

Young Women, Desire and Heteronormativity:  
The Relationship between Sexual Experience and the Sexual Double  
Standard

By  
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the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours

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# Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree in any university or another educational institution and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I further declare that the ethical principles and procedures specified in Swinburne University of Technology's document on human research and experimentation have been adhered to in the preparation of this report. Approval for this project was granted by Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 2009/090).

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Signed: .....

30<sup>th</sup> October 2009

# Abstract

A heteronormative discourse often assumes that men want sex and women want love (Bryant & Schofield 2007). It assumes gender structures sexuality in distinctly masculine and feminine ways and appropriate behaviours are defined according to these gender structures. This discourse fails to acknowledge the complexities of contemporary sexualities and positions women as passive and men as active which eliminates the need for negotiation in sexual relationships. Through analysis of in-depth interviews with women aged 22-31, this study sought to identify young women's perceptions of how accumulated sexual experience mediates the sexual double standard and to what extent they believe it influences their sexual relationships. It also explored women's subjective experiences of sexual agency, sexual pleasure and sexual desire. There is very little Australian sociological research that explores the accumulation of sexual experiences for women beyond school age and this thesis addressed this gap in the literature.

Above all, this research will argue that the participants' experiences of sex and sexuality are complex and contradictory. The results suggest that, for the women in this study, accumulated sexual experience influences young women's subjective experience of sexual agency, desire and pleasure. It will also argue that women face many challenges in expressing their agency desire and pleasure within the dominant discourse of heteronormativity.

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- Appendix A:** Project Information Sheet and Consent Form
- Appendix B:** Background Information Sheet
- Appendix C:** Draft Interview Schedule

## Interview Transcript Notation

Throughout this thesis, the participant's voices have been quoted directly from the interview. The following serves as a guide to reading the interview excerpts.

- ... Missing words (left out for flow of quote)
- ( ) Participant information, such as ages and relationship status