yeah, I think we were just... in a tent in a bikini

Mac: Yeah, yeah. It probably, we just started kissing and from there... (408-417)

Mutuality of initiation and shared desire was also an element of Helen and Paris, and Emma and George's relationship, although Helen did acknowledge she initiated hers and Paris' first instance of sexual intercourse (78-91), (420-423).

The gendered role of initiator was the strongest area of resistance to traditional sexual scripts described by the couples.

Daisy and Jay were certain that they initiated sex equally across the course of their relationship. Daisy suggested that there may have been times where she felt that she

initiated sex more often than Jay but that over the course of their relationship it was balanced (455-461).

Cleo and Marc describe changing dynamics throughout their relationship in terms of the balance of who initiates sex, following the period of mutuality described above (144-145) they found that Marc was initiating more before they adjusted to a new equilibrium (231-245). Cleo also described recently taking up a more removed initiator role in instigating a conscious change in their sex life to increase the frequency with which they have sex following the decrease prompted by the birth of their child (337-338).

Whilst they have acknowledged that Mac predominantly initiates now, Beth identified herself as an initiator in early parts of their relationship, putting this down to confidence whereas Mac identified fear caused by an earlier rejection prevented him from initiating as in the instance of their first kiss (62-73).

Agatha and Savka represented the most distinct departure from traditional gender roles in the sexual script, positioning Agatha strongly in the role of initiator. Agatha and Savka both identified that not only did Agatha initiate sex more often than Savka but that she also, never rejected any initiations made by Savka (352-375) as exemplified by this exchange.

Agatha: I've got a higher sex drive than you I think

Savka: You tend to be like, the instigator of things because... well, yeah, you just do.
(373-375)

The dynamic of initiation between Helen and Paris identified definite complexities. Helen describes herself as the '*sexual aggressor*' in the instance of their first occasion of sexual intercourse (58). Helen also instigated what she refers to as '*more elaborate*' (131) sex reasoning that, as someone who had experimented a lot with her sexuality, she knew what she liked and was consequently driven to instigate acts that interested her with Paris (153-157).

Paris however, indicates a shift in this dynamic that occurred during the latter stages of Helen's pregnancy and following the birth of their child. He believed that they had less sex but Helen countered that, based on her knowledge of other mothers with babies of the same age, they were having more sex than most (143-147). Helen did however, pick up on this shift again later in the interview when she described Paris' greater confidence in initiating (214-219).

Helen: I mean, Paris's like, much more confident with that than me, with initiating sex. I'm always a little bit nervous like, sometimes I think about it and then don't. I don't know why. Um, but yeah. Which is ridiculous because I don't think you'd ever say no. So, but like if Paris wants something particularly he'll ask for it and I'll either be like 'yes' or 'Um, I a bit tired' or, particularly like, when I was pregnant, I was achy or whatnot. (214-219)

Paris and Helen did however, regard the balance of initiation between them as balanced overall but suggested that they might be prompted to initiate in different contexts. Paris stated there was an even split and Helen clarified that she was more likely to initiate spontaneous sex whereas Paris would be more likely to do so at routine times (469-473). This assertion contrasted somewhat with a discussion relating to the success of initiations which would indicate that Paris does attempt to initiate more than Helen but that unsuccessful initiations are perhaps, not counted (500-521). Helen did indicate later that she is more likely to initiate verbally whereas Paris would initiate physically (507-508) this different mode of initiation could contribute to different perceptions around regularity of initiation and consent from each of them.

One final area of note in relation to resistance sexual to the traditional sexual script was linguistic limitations. In several instances the participants attempted to describe examples of the woman in their partnership being initiatory the language they used was either overtly masculine or had masculine connotations. Agatha and Savka identified Agatha as the '*Alpha Male*' (394-396) when discussing her active and initiatory role in their sexual relationship. This was also notable in Helen's dialogue when she described herself as the 'aggressor' (58) in the instance of her and Paris' first instance of sexual intercourse.

These findings have identified that participants' experiences problematize the traditional sexual script of masculine initiator and feminine gatekeeper. This demonstrates both, shifting and opposing behaviours in relation to gender expectations and drawing into question the dichotomous concept of initiator/gatekeeper itself. The next section will address the means and methods of communication that participants used in relation to sex and consent.

Modes of Communication

The participants identified a variety of means by which they communicated intent, initiation and consent. The variations could be seen across gender and across the course of each relationship. Modes of communication were verbal, direct and indirect, and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication was complex, multidimensional and contextual including body language such as eye contact and facial expressions, modes of touch, foreplay and the absence of non-consent. Context specific signifiers such as clothing, or lack thereof, were also used. This section details communication within the following topic areas: verbal and vocal; direct verbal, indirect verbal, the problem with verbalisation and vocal communication and physical communication; eye contact and facial expressions, touch, kissing, behavioural and contextual.

Verbal and Vocal Communication

Direct Verbal Communication

The use of direct verbal communication at times of sexual intimacy was minimal amongst the participants although it was used in conversations separate from the act

(this will be detailed in the section below). In most instances where direct verbal communication was used, it was for the purposes of non-consent.

The only couple who cited the regular use of direct verbal communication within the context of sexually intimate acts was Emma and George although they found it difficult to begin with, they subsequently found it was necessary to improve the quality of the sex they had and ensure each other's comfort but as stated above, its primary use was for non-consent. George identified that he would ask Emma questions during moments of sexual intimacy to ensure her comfort and pleasure (325-331)

Helen and Paris did also allude to making requests in terms of direct communication by indicating that Paris might make a specific request if there was something he wanted to do: *'And then sometimes, if there's something in particular you'd like, you ask don't you?'* (Helen, 213-214). Whilst Jay did state *"it's pretty rare we will explicitly say something"* (304-305), they did also acknowledge that they do occasionally directly communicate in some instances and that this has become easier during the course of their relationship. The direct communication could take the form of requests, instructions or checking (246-257 and 270-273).

Direct verbalisations of non-consent were much more common than direct verbalisations of initiation or consent. Often this was teamed with a justification of tiredness as a reason why sex could not take place (Beth, 500, Cleo, 249, Paris, 498-499, Agatha, 378-382) .

Cleo: But I think that's where, where we started to be all like, Marc might like give me a touch and then I would be like... 'no' [laughing] 'I'm really tired' (248-249)

Paris: Like, um, we just say no. Like, um, 'I'm too tired' 'I'm not in the mood' (498-499)

This necessity for direct verbal communication when non-consent comes into play can be seen with Cleo and Marc. They found that direct verbal communication did not play much of a part in their physically intimate encounters for some time and only became necessary when Cleo started to desire sex less. Cleo described how she and Marc had to directly communicate so they were clear on the difference between intimate

behaviours intended for initiation and those with a comforting and emotional purpose (251-256).

The use of direct verbal communication was not just dismissed as something unnecessary but was often regarded as something that could be detrimental to the quality or continuation of the sexual encounter. Agatha and Savka both expressed discomfort at the idea of direct verbal communication. Describing it as 'weird' and 'awkward' (311-312) and explaining that if a direct request for a sexual act was made it would 'put both of us off' (316) especially if the act requested was rejected. Agatha reiterated this point further applying it, not just to her experiences with Savka but with all of her sexual experiences. She explained that she could not recall once, in her sexual experience, the use of direct verbal communication for consent as it was, for her, a physical act (643-647).

Helen and Paris echoed the discomfort expressed by Agatha and Savka, also describing it as weird and showing particular discomfort of the idea of direct verbalisation using names during sex. Helen indicated that she might be vocal in her encouragement of Paris during sex and provide physical signals but she would never use words (354-373).

Both, Beth and Mac and Agatha and Savka pointed to direct verbalisation prior to sex as something that would make them uncomfortable by dint of its planned nature, that this would be detrimental to their perception of sex as something that 'just happens naturally'. Beth did acknowledge that verbalisation had been a growing part of her and Mac's sexual relationship but still expressed discomfort with the idea of sex being planned. Beth expressed a preference for spontaneity and indicated that she would prefer that Mac simply initiate sex rather than verbally suggesting it (688-691).

Agatha's reaction to the concept of planned sex was more oppositional and Savka indicated that sex was, for him, not made up of conscious decisions and planning. Agatha suggested that planned sex could be perceived as '*calculated*' and '*pervverted*' (625-627).

Indirect Verbal Communication

The participants described some use of indirect verbal communication such as describing their mood or indicating that the context was appropriate.

Mac, for example explained that he indicate to Beth a general feeling of desire by stating that he was '*feeling really horny*' or something similar (547), this would be regarded as a form of initiation. Whereas Helen and Paris indicated that informing one another that the baby was asleep would indicate it was an appropriate time (209-211).

Beth and Mac also identified offering to put on a condom as a consent point. Mac pointed out that this would be an unambiguous consent point for him, that although he may have been receiving other signals that Beth intended to have sexual intercourse with him, he would be certain of it if he offered to put a condom on and she agreed (285-307).

The Problem with Verbalisation

The concept of verbalisation, direct or indirect, was often perceived as something that could 'break the moment' or interrupt the physicality of the sexual act.

Cleo and Marc commented on this in terms of maintaining their focus suggesting that any talk could be distracting and '*take you out of the moment*' (400). Cleo did however, indicated that it can become necessary near to climax to ensure Marc continues the action that will bring her to that point.

Agatha and Savka focussed on the importance of the physicality of the act and indicated that verbalisation could make them too conscious and intellectually present which would negatively affect their enjoyment of sex. Savka described sex as being '*in motion together*' and gaining an '*equilibrium*' (317-318) pointing to the physicality of the act. Agatha reiterated that sense of physicality by comparing sex to giving birth in that a woman would be angered if you were to be 'pestering' (334) her with questions during that time.

Agatha: And you become almost animalistic in your brain. You go into another brain. Your conscious is, is gone and as soon as you go back into the conscious brain you're like 'oh, that's rubbish now' ... with other partners like, you do feel... You have those moments where you like, catch each other's eyes and then you like 'oh, oh, oh, this is horrible' and then you start to question yourself and then you question them and then it becomes very awkward. If you start doing that like, saying 'oh, do you like this' 'Is that ok' then sex isn't going to work. It's almost like giving birth, if you keep like, pestering women like 'you ok? You ok?' you're going to get hit in the face. It's kind of the same vibe. (319-335)

Vocal Non-verbal Communication

Participants often referred to vocal but non-verbal communication particularly with respect to vocal expressions of pleasure or enjoyment equating to a form of indications of consent.

Agatha and Savka specifically identified this; they described how they can tell from the noises they are each making that their partner is enjoying the activity and that is regarded as consent. Equally, they can use noises to identify one another's discomfort and respond accordingly (610-612)

Emma and George also recognised 'noises' as signals. George explained that he could identify the noises Emma made to express pleasure but he also pointed out that that they were often involuntary so could not be taken alone as an indicator of positive consent (251-257).

George: And, and the noises she makes and the noises I make

Interviewer: So there is an indication without using words?

George: Yeah! Oh god yeah! There's involuntary reflexes for it, yeah. I know if she's enjoying it even if she was trying not to show it to me.

Interviewer: And those things in themselves show you it's OK to proceed?

George: Yes but... just because it feels good doesn't mean it necessarily wanted so you'd have to take that with a pinch of salt. (251-257)

Helen and Paris also identified the uses of vocal signals but identified that Helen used them to a larger extent than Paris. Helen described these vocal signals as '*encouragement*' (367) indicating that her perception was that they formed a part of her physical consent (351-368).

Physical Communication

Couples tended to cite a dominant use of physical modes of communication and a good literacy of physical cues which often grew as their relationship progressed.

Agatha and Savka stated that they saw body language as clear form of communication in matters of sex. Savka identified that the way Agatha moved her body during sexual acts opened up or closed off her body to him and this was a clearer form of communication to him than other forms (665-669).

Cleo and Mark cited an unspoken certainty of each other's desire at the start of their relationship as well as an intricate knowledge of each other's subtle forms of sexual communication as their interpersonal intimacy grew. Cleo explained that there might be a presumption of verbalisation in the early parts of a relationship but that she and Marc '*just knew*' (163) that they wanted to have sex and were consenting (155-157). She later went on to explain that she could now enter a room and know as soon as she saw him that he wanted to have sex (252-253).

Beth and Mac also identified a growing literacy of each other's modes of sexual communication as their relationship has progressed. Beth explained that this literacy based upon cues such as facial expressions had developed particularly since they had been cohabiting (576-582).

Emma and George also cited an unambiguous understanding that they shared a mutual desire prior to their first kiss and a developing literacy of each other's modes of sexual communication as their relationship has progressed. Emma explained that their mutual desire made their consent obvious (63-65). George later pointed out that '*You*

learn each other' (275) in reference to understanding each other's unspoken cues for initiation and consent.

As with other couples, Daisy and Jay described an unspoken understanding in their first sexual encounters followed by a growing mutual knowledge of each other's forms of communication. Daisy referred to this initial mutual understanding as feeling '*natural*' and '*organic*' (216) and Jay added that there were 'vibes or feelings' (224) they sensed from each other which made up a form of unspoken communication. Jay later went on to say that their mutual knowledge had grown (269-270) and Daisy indicated that the early part of their relationship was a process of learning each other's modes of physical communication, what she referred to as their '*tells*' (359). Daisy and Jay agreed that over time, they had become skilled in knowing each other's '*tells*' (358-367). The importance of time and a deeper understanding of each other, in order to judge consent and remove the need for verbal communication was also reiterated by Helen and Paris.(177-182).

Eye Contact and Facial Expression

Eye contact and facial expressions were used by participants as both initiation and consent behaviours and were used at various stages of physical intimacy.

Beth and Mac suggested that eye contact was used as the cue to proceed in their first kiss (78) and used continuously throughout their first instance of sexual intercourse (319). Beth also identifies that Mac has a particular smile she identifies as an indicator of initiation which she described as his '*sex smile*' (548-549).

Emma and George also cited several examples of using eye contact and facial expressions as both, indicators of intent and initiation and consent. George indicated that repeated and/or sustained eye contact would indicate initiation or desire to him (69-72). Emma also identified the way George looks at her as an indication of his desire to have sex with her and, as such, a form of initiation (272-274). She also stated that

George's facial expressions during sexual activity informed her whether or not she should continue or change what she was doing (348-349).

Daisy highlighted that eye contact and facial expressions could be very subtle especially when used within the context of established interpersonal intimacy and mutual knowledge of each other describing this as follows: *'Attuned, attuned to each other's sort of, tells. Sometimes it can be as little as a flash in the corner of an eye* (445-446)

Touch

The use of touch to initiate and to express positive consent was common amongst the couples.

Agatha and Savka affiliated the use of touch with the concept of positive consent as the absence of non-consent. They described how they would touch each other with increasing degrees of physical/sexual intimacy and continue to do so unless one of them indicated non-consent. They noted that this form of pushing boundaries or touching without permission could be seen as *'bad'* (293-294) or *'naughty'* (301) but indicated that it was acceptable within the context of their relationship (287-291).

Cleo and Marc, Emma and George, Daisy and Jay and Helen and Paris all described how touching is used for both, initiation and consent. Cleo explained how it functioned as something reciprocal where one partner would touch and the other would return the touch; this was regarded as positive consent (251-252). George also described this reciprocal touch (239) as well as describing how Emma's initiation behaviours included her *'jumping on him'* or touching his penis, clarifying that it was simply physical (287-289). Daisy and Jay described how reciprocal touch might escalate with each partner responding to touch with more physically/sexually intimate touch which would eventually lead to sexual intercourse (310-316). Helen explained how Paris would initiate sex with her when they were in bed by transforming physical/emotional

intimacy, in this case a cuddle, into something more sexual by touching parts of her body more associated with sex such as her breasts (204-207).

Kissing

Many of the couples pointed to kissing as a form of initiation and consent but Agatha and Savka and Beth and Mac particularly identified that there were specific types of kisses that indicated something sexual rather than just dyadic or emotional intimacy.

Savka explained that there was a perceptible difference between a kiss goodnight and a kiss that was indicative of intended or burgeoning sexual intimacy: *'And then like, you kiss but it's not a kiss goodnight. It's like, it's the kiss that can then lead onto other things and then does'* (Savka, 535-537). Agatha added that when that kiss lead to further touching, it was a clear indicator that both partners intended to have sexual intercourse (540-541). Beth and Mac referred to a 'sex kiss' (431-436, 515, 580-582, 593-599 & 672-675) which was differentiated from normal kisses and perceived as a form of initiation and/or consent. Mac described these 'sex kisses' as 'heavier than a normal one' (421) indicating that there is a perceptible difference in the technique of kissing that defines the 'sex kiss' (418-422).

Behavioural

Some of the couples also identified actions that indicated initiation, intent or consent particularly with reference to the removal of their own or each other's clothing.

Agatha identified that, on the occasion she and Savka first had sexual intercourse, the moment Savka removed all of his clothing was a consent point, indicating that her willingness to continue with sexually intimate acts once Savka was completely unclothed was a form of positive consent to further sexually intimate acts (132-136).

Marc and Cleo identified that what Cleo chose to wear to bed was a signal of initiation or invitation to initiation. This was premised on a deviation from the norm as they described that Cleo would normally have underwear and a t-shirt on when she went to bed but that the absence of a t-shirt was a signal. Cleo also identified that as Marc always slept fully unclothed, she had to be able to identify other signals (269-275). Beth and Mac and Helen and Paris also identified that undressing each other or themselves during sexually intimate moments was perceived and as a signal of initiation and/or consent (Beth and Mac, 266-267, Helen and Paris, 86-91).

Cleo and Marc also identified focussing on each other rather than their mobile phones as indicative of initiation. They explained that placing their phones aside with a pretext of talking was often, not intended or perceived as a premise for talk but actually an indicator that they both intended to be sexually intimate with each other (281-286).

Contextual

Many of the couples identified that context was important in establishing the meaning of communications, particularly non-verbal communication and also that context could communicate something in and of itself.

For Agatha and Savka, context and particularly timing impacts their relationship now more so than in the early days as a consequence of caring for two children. They explained that, initially, their time together did not always included caring for a child so there were fewer impediments upon the timing of their sexual activity but now, parenting full time had necessitated a routine where there were certain times they would have sex. Agatha described how there was a form of consent in the routine, indicating that sex might be expected by both parties in those times deemed appropriate (349-367).

Beth and Mac described how certain initiatory acts were only acceptable in certain contexts. Mac explained how he might place Beth's hands on his genitals but that he

would not do this whilst sitting on their sofa but only if they were already in bed together (482-485). George also described how, he and Emma being the only ones present in his house was mutually acknowledged as a precursor to sex (423-427).

Paris also described how a good sense of one another's mood and their experiences that day provided each other with an indication as to whether sex was a likely or welcome prospect:

*Paris: Well, we, we just understand each other, where each other's at most of the time
Helen: Yeah*

Paris: Because if you've had a really shit day with the baby then you know, we're just knackered and none of us is in the mood (546-550)

This section has charted the various means by which participants described communicating about sex, consent and initiation including reference to how non-consent was communicated. The subsequent section will examine this issue more closely by describing how couples created a space for non-consent.

Space for Non-Consent

Whilst this research is not about non-consent, positive consent does not exist within a vacuum in relationships; it became apparent in the interviews that creating an environment where non-consent was acceptable and understood contributed significantly to how those couples viewed positive consent. This is particularly relevant in where the absence of non-consent is viewed as positive consent.

Absence of Non-Consent as Positive Consent

Instances where non-consent was viewed as positive consent were common amongst the couples.

Agatha and Savka discussed this in the context of relationship progression explaining how they would proceed with increasingly sexually intimate acts until one of them said no (288-299). Agatha clarified this when she stated: *'So is it a kind of try before you... until you're stopped rather than asking before you do' (298-299).*

Cleo and Marc also reflected this, in their case, in the first instance sexual intercourse where like Agatha and Savka, they enacted increasingly intimate sexual acts and perceived it as acceptable to continue unless they were stopped by their partner (112-115).

Helen explicitly cited the absence of non-consent as perceived consent when discussing the first occasion she and Paris had sexual intercourse: *'There was no non-consent so it was, you know' (80).* She stated that the consent was implicit and that the fact that there was no no-consent was an indicator that it was acceptable to proceed (78-80).

George and Emma also describe their belief that it is permissible to proceed with a sexual act unless there was an indication not to. George explained that it was not necessary to ask Emma's permission to do anything, with Emma clarifying that this was acceptable precisely because she felt comfortable with making it clear to George if she did not want to do anything (187-190).

Communicating Non-Consent

The couples used a variety of means of communicating non-consent, both physical and verbal but, unlike positive consent, non-consent was much more likely to be verbal.

Agatha and Savka described both physical and verbal forms of non-consent, suggesting that physical indications, such as pushing a partner away, might be used initially but that verbal communication would be used if the physical signals are not perceived, understood or responded to (670-672). Agatha described pushing a partner away rather than verbalising non-consent as more gentle (596-597).

Paris explained that he and Helen tended to use more verbal indications of non-consent such as directly saying no and explaining why the sex was not desired by describing their mood or stating that they were feeling tired (498-499).

Daisy and Jay also describe the use of verbalisation as their main means of communicating non-consent but like Agatha and Savka, they also indicated that this might follow other signals if those signals had not been perceived or responded to. Jay clarified that they have always felt able to inform one another if they did not want to have sex (230-236).

Emma and George also cited that they used predominantly verbal signals of non-consent but these were focussed on Emma, with no examples of how George might signal non-consent. They used the example that, initially, Emma was unwilling to perform oral sex and both stated that Emma had been very verbally clear on this issue (155-163). They later reiterated the importance that Emma was willing and able to verbally state any unwillingness to have sex or discomfort with any sexual act (187-194). Emma was clear in this: *'I'd never not say it if I wasn't comfortable with anything'* (194).

Beth and Mac talk about non-consent in the context of their relationship now as cohabiting partners, indicating it wasn't something that was required in the early days of their relationship. They also describe it as predominantly verbal and focussed on Beth rather than Mac. They described how Beth might reprimand Mac for giving her an initiatory 'sex kiss' (437-440) or that she would say no if Mac attempted to initiate sex with her at a time she regarded as inappropriate (760-761).

Cleo and Marc also described verbalisations of non-consent citing examples where one might touch the other in a way that was perceived as initiation and that, if they were unwilling, the response would be verbally negative or apathetic with an explanation such as tiredness (248-257).

All of the couples pointed to the importance of accepting and understanding non-consent in their relationships to ensure a healthy environment for positive consent. There were however, some examples of the women in the relationship finding instances of non-consent difficult.

Agatha and Savka described a growing acceptance of non-consent as their relationship progressed and the emotional response Agatha had, especially in the early days of their relationship, if Savka was non-consenting. Agatha explained that Savka being unwilling to have sex was perceived by her as an indication of his lack of attraction to her especially as he wouldn't necessarily explain his reason for not consenting. She identified that this improved as their interpersonal intimacy grew and Savka felt more able to explain his reasons. Agatha also identified that the need for clearer sexual communication was more important for them as a committed couple to ensure they were considerate of one another's feelings (352-367).

Helen and Paris explained that they regarded non-consent as particularly important to ensure each other's mutual comfort:

'Helen: I think it's completely fine, non-consent in our relationship because we love each other and wouldn't want the other one to do anything they didn't want to do and...

Paris: Well, we, we just understand each other, where each other's at most of the time'(543-547).

They also pointed out that it helped if the partners understood non-consent as a reflection of the individual's mood and not a reflection on them or the degree to which their partner desired them:

Helen: We're both... I think one of the things that helps there be a space for a no is that we both know that we're sexually desired. You know, regardless of what's happened with my body or you know, all the changes that we've been through very rapidly in a year, I still feel very much desired and I don't know, do you feel desired still?

Paris: Yeah

Helen: Yeah? Good. Whey. Um, so that makes a no ok because it isn't a rejection it's just a statement of mood or general feeling so, yeah. The no is occasional but there's definitely room for it (551-559)

Helen did however, describe one incident where she felt hurt by Paris' non-consent, relating this to her own self-esteem but simultaneously indicated that she felt she shouldn't have been hurt by it because it was rare for Paris to decline sex and that she recognised she was desired (500-517).

Daisy and Jay placed a good deal of emphasis on the importance of creating a space for non-consent, suggesting that it was an important part of understanding, respecting and caring for one-another and that knowing non-consent was acceptable made sexual intimacy a more comfortable experience. Jay indicated that trusting that each other would express any non-consent had been central to their establishing sexual intimacy. Daisy added that a lack of '*judgement ... [or] pressure*' (399) in instances of non-consent, rather, interest and concern was important for building '*mutual understanding*' (403) of each other in a functional sexual relationship (381-403). Jay also pointed out that, even in their established relationship, that consent was never a '*forgone conclusion*' (425). Daisy further emphasised that she felt an integral part of positive consent was knowing indicators, however subtle, that your partner was uncomfortable or did not wish to proceed and that it was important not to be personally affected by non-consent (448-454).

Emma and George further emphasised the value they placed upon creating a space for non-consent; they described how George's response to Emma's non-consent on the issue of oral sex allowed Emma the space to think about it and come to it in her own time, performing the act when she felt comfortable with it (515-527).

Beth and Mac also identified a space for non-consent when Beth stated that she was unafraid to tell Mac she was not willing to have sex and that she hoped that was the case for him too. Mac however, was clear that he did not find it necessary as he was always willing to have sex (766-770). Cleo and Marc further described how non-consent became an issue when Cleo's interest in sex fell. They explained how Marc

found the change hard because his initiations were being rejected more often but that they adjusted to the change with Marc became more accepting of Cleo's lessened interest in engaging in sex (241-245).

This section has identified the participants' recognition of the place for non-consent in their relationships, how it was communicated, its value and responses to it. The final section of these findings will relate how participants made use of verbal communication about sex, separate from the act.

Talking About Sex

Most of the couples, with the distinct exception of Agatha and Savka, used conversations they had about sex, separate from the act as an important site of sexual communication which fed into their agreed boundaries and perceptions of shared consent.

Helen and Paris had the most formalised version of the above practice. This was linked to their particular sexual practices. Helen identifies BDSM (Bondage, Domination and Sadomasochism) as part of her sexual identity; this necessitated clear discussions of acceptable acts, boundaries and agreed 'safe words'. The safe word allowed them to invoke the boundaries and consent they had previously agreed without referring to it directly. Helen and Paris were clear that these discussions took place separate from sex and fed into the sex and sexual consent they shared. (148-171).

Emma and George's conversations about sex were driven by a mutual desire to improve the quality of their sexual interactions consequently these discussions developed and improved as their relationship progressed. They described how, after Emma's early discomfort in talking about sex, they were able to discuss it. These discussions initially took place after the couple had had sex and allowed them to build greater trust and understanding which created a more relaxed and informed environment. Emma and George both recognised these conversations as playing an

important role in the improvement of the quality of sex they have and their developing intimacy (353-374).

Daisy and Jay described how they developed their communication over time and conversations they had following sex helped them to build trust and confidence in respect of the consent they shared. They explained that the conversations related to discussing aspects they particularly enjoyed in the sex they just had and indicating things they would like to do more. They both identified that these conversations contributed to their ability to be non-verbal in their communication when they were engaging in sexual intimacy; they regarded this as an integral part of their relationship (273-287).

Jay: And sometimes we talk afterwards.

Daisy: We do actually and sometimes in isolation of...

Jay: Yeah

Daisy: ..you know, physical, physical intimacy. Um, not necessarily to review or critique or anything just to kind of air it or something.

...

Daisy: Yeah, I find it really quite nice actually. I think it sort of, it helps reinforce the, you know the trust, if you will, and knowing what the other person's agreeable to....

Jay: I think...

Daisy: ...and not agreeable too and kind of firming up that non-verbal communication there. Which we've kind of come to, it's become part of who we are as a couple. (273-287)

Beth and Mac also referred to conversations following sex feeding into their understanding of each other's sexual modes of communication (671-684). They also referred to the fact that, separate from sex, Beth had communicated to Mac that she had a preference for being dominated by him sexually thus improving their understanding of each other's consenting behaviours and boundaries(639-649).

Cleo and Marc identified that conversations about sex grew in importance after the birth of their child. Cleo felt that it was important to discuss re-establishing their sex life once they had adjusted to becoming parents. She initiated and discussed a plan to increase the frequency with which she and Marc had sex which they both agreed to.

This has contributed to a greater frequency with which they might both initiate and/or consent (323-335).

As mentioned above, Agatha and Savka were the only couple who described discomfort with the concept of having conversations about the sex they share although they acknowledge that they do have more conversations about it now than they did at the start of their relationship (281-286). The exception to this was discussions about the sexual experiences that they had with others which may have fed into some degree of understanding and interpersonal knowledge but were deemed inappropriate at this stage of their relationship (466-479). Agatha stated that she finds it very difficult to talk about sex with Savka, she explained that it makes her embarrassed but that she feels very able to talk about it to female friends (440-446, 464-479).

This section has described how participants made use of conversations, separate from but about sex contributed to greater sexual intimacy and understanding as well as forming a part to the consent that they shared. This is the final section of findings, the subsequent section of this chapter will attend to an analysis and discussion of the findings with reference to research and theory related in the literature review.

Analysis

Based on the above findings, the section below presents an analysis and discussion of the communication and consent shared by the couples who participated in this research. It will link back to theory and research related in the literature review and, where necessary, introduce new theoretical concepts. It is structured according to the key themes as above that is, sexual scripts, communication, space for non-consent and talking about sex.

Sexual Scripts

Acknowledgement and Adherence

The traditional sexual script (Simon and Gagnon, 1984) was described above as being grounded in cultural scenarios which were strictly gendered and heteropatriarchal, casting women as passive recipients of sex and men as active sexual agents. The participants of this study identified this dominant script but notably, in most cases, in terms of their own conscious or unconscious desire to depart from it. Agatha and Savka pointed to the stereotypical nature of the concept of men as sexually dominant within the context of her own dominant sexuality within the relationship.

Agatha: It is, because it's usually the man who's always... well, this is a stereotype
Savka: That's a stereotype
(397-398)

George expressed an unwillingness to fulfil the stereotype of dominant male sexuality which he conceptualised as being unconcerned with women's sexual needs or pleasure.

George: ... I know I never wanted to be that guy that just um, and had sex and whatever and didn't care whether she enjoyed it or not because that's not the kind of guy I want to be. (319-321)

Whilst these examples were the only explicit acknowledgement of an awareness of the dominant sexual script, other behaviours described by the participants did indicate an internalised acceptance of the script which led to both, conformity and dissonance.

The normalisation of a more dominant sexual drive can be identified in some cases where relationships became more settled especially once the couples were cohabiting. Cleo and Marc appeared to normalise the traditional script when they described how Cleo's desire for sex waned whilst Marc's remained.

Cleo: ... And then, at some point we just started having sex less. I think that's normal

...

Marc: And I think I found that difficult for a while. Um, because I, I was hornier than you were... maybe

Cleo: Well, more often

Marc: Yeah. Um. But yeah, I think that's fine now. I think like, we've adjusted to it

Cleo: Yeah. [laughing] Now you just accept that it's not going to happen (231-246)

This discourse could also be identified in Beth and Mac's description of their differing levels of desire where Beth interest in sex fell but Mac's remains undiminished and leads to him attempting to initiate sex more often and being refused by Beth regularly. Mac described himself as '*always in the mood*' (766).

Other behaviours which appeared to adhere to the traditional sexual script could be seen in the presence of the gendered roles of initiator and gatekeeper. This was most distinct in the case of Emma and George; they described how George would try things and it was down to Emma to acquiesce or refuse.

George: I've, I've never needed to ask her if it's OK to do something

Emma: Because you know I'd make it obvious if it wasn't

George: Yeah, like she has done because I know that if there is an issue potentially she tells me, I feel that I'm free to do it... (187-190)

It could be suggested that George and Emma's dependence upon the traditional sexual script may be due to their levels of sexual experience. They both acknowledge that they were not vastly sexually experienced when they became a couple (509-511). Humphries (2007) and Beres (2010) both pointed to sexual experience as impacting upon communication and consent behaviours, in this case it may be that Emma and George had a greater dependence on the traditional sexual script because they lacked other models upon which to base their sexual behaviours. This theory is born out in their descriptions of the sex they shared as their relationship developed where it was indicated that Emma became a much more active and initiatory participant (287-289, 332-336, 522-527).

The normalisation of male initiation could also be seen in an exchange between Helen and Paris where Helen described how Paris was more confident in initiating sex with her whereas she experienced self-doubt which sometimes causes her not to initiate even when she desired sex (214-216). This could be said to be another example of the ease with which couples can fall back upon the reproduction of heteropatriarchal roles within their sexual relationships even when it conflicts with how they feel. That is to say, that when self-doubt arises or confidence is lacking, it is easier to follow the rules than to break them.

The internalisation of the sexual script could also be seen in individual's responses to unsuccessful attempts to initiate. Whereas some of the male participants expressed nonchalance at rejection or seemed unperturbed (Paris, 520-521 & Mac 462-467), several of the women described feeling hurt or distressed by sexual refusals from their partners. Agatha stated that, upon Savka's refusal or disinterest she would '*get in a grump*' (306) and Helen related a story where Paris refused sex and she felt hurt, acknowledging that this related to her self-esteem (514-515). These women's responses could be a consequence of a discourse of men's perpetual sexual desire. Jozkowski & Peterson (2013) identified that the traditional sexual script required men to be seen as constantly 'up for it' in order to maintain their masculine identity; if this perception is internalised by women too it is easy to see how they would find sexual rejection especially difficult. If men are always 'up for it' a woman rejected

would see that rejection as a reflection of their own undesirability because, within the traditional sexual script, the idea that he is just not in the mood is impossible.

Possible evidence of a discourse of (or internalisation of a discourse of) a more passive female sexuality can also be found in incidents described by both Cleo and Helen. They both related examples of engaging in sex when they did not, initially, desire it (Helen, 480-482 & 529-538, Cleo, 464-467) but were also both clear that, once they were participating, they did enjoy the sex. Previous research has demonstrated that engaging in sex that is not definitively 'wanted' is not uncommon practice as described in the studies cited in the literature review (O'Sullivan & Gaines, 1998, and O'Sullivan & Allgeier both cited in Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007:73). The literature review also referred to Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007) who cautioned against assuming unwanted sex was non-consensual and pointed to their study which demonstrated that women regarded wantedness/unwantedness as a scale rather than a binary.

Whilst this work goes some way to explaining scenarios where women might proceed with sexual activity when they do not desire it, it is limited in establishing what might motivate them to do so. Humphries & Herold (2007) suggested that the perception exists that having had sex with a partner can lead to an expectation that further sex will be forthcoming. Within the context of these interviews, such a justification seems unlikely particularly with regard to the participants' willingness not to consent to sex in other instances. Helen's justification for the act in one part was as a kindness to Paris although it is notable in this description she is referring to a 'hand job' (manually stimulating the penis using hand/s) to bring him to orgasm (529-538) rather than engaging in an act intended for more mutual pleasure. In the other instance Helen described (480-482) and in Cleo's example they both allude to forgetting they enjoy sex or needing to be reminded of it. This could indicate a self-perception in which the sexual or desirous self may not be prioritised even though it is present. This could certainly be linked to traditional sexual scripts where desire is not considered to be a part of women's identity thus, women lack models to, essentially, remind them they are sexual beings.

There is no doubting here that the traditional sexual script has an impact upon the participants of this study but, as the subsequent section will demonstrate, it is far from the ruling force in their behaviours and attitudes.

Transgression & Resistance

Whilst the cultural scenarios of the traditional sexual script demand adherence to the gendered heteropatriarchal norms the interpersonal scripts allow individuals to impose their own identity and sexual desires upon any given sexual situation (Simon and Gagnon, 1984). However, when those impositions cause a distinct departure from the cultural scenario this can be seen as resistance or transgression.

Evidence for the existence of resistance and transgression was described in the literature review with Dworkin & O'Sullivan's (2007) assertion that in a post-feminist society we have moved on from the concept of female sexuality as passive. Masters et al's (2013) research also found that individuals may conform, make themselves an exception to or work to actively transform the traditional sexual script. Whilst this research was not focussed specifically on examining the degree to which participants adhere to or deviate from the traditional sexual script, a good deal of evidence was found to indicate transgression and resistance.

As was conveyed above, George was deliberate in his avoidance of being 'that guy' but further evidence was also found of men not fulfilling their specified role in the traditional script. Jay and Daisy described how it was Jay's hesitance and caution that led to an unhurried pace in the development of their sexual intimacy. Daisy acknowledged that she took cues from Jay but had previously been used to moving towards sexual intimacy and, ultimately, sexual intercourse with greater alacrity (155-170). Although Daisy identified this as a departure from her past experiences she also pointed out that it did not feel '*unusual or weird or uncomfortable [sic]*' (168) indicating that Jay's behaviour in this instance, although a distinct departure from the

role assigned to him by the traditional sexual script, was not perceived as unacceptable.

Agatha and Savka described their sexual roles in the relationship in opposition to the traditional script citing Agatha's sexuality as dominant to the degree they referred to her as 'the alpha male' (394-395) positioning Savka's sexuality as less dominant. Savka pointed out to Agatha that he was not '*of the disposition to try and persuade [her] to have sex*' (391-392) thereby acknowledging that his personal identity did not encompass an aggressive, potentially coercive sexual element. Whilst they both acknowledged these roles represented a departure from those traditionally assigned to them (397-398), they did not indicate any discomfort with this. Rather, Agatha expressed pleasure at it, stating '*I'm the alpha male in this relationship. Oh I like it*' (395).

These examples are indicative of a masculine sexual identity which, despite deviating from that proscribed by the traditional sexual script and the social stereotype, is not just accepted but embraced. This identity does not require of its men that they are sexually dominant, always 'up for it' or required to take full responsibility for initiating sex, instead of their sexual identity being defined by their gender, it is determined by their personality and their relationship.

As with the men above, several of the women in this study described themselves or were described by their partners as enacting behaviours that departed from their proscribed role. As detailed above, Agatha was perceived by herself and her partner as being sexually dominant, an identity she and her partner embraced. Helen described herself as a '*sexual aggressor*' (58); she discussed how she had a good deal more sexual experience than Paris (414-416) and that she had strong ideas about what she liked. This led to Helen proposing certain sexual acts to Paris that he was initially uncertain of but was willing to try and, ultimately, found he enjoyed.

This description of Helen establishes her as holding a firmly autonomous sexual identity which departs wholly from the concept of female sexual passivity. Neither Helen nor Paris overtly acknowledged this as a departure from an accepted norm

rather, it was the norm in their relationship which they indicated pleasure in which Paris highlighted when he said 'we're both quite sexual people' (143).

Although, Beth and Mac's relationship has fallen into more traditional roles, Beth described herself as more sexually experienced than Mac (720) and the more sexually confident of the two (62-63) at the start of their relationship. This confidence allowed Beth to be more initiatory in their early sexual encounters and whilst she cited cohabiting as a contributing factor in the drop in her sexual desire, she also indicated that it was a consequence of medication she was taking. This indicates that the more passive role Beth has taken in their sexual relationship may not be entirely representative of her true sexual identity and levels of desire.

The autonomous, active and initiatory female sexual identities evidenced here are also a departure from the traditional sexual script. As with the masculine identities above, they were accepted without question and welcomed within the context of the relationship. This is further evidence to suggest that there are sites where the concept of a passive female sexuality are resisted and transgressed.

Whilst there was evidence of resistance and transgression in relation to gendered identities, there was greater evidence still in opposition to concept of initiator/gatekeeper roles. Participants discussed both, a sense of balance and mutuality in initiation as well as indicating that, where the roles do exist, they are fluid and can function differently at different sites.

Beres (2013) has cautioned researchers that becoming dependent upon sexual scripting theory as a grounding paradigm for sex research can be restrictive and deny participants the opportunity to express themselves. This was borne out by the participants' resistance to the universal, unidirectional and binary concept of initiation and consent. Although they did cite many examples of one party initiating and the other consenting or not consenting, there were also many examples where participants described engaging in sex as simultaneous and mutual.

Beth and Mac wrestled with the concept thus:

Mac: Who was initiating it, I'm not sure.

Beth: Yeah, I think it was like, joint...

Mac: Mutual

Beth: ...joint consent. I think because we'd had such a great time before and then we were meeting up again, it was more like the anticipation of it.

Mac: Yeah, it can never be joint consent can it? Because there's the one that mentions it first or something like that isn't it?

Beth: I don't think we mentioned it. Yeah, I think we were just... in a tent in a bikini

Mac: Yeah, yeah. It probably, we just started kissing and from there...

(408-417)

This sense of mutuality was echoed at some point, directly or indirectly, by all of the couples. Daisy and Jay described it as 'organic and natural' and stated '*it's always kind of just sort of happened*' (Jay, 223). Helen used the same language to describe the mutuality with '*just happened*' (78) and Cleo used similar language in stating '*I think we just knew*' (163). When questioned on who initiates George said '*most of the time it's both of us together*' (423).

These statements reflect those made by participants in Beres' (2010) work who 'just knew'. It is clear here then, that the participants' experiences often did not reflect the positivist concept of initiation and response where one act is deemed a cause and the response, an effect. In the literature review above it was proposed that '*any given sexual act, by any person in a sexual situation may have multiple meanings and can simultaneously be an initiation and an expression of consent*' (page 21). This mutuality of inception and progression in instances of sexual intimacy can be seen to support this proposition. The sexual acts themselves will be explored further below in the section on modes of communication.

Where participants did discuss initiation and response, many indicated a degree of balance between the partners and all described a fluidity where there might be balance at some times and, at others, one partner might take the lead. There was also evidence that initiation does not only exist at one site, in act, but can also be present as a separate and more generalised driving force behind a couple's sex life.

All of the couples indicated that there was no dominant initiator at the start of their relationship, a condition summed up by Cleo when she said: *'it was just like understood that we were both pretty much permanently horny during that time period'* (144-145).

Alongside, Cleo and Marc, Beth and Mac and Helen and Paris also described a shift in their relationship towards the men initiating sex more frequently. However, they also implied that this was not necessarily the commencement of a permanent state; rather it was influenced by other factors and could be subject to change in the future. This was evidenced by plans set out by Cleo (335-345) and Helen (265-273) to re-establish and maintain their sex lives following the birth of their respective children. This can be seen as a removed form of initiation in that they are taking active steps to ensure the frequency and quality of sex in the future.

Emma and George and Daisy and Jay generally cited a balance where there was one party initiating but there was evidence of some degree of ebb and flow between the partners as exemplified by Daisy and Jay as follows

Jay: I think it happens both ways. I think both of us tend to.

Daisy: Yeah, there are some points when I do think I initiate more maybe but if tallying up for the sake of tallying up over seven years...

Jay: I think it's pretty equal

Daisy: Yeah, pretty much equal
(457-461)

Although Agatha and Savka have positioned Agatha as the dominant initiator they did not suggest this was an exclusive role; they described instances where Savka would also initiate.

The experiences of these couples indicates multiple sites of resistance and transgression from the traditional sexual script with deviations from gender roles and in their opposition of the concept of sex which must be initiated by one and responded to by another.

Although Masters et al (2013) found similar resistance to the script with their 'exception finders' and 'transformers', this attempt to categorise the individuals left little space for diverse and fluid identities. The narrative shared by the participants in this study demonstrated that the sexual roles they assign themselves and are assigned by their partners are by no means fixed; they can be affected by many factors including relationship status, mood, personality, physical disposition and wellbeing.

This chapter has sought to view the sexual activities, initiation and consent behaviours and communication of the participants through the lens of sexual script theory. It has established that, although participants were undoubtedly impacted by the cultural scenarios described by the traditional sexual script, their interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts diverged significantly from the cultural scenario. The fluidity of sexual roles and denial of the necessity of an initiator/gatekeeper model of sexual intimacy serves to demonstrate that sexual script theory is too restrictive to apply exclusively to sexual behaviour in this post-modern, post-feminist era.

Sexual Communication

Much of the research previously conducted regarding positive sexual consent has attended to how individuals go about communicating prior to and during intimate sexual encounters. The broad consensus has been that there is a dominance of nonverbal communication. This study has established this to be the case with the participants involved but offers further insight into how this functions within a relationship and has highlighted aspects of communication practice not previously identified by past studies.

All of the couples involved in the study described shifts in the ways in which they communicated about and during sex over the course of their relationship; the strongest site for nonverbal communication however, was in the initial stages of a relationship. As described above, participants cited a sense of 'just knowing' that they both wanted to have sex and a sense of a period of constant readiness where there

was a tacit agreement that sex would be had whenever there was an appropriate situation, environment and opportunity.

The couples often described literacy in physical communication which was strongly present from their early sexual encounters but also grew and developed as the relationship progressed. This indicated a degree of unconscious awareness of the signals they gave out and perceived in each other which became more conscious and more explicitly identifiable as they became more familiar. This can be exemplified by Beth's discussion of 'sex kisses', that is those with a discernible sexual intent in them rather than a kiss to express affection.

Beth: Maybe I've known your sex kiss before because I think everybody has a sex kiss and it's definitely much more forceful and things like that so maybe I'd noticed that before but it's certainly become a common like, a communication thing between us in terms of 'oh that's your sex kiss.' Like that's you verbalising what it is to each other since we've lived together.
(594-599)

Whilst there were examples where participants had difficulty detailing precisely how they communicated sexually, all were able to offer some examples of how they believed they communicated and how they perceived and interpreted the communications of their partner. These examples included eye contact or a look in someone's eyes, facial expressions, breathing, how individuals held or moved their bodies, touching and kissing.

A common theme was the use of mutual touching which escalated in its sexual intimacy. This was a technique used by many of the couples but best described by Daisy and Jay thus.

Daisy: Yeah I think you're right, it's definitely an evolution from, even just physical touch into something else. Maybe how that physical touch is interpreted by the other person maybe it's then sort of... not reciprocated, that's not the right word but...
Jay: Responded to?
Daisy: Responded to. But that then is taken a little bit further and then the other person then goes 'oh, ok, let's...' and it sort of continues and grows from there and builds
(310-316)

The literacy in these diverse modes of nonverbal communication described by the participants reflects the findings of Beres (2010) in her research described in the literature review. She found that the *'casual sex partners, both male and female, she interviewed were generally very well versed in the language of consent and were able to correctly identify a range of contextually appropriate consent cues'* (Literature Review p20). If individuals already have this knowledge and then, as George describes *'you learn each other'* (275) it is easy to see how partners can become experts in each other's subtlest forms of communication to the point that Cleo described where she can *'walk into the room and tell that [Marc] wants to have sex'* (262-263).

The literacy that participants discussed consisted of the ability to absorb complex, diverse and idiosyncratic signals that were context specific. Understanding the context was important in contributing to appropriateness judgements as described in Dryden-Henningsen et al's (2006) work with CTV. Here, cultural and relationship appropriateness can be assumed so the individuals are required to assess situational appropriateness. If the situation was deemed appropriate, for example, they are in bed, they have the house to themselves or the baby is asleep this allows them to begin to consider personal receptivity judgements (Dryden-Henningsen et al, 2006). It is through the lens of appropriateness, their own and their partner's personal receptivity that individuals are able to interpret feelings and actions to create meaning. In Dryden-Henningsen et al's (2006) study participants were unknown to each other, here the participants have a good deal of familiarity and interpersonal knowledge which allows them to identify and assess behaviours that may be overt or subtle and nuanced; from undressing to a 'sex kiss', the placement of a hand or a look in the eye a range of communication amongst these couples was clearly understood.

Whilst physical communication was the dominant form there were some instances of in act verbal communication (verbal communication separate from sex will be discussed in a subsequent chapter). In these instances couples tended to identify that verbal communication increased or was used with greater ease as the relationship progressed. This verbalisation often took the form of instructing, requesting or checking on the enjoyment or wellbeing of the partner.

One area where verbalisation was the dominant form of communication was where partners were expressing non-consent; that is where they were indicating their unwillingness or disinterest in participating in a sexual act proposed by their partner. This provided a potential answer to the question raised in the literature review regarding the risks posed by sexual communication that is not verbal or explicit. It was suggested that physical forms of communication presented a greater risk for misinterpretation.

The participants of this study regularly described the instances of non-consent in their relationship in verbal terms, often direct, sometimes indirect. This clarity of non-consent offers an interesting counterpoint to the implied or indirect potential of physical communication of positive consent which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

As the participants demonstrated both the ability and willingness for verbal communication when it related to non-consent or took place separate from sex, this raised the question as to why verbalisation was so unwelcome in or during sexual intimacy. Certainly talking during sex was often described in such terms as 'weird' and 'awkward'; language that echoes the findings of Humphries (2004). Agatha also touched on its associations with vulnerability and the greater risk of overt rejection (310-316) as was identified by Krahé et al (2007). However, the majority of the participants who discussed this issue alluded to verbalisation interrupting the physicality of the act or 'breaking the moment'. The indication was that verbalisation could create too much consciousness or awareness in what was deemed a physical and potentially transcendent act. A link can be found here with Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) theory of flow.

Csikszentmihalyi (2008) describes flow as the psychology of optimal experience pointing to the importance of enjoyment in human experience and its value for wellbeing. He sets eight conditions for enjoyment all or some of which may be present; included in these is 'the merging of action and awareness' where 'people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost

automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008:53).

Other conditions are 'concentration on the task at hand' where an individual's attention is so taken up by the act in hand they are able to forget other aspects of life which may otherwise disturb them, and the 'loss of self-consciousness' where individuals are able to release themselves from the preoccupation of the concept of self. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008)

Although Csikszentmihalyi (2008) makes a distinction between pleasure and enjoyment, placing sex amongst the physical pleasures, there is a discernible link between his conditions of enjoyment and what the participants indicated sex without verbalisation permits them. Undoubtedly there are multiple factors at play in the limited use of verbalisation in sex, several of which were discussed in the literature review. However, it could be suggested that one of those factors may be that it allows people to be fully present in the act, releasing them from everyday concerns and the demands of selfhood.

This chapter has examined the ways in which the participants communicated prior to and during sex. It has established that, as with previous research, participants predominantly preferred to communicate their desire, initiation, consent and pleasure by nonverbal means. It has explored possible motivations for this preference and proposed that it is grounded in more than just socialised norms and fear but may also be linked to how individuals experience and enjoy sexual intimacy. This chapter has also proposed that the dominance of explicit verbal non-consent offers a counterpoint to the more tacit forms of positive consent, an issue which will be explored more fully in the subsequent chapter.

Positive Consent's Relationship with Non-Consent

The literature review, in its examination of past research, firmly established that the absence of non-consent was a common means of positive consent to sexual acts. This chapter will examine the participants' use of non-consent and how this functioned within their sexual relationship, particularly with regard to its reference to positive consent.

All of the couples discussed, to some degree the perception that the absence of non-consent, communicated physically or verbally, was perceived as indicating it was acceptable to proceed with sexual intimacy or sex acts. In some cases this was described explicitly as with Helen who stated, '*There was no non-consent so it was, you know*' (80). Taken alone, it is easy to imagine that the use of no non-consent for positive consent indicates passivity on the part of the user but this is contrary to the narratives of the participants.

Couples tended to describe the absence of non-consent within the context of both parties actively participating in sexual intimacy or using body language to indicate consent. This can be seen in Helen and Paris (67-67) and Beth and Mac's (420-429) examples; they refer to the absence of non-consent but also describe how they were undressing themselves or each other, touching and kissing. Agatha and Savka (287-299) and Cleo and Marc's (251-252) references to it were also described within the context of reciprocal touching. Here, it can be seen that the absence of non-consent is not the only communicator of positive consent being processed; it is used to sure up the perception of physical consent signals.

Part of this process was also the participants' understanding of how non-consent would be signalled within the context of their relationships. The familiarity and comfort they had with one another as the relationship developed allowed them to express non-consent explicitly and verbally and was perceived by their partners without ambiguity. It is important to note here that the couples did not discuss examples of non-consent in the early part of their relationships so it must not be

assumed that the means by which they communicated non-consent then (if there were such occasions) would be approached with the same comfort, confidence and clarity. However, within this context, the participants did describe expressing non-consent in terms of comfort and confidence.

This sense of comfort and confidence was deemed important by participants in the context of their wider communication and consenting behaviours. The ability to say no freely and without negative consequence was the grounding for accepting the absence of non-consent as positive consent as well as allowing participants to have confidence in interpreting more subtle positive consent signals. That is to say, if it is known exactly what a no looks or sounds like, then other acts can be perceived as a yes with the confidence that, an easily identifiable no will be forthcoming should any misinterpretation occur.

This environment where non-consenting is easily identified and accepted without rancour was essential in creating a safe space for sexual intimacy where both partners were fully consenting. It was not always established without impediment; sexual rejection can be difficult to experience without a sense of hurt as was described above, with examples from Agatha and Helen, in the chapter on sexual scripts. However, it was identified as an important part of a relationship where partners cared for one another's wellbeing. Daisy pointed out it was essential for partners not to feel judged or pressured (399) and Helen and Paris explained that their love for each other meant they would never want their partner to do anything sexual they did not want to do (543-545), implicitly acknowledging that unwanted sex can be emotionally and psychologically damaging.

The value of creating a sexual environment where individuals feel safe and comfortable cannot be underestimated. Along with its moral and ethical necessity it is also an important factor in the quality of sexual experiences. Comfort and safety, along with wantedness, were the most significant and consistent predictors of high quality sexual experiences Jozkowoski (2011) found when using her ICS.

Whilst all of the couples identified the importance of 'space for a no' Helen best described how it could be established without ill feeling. She explained that both partners must still feel desired *'so that makes a no ok because it isn't a rejection it's just a statement of mood or general feeling'* (557-558).

This chapter has established that, within a relationship context, couples are easily able to identify or express non-consent. This allows individuals greater confidence in using subtle or tacit positive consent signals but must exist in an environment where there is 'space for a no', that is acceptance and understanding on the part of the person in receipt of the non-consent. Whilst this, and the preceding chapter has attended to 'in act' communication the subsequent and final analysis chapter will attend to the uses and value of communicating about sex apart from the act.

Talking About Sex

All of the couples who participated in the study shared narratives of talking about sex, separate from the act itself. With the exception of one couple (Agatha and Savka) they described using it as an important practice contributing to their shared consent. This chapter will explore the participants' use of this practice and how it was used to establish boundaries and inform positive consent.

The conversations participants had about the sex they shared differed in timing; some would reflectively discuss the sex they had following it either immediately after or in the day/s following it as described by Daisy and Jay (273-287), Beth and Mac (671-681) and Emma and George (362-370). These reflections allowed them to discuss aspects of the sex they had particularly enjoyed, how it made them feel and analyse the signals they had given each other during the course of that instance of sexual intimacy. The couples described how these conversations allowed them to be more confident in interpreting each other's sexual behaviours and improve the quality of their subsequent sexual intimacy.

Other conversations might take place more separately from sex and rather than reflecting on a specific instance, they served a more directive purpose. Beth, for example, instructed Mac that she had a preference for being dominated sexually (643-647). This instructed Mac that certain sexual behaviours, particularly initiatory ones, which would not have been acceptable prior to the discussion, were desired and indeed, requested by Beth. This constituted a setting of boundaries and expectations of what would take place and how each of them should behave during instances of sexual intimacy.

Helen and Paris used conversations to share likes and dislikes and reflect on the sex they had shared but also used them for a more formal purpose due to the BDSM practices which they had a preference for engaging in (131-143, 148-171). These conversations reflected those explicit verbal negotiations referred to in the literature

review in reference to BDSM practices including the setting of a safe word so that they might control 'play' without breaking the suspended reality of the 'scene'.

The literature review described how this process can be seen to create a reflective cycle which builds on your understanding of your sexual self and that of your partner to create an environment in which there is a greater respect for one's self and one's partner. Outside of a BDSM context, the literature review also indicated that sexual communications such as these were linked to the concept of sexual self-disclosure (SSD). This was a concept investigated closely by MacNeil and Byers (2009) who found that sexual communication, particularly in terms of sharing preferences, likes and dislikes contributed to sexual satisfaction in long term relationships. They linked this to both, a greater knowledge of how to enact sexual intimacy in a way that is mutually pleasurable and an increased sense of intimacy and trust. This study would propose that these conversations also achieve these ends by serving as a removed negotiation of boundaries and consent. This then allows sexual intimacy itself to proceed with couples having greater confidence in their partner's willingness and enjoyment without explicit or verbal signals to that effect.

This chapter has described and analysed the findings of this research within the context of four key themes. The subsequent and final chapter will present the conclusions of the research and its limitations before proposing areas for further study.

Conclusions, Limitations and Implications

Conclusions

This research was ultimately intended to examine how consent can be done right; that is, how couples in functional relationships who regard their sex lives as healthy and positive do it. In this it has succeeded in presenting some examples of how couples make it work in their own dynamic and individual ways.

This research has demonstrated that sexual communication, initiation and consent is fluid in a relationship and how it is used and expressed may change from day to day or year to year. What does remain constant is the couples' ability to understand and interpret each other's signals however subtle or idiosyncratic.

Whilst all the couples remained tied on some level to the traditional sexual script, they had for the most part, eschewed such dichotomous notions in favour of expressing themselves as individuals and as dyad. Their ability to do that surely, cannot be divorced from an evolving society which is gradually but noticeably, relinquishing its hold on the restrictive and harmful binary concept of gender which necessitated such oppressive sexual roles.

What all couples regarded as essential for the function of positive consent was an open respect for and value of non-consent. They made it clear that they would never want their partner to engage in any sexual behaviour or acts that they didn't want to do. Partners in turn, were able to express non-consent clearly (and usually verbally) without risk of censure. This environment for non-consent was an important factor in allowing for positive consent to be expressed subtly, indirectly and in diverse manners. That is, when non-consent is free to give and clear to understand it creates a space for positive consent that might otherwise be difficult to interpret. This was valuable in allowing the couples' sexual experiences together to flow representing a wholly

physical act and providing them with an experience which released them from the demands of their wider lives.

The functionality of positive consent was further supported by conversations the couples had separate from sex (sometimes immediately afterwards) which allowed them to share likes and dislikes, clarify meanings of their behaviours, offer guidance or direction and set boundaries and rules of conduct.

This exemplifies the many levels upon which consent functions within a sexual relationship. At its core, positive sexual consent is grounded in mutual respect and a desire not to cause harm. Whether that is borne out of love or general value of humanity, there is no doubt that positive sexual consent can flourish in its complex and diverse ways when this is present.

Limitations of the Research

As is the case with all research, this work is not without its limitations. As Masters research carried out by one individual, it was necessarily small in scale with only six couples participating, consequentially it is limited in its ability to be broadly applied. This limitation also relates to the demographic restrictions imposed by the study and in the nature of those volunteering. All participants were heterosexual, white British, mostly middle class and aged between 21 and 35. Whilst this demographic does represent a reasonable portion of the UK population, this study has been unable to examine how sexual communication and positive consent functions between individuals with other identities relating to sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, class and age. This study was also limited in the necessity for ensuring no risks were posed to participants; it ruled out interviewing anyone who had experienced sexual trauma such as assault or rape. Whilst it is most certainly important to protect participants from harm as far as possible, this measure also served to silence those with negative

experiences from sharing their positive experiences thus defining them by their trauma.

A further limitation of this study is one applicable to much of sexualities research, that of volunteer bias. It has long been suggested that those willing to volunteer for sexualities research are not necessarily representative of the general populous, with Griffith and Walker (1976, cited in Wiederman, 1999:59) finding that such volunteers were 'less inhibited and displayed less sexual guilt' (1999:59). Wiederman's (1999) own study supported the evidence that volunteers for sexualities studies were more likely to have more sexual experience and have more sexually liberal attitudes than those who would not volunteer for such studies.

There is no doubting that issues around volunteer bias do have an impact but, in this case of this study it was somewhat mitigated by the intent and need to speak to people who were sexually self-aware and experienced. This was required to ensure they were able to review and analyse their and their partner's behaviours attitudes in order to effectively share them with the researcher.

Whilst conjoined interviews presented significant advantages in terms of a representation of dyadic dynamic and behaviour, there is one clear disadvantage of this practice. As Torgé (2013) notes, it is possible that a couple may be choosing not to share certain experiences, thoughts or feelings with their partner and consequentially would not share them in an interview where said partner was present. This means that there may be aspects of communication, behaviour and attitudes which were not accessed during the research process.

One final limitation to this study relates to gender. It has been found that research participants' responses in interviews, particularly on sensitive topics, are affected by the gender of their interviewer (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). However, on a more positive note, when Catania et al (1996) examined this issue they considered participant choice in interviewer. They found that when it came to interviews of a sexual nature, women almost exclusively chose to speak to other women and roughly half of men also expressed a preference for a woman as their interviewer. This indicates that most

people feel more comfortable talking to a woman about such intimate issues which increases the likelihood that the participants were more comfortable speaking to the researcher available to them than they might have been with one of another gender.

The limitations of this study, alongside its conclusions give rise to potential areas for further study which will be discussed below.

Areas for Further Study and Implications

This area of study would benefit greatly from a wide and diverse range of people contributing to its study. In order to gain a wider insight into how positive sexual consent functions it would be ideal to speak to individuals, couples and groups with diverse sexual, gender, ethnic, cultural and class identities.

This work would benefit from offering a diverse range of potential interviewers and being as participant lead as possible.

This piece of research has served to add to academic understanding, building upon the predominantly quantitative work that has gone before it to provide a more in depth examination of positive sexual consent. The qualitative nature of this work has allowed for an examination of, not just what people do, but why they do it and what it means to them.

This research is not without its social implications either. Current educational practices around sexual consent focus mainly on encouraging individuals to use and understand clear positive consent signals. Whilst this is certainly ideal, this research suggests that educators would do well to team this with work around respecting the value of non-consent. Individuals would benefit from a greater understanding that non-consent is not a reflection on them but a personal choice of an individual. They would also benefit from feeling free and able to not consent without concern that this will lead to hurt feelings or pride, reflect negatively on them or invite anger and aggression.

The goal of 'in act' clear verbal consent for all might not be wholly attainable but encouraging individuals to talk about sex, apart from the sex could be extremely valuable. This would allow people to set boundaries and clarify communication before, after and in between instances of sexual intimacy.

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List of Appendices

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Appendix 1: Approved Ethics Document

Including Text for Response to Expression of Interest, Participant Information Sheet,
Participant Agreement Form & Topics to Be Discussed At Interview

Ethical Considerations for: An Investigation into Communication and Perception of Positive Sexual Consent in the UK.

Aim: To investigate perception and communication of positive sexual consent as negotiated and agreed by heterosexual, cis gendered couples in the UK between the ages of 21 and 35.

There has been increasing public awareness and concern relating to issues of non-consensual sex, sexual assault and rape. Whilst there has been a great deal of research into this, there has been a dearth of research into how people communicate and perceive positive consent, particularly in the UK. In order to respond to concerns over non-consensual sex and better educate people about fully consensual sexual, it is necessary first, to have a greater understanding of how people do go about consenting. This research is intended to start to address the gap we have in knowledge and understanding of this issue.

As this study aims to investigate positive sexual consent this will be emphasised throughout. Advertising for participants will be clear on this fact and any volunteers will be reminded throughout the selection and research process.

Mode of investigation:

The investigation will be carried out through semi-structured interviews with couples who are sexually intimate. This method has been chosen to allow participants to speak freely about their positive consent focussing on the aspects and elements of it that are meaningful, relevant and important to them. This is intended to promote a more ethical and empowering research process by allowing participants to have greater control over the research process and the topics discussed.

The full process of recruitment, selection, interview and the post interview process is listed below with reference to appropriate documents provided in the appendix.

<p>Advertising for Volunteers</p> <p>Local news outlets will be contacted to elicit interest in an ‘advertorial’ to attract participants. The researcher will also consider use of online networks to source participants should news outlets fail to attract sufficient, appropriate participants. All promotion of the research will make clear that the research is about positive consent and discourage intentions to discuss non consent. Potential volunteers will be asked to contact the researcher to express their interest. Bournemouth University’s involvement in the research will be highlighted during recruitment and advertising.</p>
<p>Expression of Interest</p> <p>Potential volunteer e-mails researcher to express interest. They are not required to provide any personal details at this stage.</p>
<p>Researcher Initial Response</p> <p>Researcher responds to expression of interest with e-mail clarifying the aims and processes of the study. Volunteer is requested to respond if they are still interested in participating. (See appendix 2)</p>
<p>Confirmation of Interest</p> <p>Volunteer e-mails to confirm they would like to find out more and potentially participate.</p>
<p>Request for Contact 1</p> <p>Researcher requests that each volunteer contacts her individually further confirming interest and providing a contact telephone number. If each participant does not e-mail, no further contact is made.</p>
<p>Request for Contact 2</p> <p>Researcher responds including participant information sheet (appendix 3). Researcher requests a meeting with each volunteer (See appendix 4).</p>
<p>Telephone Call Approval</p> <p>If volunteer agrees to meeting, time and date and location is agreed. If participant does not agree to meeting they are thanked for their time and interest and no further contact is made. Meetings will be arranged in public places with access to private meeting rooms for the safety of all concerned</p>
<p>Meeting</p> <p>Researcher meets with each volunteer separately to establish their bona fides and discuss: purpose and process of the research; risks and the likelihood of harm; right to withdraw and individual, non-coerced consent. (See appendix 5 for checklist of issues to discuss in telephone call) In addition the researcher will also talk through the participant information sheet previously sent and asked if they have any questions relating to it.</p> <p>Volunteers are assured that any disclosures they make during the meeting will remain confidential. If the volunteer voluntarily discloses any history of non-consensual sexual experiences during this meeting the selection process will cease and the researcher will recommend support services (flyer appendix 7). If volunteer indicates that they have been coerced or persuaded in any way to participate in the study by the sexual partner they are volunteering with, the selection process will cease and an e-mail will be issued to both parties informing them that they have not been selected to participate in the study.</p>

Post Meeting.

If no issues of concern have arisen from the meeting the researcher will e-mail to ask if the volunteer has any questions arising from the meeting and if they would like to proceed with participating. If the volunteer indicates their continuing interest in participating they will be sent another copy of the participant information form and a participant agreement form (appendix 5) to sign and return and a list of topics likely to be discussed in the interview (appendix 6) where they can indicate any topics they would not feel comfortable discussing.

Selection.

The researcher selects a maximum of ten couples (twenty participants) to participate in the study. E-mails are sent to any volunteers not selected thanking them for their time and interest and informing them they have not been selected. E-mails are sent to selected participants inviting them to participate and reminding them of their rights including the right to withdraw. They are requested to indicate times and dates they would both be available for the interview

Start of Interview

Participants are reminded of their right to withdraw and their right not to respond to any question they do not wish to. The process of the interview is explained. Participants will also be asked to only discuss their consent they share with each other and not refer specifically to experiences they have shared with others not involved in the study.

During Interview

The researcher will facilitate the discussion by introducing topics for discussions and guiding participants away from tangential discussions not relevant to the issue of positive sexual consent. If any participant appears to become distressed the interview will be ceased.

End of Interview

Participants are of what will happen to the information they have provided and how confidentiality will be maintained.
They are thanked for their time and participation.

Post Interview

Interviews will then be transcribed with any identifying information being removed and recordings of the original interviews will be wiped.

Write Up

Participants will be contacted to inform them when the thesis is completed and instructed on how they can obtain a copy of the document.

Key Ethical Considerations.

Informed Consent

Participants will be provided with information about the purpose and process of the study in verbal and written form throughout the selection and interview process. They will be provided with a participant information sheet and information on topics to be discussed. Individual informed consent will be sought by the researcher verbally and in writing.

Data Storage, Security, Confidentiality and Anonymity.

All data provided by participants including, but not limited to, their personal information, contact information, participant agreement forms and all information and recordings relating to their participation in the research will be stored on an encrypted and password protected external hard drive. The password for this device will be held by the researcher only and never written down anywhere. Communication via e-mail will be stored on the Bournemouth University student e-mail address which is also password protected. E-mail communication will be restricted to discussions of arrangements selection and participant's consent to the study. Discussions relating to the participant's sexual experiences will not be communicated about via e-mail, such discussions will be restricted to interviews to be stored as stated above.

Should a participant withdraw their consent to participate in the study after the interview has taken place the file containing the recording of the interview will be wiped using the 'secure erase in disk utility'.

Following the interviews, the conversations will be transcribed by the researcher and anonymised in this process. Each interview will be allocated a number. Participants in the interview will be defined in the transcript as male, female and researcher. Any references to names, places, dates or details specific to the participants (such as appearance, profession) or any person they know or refer to during the course of the interview will not be transcribed and will be noted as redacted in the transcript.

Participants' data will not be passed to any third parties.

All data and personal information provided by participants will be kept fully confidential and will not be discussed unless it is fully anonymised and is for the purposes of the study.

Transcripts rather than original interviews will be used in the process of analysis and write up to ensure the steps taken to anonymise the participants remain effective.

The Right to Withdraw

Participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the research process at several stages through recruitment, selection and interview. They will be informed that they can invoke this right up until the time that the interviews are transcribed and anonymised. In addition they will be informed that they do not need to give a reason for withdrawing and that the participant they volunteered in conjunction with will not be informed of their withdrawal.

If any volunteer withdraws prior to interview, an e-mail will be sent to both volunteers thanking them for their time and interest and informing them that they have not been selected to become participants in the study or, if they have already been informed that they've been selected, that the researcher no longer requires their participation. If a participant withdraws following interview they will be sent an e-mail confirming that they have been withdrawn and that their interview and personal data has been wiped as stated above. The participant they volunteered with will not be contacted.

Access to Research

All participants will be notified that they have a right to read the research in which they participated and this will be available to them in whichever format is accessible to them. When the thesis is submitted and graded participants will be e-mailed with information on how they can access the research.

Absence of Coercion

The researcher will in no way coerce any participants to take part in the study. No incentives will be offered to participants.

The researcher will also take a number of steps to avoid any participants being persuaded to take part in the study by the sexual partner they are volunteering with. They will be informed repeatedly from initial contact up until the interview that it is important that they do not attempt to persuade their partner to participate or agree to participate if they are uncertain and their partner has persuaded them. The researcher will also speak separately to each volunteer on the phone and ask them about their motivations for wanting to participate to ensure they have their own reasons for wanting to take part. The researcher will additionally ask the volunteer directly if anyone has persuaded them to take part and reiterate the importance of each individual being entirely willing to participate. If, during the telephone conversation, a volunteer indicates that they have been persuaded to participate or that they have persuaded their partner to participate they will both be e-mailed following the call to inform them that they have not been selected to participate.

Volunteers will also be asked to discuss their participation in the study with their partners at each stage of the process to ensure they are both willing.

Risk of Harm

Key to ensuring that this study causes minimal harm to participants is the emphasis on positive consent. All promotion of the study will explicitly state that the research that the aim is to investigate communication and perception of positive consent. All communication with volunteers and participants will reiterate this emphasis and make it clear that discussions of non-consensual sex will not be a part of the study.

Volunteers will be informed from initial contact through to interview (both verbally and in writing) that it is recommended that they do not participate if they have experiences of non-consensual sex, sexual violence, assault or abuse to avoid the risk of their participation in the study causing or triggering distress. They will be informed that they do not have to disclose any history of the above to the researcher and can withdraw without any explanation for their reasons.

Participants will also be asked to seriously consider if they think there is any possibility that talking about the subject of sexual consent might cause them distress. They will be asked not to proceed with participation if they think this is a possibility.

Prior to interview, the participants will be provided with a list of topics the interview may cover and will be informed that they can identify topics they would prefer not to discuss. They will also be asked to discuss this with their partner to ensure they are both aware of any topics they would prefer not to discuss. Participants will be reminded at several stages prior to the interview and at the start of the interview that they can decline to answer any questions or discuss any topics without explanation, even if they have previously indicated that they would be willing to discuss that topic.

If at any stage, participants indicate distress or raise any issues relating to non-consensual sexual activity, abuse, rape or sexual assault the researcher will provide them with a flyer detailing support services that they can access (appendix 7).

They will also be informed that, if they have concerns about this study or how it's being conducted they can contact Professor Ann Brooks at Bournemouth University.

The processes listed above relating to the anonymization of participants, data storage and confidentiality are intended to prevent potential negative consequences of any disclosures that a participant might make being known by anyone outside of the study or making their way into the public domain.

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Appendix 1:

Advertising for Participants

Advertising for Research Participants

Local news outlets will be contacted to elicit interest in an 'advertorial' to attract participants. The researcher will also consider use of online networks to source participants should news outlets fail to attract sufficient, appropriate participants. Below is proposed wording to be used in written contact with local news outlets which can be adapted for online use if required. Contact with local news agencies may also be made via telephone, in which case, the same points will be covered.

Holly Barnes-Bennetts is a resident of Worcester embarking on an exciting new research project with Bournemouth University; Holly is investigating positive sexual consent and is seeking participants for her research.

The research asks the question 'how do we say yes?' and aims to find out how consenting couples actually go about communicating that with each other. Holly is going to be interviewing heterosexual couples between the ages of 21 and 35 about the sexual consent they share. She needs volunteers in the Worcester area who might be interested in taking part.

The real hope of this research is that it will help us better understand what positive consent is and how we share it. If we understand this better, we might have the tools to better educate young people about building healthy relationships and healthy attitudes to sex.

Holly is keen to emphasise a few things: First, the study is not about non-consensual sex. Second, anyone who gets in touch is under no obligation and all their details will be kept entirely confidential.

People who are interested in taking part should e-mail Holly for more information at i7650145@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Appendix 2:

Text for Response to Expression Of Interest

Text to Respond To Expression of Interest

Thank you for getting in touch about the study into positive sexual consent. The purpose of this study is to try and better understand how people who want to have sex with each other communicate that and what cues they take from others to indicate that they want to have sex. Hopefully the study will lead to further research into positive sexual consent and will allow academics, as well as society generally, to know more about what positive sexual consent means.

Below you will find further information about the study. Please read it thoroughly and discuss it with your sexual partner. If you would both like to be involved, please respond by e-mail.

My name is Holly Barnes-Bennetts, I am doing a Masters by research with Bournemouth University. What I want to find out means I need to find people who are sexually intimate that are willing to talk to me about this subject and their personal experiences in their current relationship.

As this is quite a small scale study, I'm limited in how many people I can talk to and how much information I can analyse so I'm only looking for heterosexual couples between the ages of 21 and 35. It doesn't matter if you've only been together a few months or if you've been married for ten years as long as you've been sexually intimate on at least a few occasions.

The research would take the form of an interview conducted in person or over skype with you and your sexual partner; the location will depend on what you would prefer and what seems most appropriate. It would probably take a couple of hours. I would have some specific topics I would like to cover so I'd be asking a few questions but it would mostly be about you and your partner talking, sharing your experiences, thoughts, feelings and opinions. You'd be given a list of the topics I'd like to discuss before the interview to allow you time to think about it.

Once we'd done the interview, I would transcribe it, this would involve writing it up word for word whilst removing any information that could be used to identify anyone (except myself). I would then analyse all of the information from the interviews to try and come up with some ideas about how people really 'do' sexual consent.

There's a few things that are really important: First of all, this is **not** a study into non-consensual sex, please only volunteer if you want to talk about positive consent. Second, I want to make sure there is as little chance as possible of anyone becoming distressed if they're involved in the study so if you and/or your sexual partner have experiences of non-consensual sex, sexual violence or sexual abuse, it is strongly recommended that you don't volunteer. Finally, it's essential that all volunteers are fully willing to participate, please don't attempt to persuade your partner to be involved or agree if someone else is trying to persuade you.

So, if you'd still be interested in getting involved remember, you have the right to change your mind, even after the interview, right up until I've transcribed the interview (at which point I'd have removed your name and identifying information). If you do change your mind I'll remove you and your partner from the study and I wouldn't inform your partner. I would keep all of your personal information completely confidential and store all data securely.

If you have experienced any distress as a consequence of non-consensual sex, sexual violence or sexual abuse or issues relating to this study have caused you distress, there are services available to you:

For information on services in your area for survivors of sexual assault, violence or abuse visit: <http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/find-support/>

If you need someone to talk to you can call the Samaritans on 116 123, email them at jo@samaritans.org or find your local branch so you can speak to someone in person here: <http://www.samaritans.org/branches>

If you have concerns about this study or how it's being conducted you can contact my supervisor, Professor Ann Brooks at Bournemouth University

Thank you for taking the time to contact me.

Best wishes

Holly Barnes-Bennetts

Appendix 3:

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet For:

**An Investigation into Perception and Communication of Positive Sexual
Consent in the UK**

You have volunteered to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to go ahead with taking part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to investigate how people communicate their positive consent to sex and how they recognise the positive consent of the people they have sex with.

The intention is to try and better understand how people who want to have sex with each other communicate that and what cues they take from others to indicate that they want to have sex. Hopefully the study will lead to further research into positive sexual consent and will allow academics, as well as society generally, to know more about what positive sexual consent means.

Who will be involved?

The researcher is a Masters of Research Student at Bournemouth University; she has a BA Hons. In Media in Cultural Studies with a special interest gender and sexuality. She is also a qualified teacher currently teaching academic skills in an FE college.

The researcher's supervisor is Ann Brooks, Professor of Sociology of Bournemouth University. As supervisor, Professor Brooks will ensure the researcher conducts the research professionally and ethically. If you have any concerns about the research, you can contact Professor Brooks on the details below.

The study is currently restricted to interviewing heterosexual couples from the UK between the ages of 21 and 35. This restriction is only due to the current size of the study, it is hoped that future research may allow for interviews with people with differing gender and sexual identities and diverse relationship statuses.

What will happen in the study?

The research will involve interviews with couples together and will take place over Skype or in person depending on your preference. The interviews will involve questions about how the couple first consented to sex within their relationship and how they continue to consent to sex. Questions will be open and allow the participants to talk about the things that are important to them. The interviews will take approximately 1 to 2 hours.

The interviews will be audio recorded.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

Your involvement in the study is entirely voluntary and continues to be throughout the study. You can change your mind about being involved at any point before the study is completed. You do not have to give a reason for your decision. If you inform the researcher that you have changed your mind about being involved then all records of your interviews and the interviews of the person you volunteered with will be permanently deleted. There will be no negative repercussions if you decide to withdraw from the study and the person that you volunteered with will not be informed by the researcher.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Every effort has been taken to ensure the study will not cause participants any distress. All participants can decline to answer any question asked during the interviews without any explanation required.

Although the focus of the study is on positive sexual consent, it is possible that discussing issues of sexual consent might trigger distress for people who have experiences of any non-consensual sexual activity. If you have any experience of non-

consensual activity it is recommended that you do not take part in the study to avoid the risk of the process causing you distress. If you decide not to take part in this study for this reason, you do not have to inform the researcher your reasons for not participating. The study will not include discussion of or questions about non-consensual sexual activity, any form abuse, rape or sexual assault. If you raise questions about any of these issues prior to or during the interviews, a flyer detailing the support services you can access will be available to you.

If you have concerns about this study or how it's being conducted you can contact my supervisor, Professor Ann Brooks at Bournemouth University.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Although participants in the study will not be directly benefitted, your participation will help to contribute to knowledge about positive sexual consent which will improve understanding in the academic community and, potentially, society as a whole.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All the information gathered about you and from you will be kept strictly confidential. All data about you will be securely stored and recordings of interviews will be stored on an encrypted and password protected device. All references to you and your words will be fully anonymised in the write up of the study and any references to information that might indirectly identify you or anyone you know will not be used in the write up of the study. All audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed after they have been transcribed.

What should I do if I want to take part?

First you need to discuss it thoroughly with the person you plan to volunteer with to make sure that you are both equally willing to take part. The researcher will chat to you separately to make sure each of you wants to take part. You must both read this document in full and make sure you fully understand what will be asked of you and what your rights are. You can ask the researcher any questions you like before you make your decision about whether or not to take part. If you decide to go ahead, each

of you will be required to sign a consent form. The researcher will then arrange convenient time to interview you.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research will be used in a Masters by Research thesis. The results of the research may also be used to write articles published in academic journals. You can request a copy of the thesis from the researcher or from the university.

Who has reviewed the study? This research has been reviewed in line with Bournemouth University's Research Ethics Code of Practice.

If you wish to make a complaint about this research you can address this to Professor Vanora Hundley, Deputy Dean - Research and Professional Practice who is independent of the research team. You can e-mail Professor Hundley at vhundley@bournemouth.ac.uk or write to her at: Bournemouth University, Royal London House R118, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, BH1 3LT

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

December 2015

Researcher: Holly Barnes-Bennetts, M Res. Student, Bournemouth University. E-mail:
i7650145@bournemouth.ac.uk

Supervisor: Ann Brooks, Professor in Sociology, Bournemouth University.

Appendix 4:

Checklist for Topics to Discuss In Initial Meeting

Checklist for Topics To Discuss During Individual Initial Meeting.

Topic	Discussed /confirmed
Confirm volunteer fulfils the criteria (21-35 years old, in a heterosexual relationship, cis-gendered).	
Explain and confirm volunteer understands the purpose of the study.	
Explain and confirm volunteer understands what will happen to the information they provide.	
Explain and confirm volunteer understands the process of the research and what will happen in the interview.	
Ask volunteer to explain why they want to participate in the study to ascertain individual motivations.	
Ask volunteer if their sexual partner persuaded them to participate in the study in any way.	
Explain that, although they don't have to disclose anything to the researcher, it is recommended that they don't participate in the study if they have experiences of non-consensual sex, sexual assault, violence or abuse.	
Explain that the volunteer has the right to withdraw, the timescale for this, what the researcher will do if they withdraw and that the partner they are volunteering with will not be informed that they have withdrawn.	
Explain how confidentiality will be maintained and how data will be securely stored.	
Explain that they will be provided with a list of topics for discussion in the interview and can, individually, identify to the researcher any topics they prefer not to discuss.	
Discuss the risk of harm and ask the volunteer to consider if they think that there is any likelihood they could find the process distressing in any way. Recommend to volunteer that they do not proceed if they think it is possible it will cause them distress.	
Reiterate the importance of non-coerced consent identifying that they should not try to persuade their partner to participate and that they should not participate if they are at all uncertain, especially if their partner has tried to persuade them.	
Ask volunteer if they have any questions. Answer questions immediately if possible or inform volunteer that you will call/e-mail back with answer.	
Thank volunteer for taking the time to speak with you and inform them what will happen next.	

Appendix 5:

Participant Agreement Form

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT FORM



An Investigation into Perception and Communication of Positive Sexual Consent in the UK

Researcher: Holly Barnes-Bennetts, M Res. Student, Bournemouth University. E-mail: i7650145@bournemouth.ac.uk

Supervisor: Ann Brooks, Professor In Sociology, Bournemouth University, Royal London House R202, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, BH1 3LT

Tel: 01202 962169 E-mail: abrooks@bournemouth.ac.uk

Please Initial Box

	Yes	No
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.		
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving reason and without there being any negative consequences. I understand that I am free to withdraw up to the point where the data are processed and become anonymous, so my identity cannot be determined		
3. I agree to take part in the above study.		
4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded. (All audio recordings will be deleted following transcription.)		
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications		

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Researcher Date Signature

Appendix 6:

**List of Topics to Be Discussed At
Interview**

Interview Topics

Below you will find a list of topics to be discussed during the full interview. There is space for you to mark if you are, or are not comfortable discussing these topics. The researcher will not ask you questions about anything that does not fall into these categories but, if you bring something up that is not on the list and you feel that it is relevant, the researcher may ask you follow up questions.

Remember, even if you agree to discuss something at this point, you can always change your mind. If the researcher asks you something in the interview and you don't feel comfortable you can simply say that you would prefer not to talk about that and the researcher will move on.

If you indicate 'No' for any of these topics the researcher will not bring it up during the interview but please remember, she cannot control what your partner talks about at interview. Make sure to discuss this list with your partner so they know if there are some things you'd prefer not to talk about.

Topic	Are you Comfortable Discussing this?	
	Yes	No
How you and your sexual partner met/know each other	Yes	No
What kind of relationship you have. e.g casual, committed, exclusive, not exclusive, long term, cohabiting, long distance.	Yes	No
How long you were together before you were sexually intimate	Yes	No
What happened the first time you were sexually intimate.	Yes	No
How you think you showed your consent the first time you kissed.	Yes	No
How you think you showed your consent the first time you touched sexually or engaged in foreplay.	Yes	No
How you think you showed your consent the first time you had penetrative sex.	Yes	No
How you think you showed your consent the first time you had oral sex.	Yes	No
How you identified that your partner was consenting the first time you kissed.	Yes	No
How you identified that your partner was consenting the first time you touched sexually or engaged in foreplay.	Yes	No
How you identified that your partner was consenting the first time you had penetrative sex.	Yes	No
How you identified that your partner was consenting the first time you had oral sex.	Yes	No
How consent between you is different or the same now when you kiss	Yes	No
How consent between you is different or the same now when you touch intimately or engage in foreplay	Yes	No
How consent between you is different or the same now when you have penetrative sex	Yes	No
How consent between you is different or the same now when you have oral sex	Yes	No

Appendix 7
Support Services Flyer

Support Services

Below you will find information about how to access support if you are distressed or have had negative or non-consensual sexual experiences.

For information on services in your area for survivors of sexual assault, violence or abuse visit:

<http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/find-support/>



If you need someone to talk to you can call the Samaritans on 116 123, email them at jo@samaritans.org or find your local branch so you can speak to someone in person here:

<http://www.samaritans.org/branches>



Appendix 2:

Advertisement Flyer

WANTED

Are you aged 21 to 35 and in a relationship?

Casual or serious, it doesn't matter...

A Worcester based researcher with
Bournemouth University is seeking couples to
take part in a study on
positive sexual consent.

You could help contribute to better understanding of
sexual communication!

Anonymity of volunteers is assured.

Minimal commitment -brief introductory meeting and
interview of 1 to 1½ hours in your local area.

For more info e-mail: i7650145@bournemouth.ac.uk

Facebook: Holly Barnes-Bennetts