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'It's a consumer society and bodies are for consumption as well'

- Women's views on the commodification and consumption of sex in contemporary society.

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Abstract

There have been significant concerns in contemporary society that our culture is becoming increasingly sexualized leading to terms such as 'pornographication', 'Mainstreaming sex', 'Striptease Culture' and 'Pornosphere' being coined. Concerns regarding the influence of this culture on young people have received substantial focus publicly and academically. However, given that the majority of sexualisation and representation is of women, there seems to be little known about the everyday women's views and engagement with this culture. This research focuses on women's interpretations and understanding of representations of sexuality within our culture and what they considered acceptable and unacceptable. Conducting three focus groups, divided into three age cohorts, using stimuli that engages with a range of representations of sex and sexuality within society, and thematically analysing the data, five themes are identified and discussed. Consumption being a key component of the 21st Century, theory is drawn upon from Baudrillard to interpret the commodification and objectification of sex. Further, feminist thought and literature is used to understand the women's views on gender, equality and oppression. The research also questions how we learn about sex and these themes engage with representations of sex in popular culture and pornography. The research highlights the need for a contextual understanding of sex and sexuality in order to consume and engage with representations more critically.

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Introduction

The 'sexualisation of culture' has become a major focus of interest and concern in the last decade (e.g. McNair, 2002; Gill, 2012; Levy, 2005 and Attwood, 2009). This term expresses the idea that western societies have become saturated by sexual representations and discourses. The prevalence of sexualised images within popular culture and the media can be seen in advertisements, 'page 3' images in newspapers, television programmes, the internet and music videos and a plethora of other things that are part of our everyday lives. Indeed, lap dancing and pole dancing are now available as fitness classes. These examples capture a 'porno chic' aesthetic whereby practices once associated with the sex industry can now be seen within mainstream culture (McNair, 2013). Furthermore, it is assumed that these perceived changes in sexual behaviour have been facilitated by the way we use technology (Attwood, Bale and Barker, 2013). It would seem cliché to say that access to pornography is now only one or two clicks away but this is evidenced by the huge amount of internet traffic it creates. The Sense about Sex website (2013) states that five porn sites were in the top 50 websites of 2012 two of which were more popular than the BBC news.

Additionally, social networking sites are an ever evolving area where we can experiment with our identities, self-expression and particularly sexuality. Such social networking sites provide platforms for social communication through the sharing of messages, pictures, videos and other forms of multimedia communication. Among all of this is the feeling that sex is becoming more commercial and the place of sex within people's lives is becoming less private. One could attribute this to the way in which social media enables and even encourages people to participate within a confessional culture, a term derived from Foucault (1976). This type of culture is obsessed with publicising the private and exposing oneself and others as part of identity construction. This can bring pleasures but also pressures to perform particular idealised forms of femininities and masculinities which are culturally, class and race specific. Indeed, I am reminded of an incident in October 2013 where photographer Petra Collins posted on Instagram a photograph of herself from the waist down, wearing bikini bottoms and the social media site deleted her account because her pubic hair was visible. This infraction exemplifies the culturally specific nature of sexualised images as over five million pictures of similar poses exist on this site, some with more skin showing, but non with pubic hair. One can conclude that the pubic hair is what caused the violation, an unaltered female body, whilst edited nudes abound on the internet, echoing McNair's (2013) term of 'porno chic'.

The feeling that society is becoming more sexualized has led to concerns particularly about child sexualisation and commercialisation and has thus led to a proliferation of reports in

recent years. The Home Office report by Linda Popodopoulos (2010) looked at how sexualised images and messages may be affecting the development of children and young people and influencing cultural norms. Furthermore the American Psychological Association (2010) issued a review on the sexualisation of girls which explored the consequences of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising and media stating that it is harmful to self image and healthy development. The NSPCC (2012) commissioned a qualitative study of children, young people and sexting, highlighting the way in which increases in technology have contributed to sexualisation and concerns about it. Bailey's (2011) report Let Children be Children builds on the Byron Review (2008), which examines ways of helping young people safely cope with increasing exposure to and use of sexually explicit materials via new media technologies. Action has also been taken in the attempt to ban page 3 from The Sun. The No More Page Three campaign (nomorepage3.org) is a clear demonstration of how the sexualisation of women is of major public interest.

In writing about women's views on the sexualisation of culture I have been primarily driven by my own awareness of sex and sexualization in my own life. Though I am not an active consumer of the Sun and I do not choose to seek sexualized imagery, its presence is pervasive and ubiquitous. Being a young Christian woman I find sexual culture all the more significant as reconciling competing political and cultural influences with my beliefs is challenging but this disjunction has posed questions that have led to and informed this research.

> *'Sex and sexual culture matter like few other elements of our lives, in ways both personal and political; that sexuality and its representation are therefore of great importance at the individual and societal levels, and should be studied in a serious and sustained manner by sociologists of culture'* (McNair, 2013 p.ix)

Therefore, driven by my own interests as a women and as the majority of sexualised images and representations are of women I felt it logical to research women's views on what they considered acceptable and unacceptable representations of sex and sexuality and explore any concerns they have about the sexualisation of culture.

Literature Review

<u>Introduction</u>

Academic interest in the sexualisation of culture is not a recent development, indeed sex has undergone significant research throughout history. However more recent developments such as the sexual revolution in the 1970s and second-wave feminism and the post-feminist movement that followed are what this work engages with. Furthermore when looking at the broad notion of sex and sexuality within society one can observe that this incorporates an extensive range of issues, from sexuality, gender and femininity to the sexualisation of the body in prostitution to the ubiquitous nature of sexual content within the media and commerce exchange. One can see that within contemporary society sex has a constant presence, encompassing many aspects of our daily lives. In particular the use of sex permeates aspects of consumption from prostitution and pornography to music videos and literature, with a vast array of other things in between forming a continuum of contexts in which sex is sold. Reviewing existent and current literature I will endeavour to summarise the key areas in which sex has been researched, theorised and explored.

<u>Are views about sex and sexuality changing?</u>

'The time has come to think about sex', begins Rubin (1999) in ''Thinking Sex'', proclaiming that popular culture is permeated with ideas that erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy, depraved, and a menace to everything from small children to national security. Erotic variety translates to anything sexual that is not straight or marital, 'vanilla sex' as Rubin terms it. These could include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer sexual relations in which Rubin claims society imposes strict boundaries upon that are upheld by popular and mainstream culture. She continues that 'modern western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchal system of sexual value' (Rubin, 1999, p.151) believing there to be a value placed on sex that incorporates some kind of moral code. Furthermore, Rubin likens the moral code to the ideological systems of racism and religious chauvinism because she believes there to be a value system whereby 'natural' and 'good' sexuality is heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial. Sex that violates the approved norm is 'abnormal' and 'unnatural' which could include homosexuality, unmarried, promiscuous and commercial sex. 'The charmed circle' (see Fig 1) is an illustration of the sexual hierarchy, the nearer the centre of the circle the more morally acceptable the action is.

Fig.1
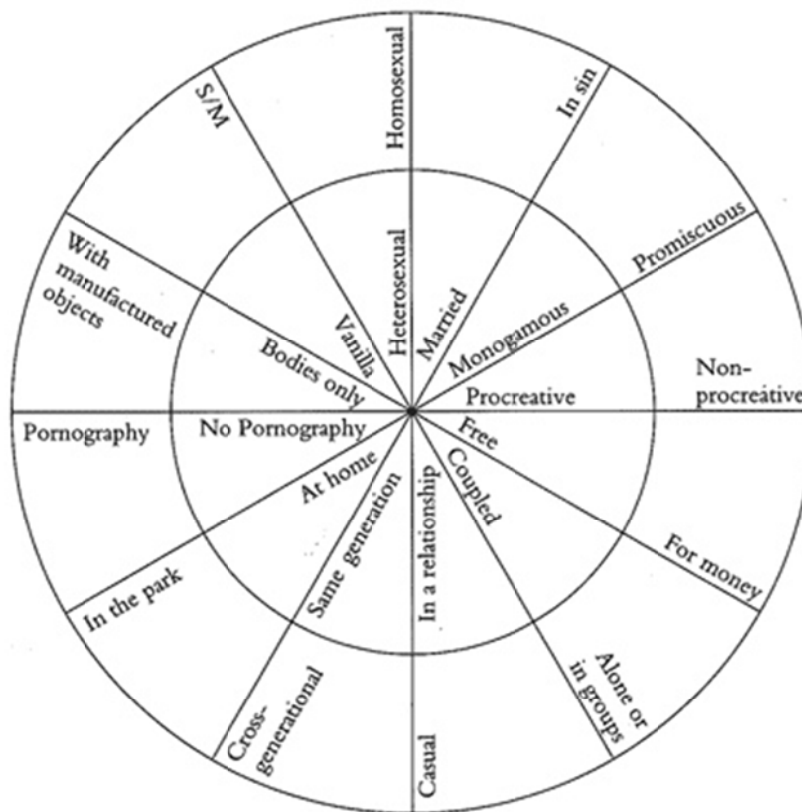
(Rubin, 1999, p.153)

Twenty seven years on from when this was originally written one could claim, with reasonable substantiation, that we may find some of the outer circle taboos are now more accepted. Within popular culture Rihanna's song S&M (Matsoukas, 2011) could indicate that various types of sex are becoming more acceptable and/or talked about on a mainstream scale. Moreover, the book *50 Shades of Grey* (E.L James, 2011) is a current leading example of how sex has become more acceptable to write and read about and indeed talk about. The type of sex that *50 Shades of Grey* depicts would certainly be on the outer circle as it heavily features sexual practices involving bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism and masochism (BDSM). The erotic novel has received significant media coverage for its sexual explicitness and subsequently became the bestselling book in British history. Shifting views towards same sex partnerships are reflected in the Civil Partnership Act 2004 whereby same sex couples in the UK were granted the same rights and responsibilities to those who are married. The Act demonstrates that homosexuality has become more accepted and recognised, furthermore civil partnerships have very recently (July 2012) received permission to take place within the United Reform Churches in England and Wales. This can be further illustrated in figures from The Sexualization Report (2013) that state 62% of people in 1983 thought sexual relations between adults of the same sex were wrong,

compared to 36% in 2007. Additionally 11% of people in the UK in 2007 thought that sex before marriage was always or mostly wrong compared with 28% in 1983. Thus, it would seem that the boundaries between what is acceptable on the charmed circle and what is unacceptable have become less distinct within contemporary society.

Williams (2004, p.2) notes that we are compelled to speak sex, whether to protect ourselves or our children from sexually transmitted diseases, or simply as a result of watching *Sex in the City.* Williams means that it has become so engrained within our culture that it has become an over familiar topic that is almost demanded to be talked about. I would agree with Williams when she observes that discussions and representations of sex that were once deemed obscene, in the literal sense of being off the public scene, have increasingly appeared in the public realms of the Internet, she suitably coins this shift as 'on/scenity' (2004, p.3). Thus, she believes that it is increasingly difficult to define what is obscene because we have become somewhat desensitised to such things as they have become more mainstream meaning we can no longer make clear distinctions between the two. Particularly in relation to pornography Williams notes that the once obscene sexual scenarios that have now been brought into the public sphere has led to diverse forms of sexuality being represented. This marks a distinction between Rubin's work and contemporary society as one can see that the boundaries between the outer and the inner circle are becoming less distinct as the obscene and the erotic variety are represented and becoming seemingly more acceptable within mainstream culture.

Feminism

'*Sexuality has been a contested terrain amongst feminists'* (Jackson & Scott, 1996, p.1)

As one can imagine, feminists have a lot to say on the matter of sex, however, they are rather conflicted around the topic. Second-wave feminists argued that women experience the majority of their oppression via a (heterosexual) social and cultural system that not only privileges men but works to substantially disadvantage women in all facets of daily life (eg. Jeffreys, 1990; Mackinnon, 1989; Rich, 1980). Second-wave feminism can be identified by three phases (Ferguson, Philipson, Diamon, Quinby, Vance and Snitow, 1984). What is considered the first phase began during the 1960s and focused on women's right to choose and define her own sexuality. Feminists at the time advocated the idea that women's nature (often seen as different to men's) not only needed to be celebrated but also 'liberated' from patriarchal definitions. Different forms of theorising approached women's oppression differently. A Marxist feminist analysis argued that women's oppression was based on sex differences, leading to the sexual division of labour, and that women needed to take control of their own reproduction, which would lead to the collapse of structures like romance,

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marriage, motherhood (Firestone, 1970). The emphasis of liberal feminists on the equality of men and women was through political and legal reform. Emphasising equal liberal and political rights for women they focus on equal rights in education, equal pay, and political rights. With regard to sexuality they value personal privacy and autonomy, defending the liberty to decide on one's sexual orientation, partners and practices as beyond the reach of the law. Radical theorising held that sexuality in a male-dominant society involves danger because heterosexual practices perpetuate violence against women. They recognised the widespread sexual abuse and violence that women experienced arguing that things like sexual violence and rape were not only defined by men, but were also routinely used by men to keep women at a constant state of fear and submission (Brownmiller, 1975). As one can see, from all aspects, second-wave feminism was not only recognising women's oppression but also celebrating womanhood and helping women gain control of their own bodies. As Segal (1998, p.47) notes, 'Feminists initially sought to celebrate female sexuality: liberating it from the male-centred discourses and sexist practices to uncover women's own ''autonomous'' sexuality.'

The second phase, in the early 1970s, challenged earlier views of gender and sexuality, arguing that they were socially and culturally produced (Rubin, 1999). This then led to the problematisation of heterosexuality and the rise of a lesbian-feminist community (see Rich, 1980). The third phase is characterised by what are known as the feminist 'sex wars', where the focus shifted to pleasure, as well as the danger, of all things sexual. The sex wars were, and still are, characterised by differing stances towards sex and sexuality, particularly on issues such as pornography and prostitution. Feminists became divided into pro-sex and anti-sex and are typically identified as liberalist and radical, respectively (Jackson & Scott, 1996). Rubin is a typical example of the pro-sex camp, which argues that any form of sexual interaction (as long as it is consensual) that brings pleasure should be deemed as acceptable. She critiqued western society for making a distinction between good/normal sex and bad/abnormal and that delineated what was acceptable sexual practice. In contrast, those in the anti-sex camp, often radical feminists, argued that any form of sexual relations that included power difference and dominance/submission was problematic and reproduced patriarchal power (eg. Andrea Dworkin, Katharine McKinnon and Adrienne Rich). Indeed they believe that prostitution and pornography can never be liberating as they are part of a cultural system that objectifies women as sex objects and bodies for sale. Dworkin (1981), one of the prominent anti-pornography campaigners, saw women's participation in pornographic films, the production of pornography and men's consumption of it as damaging to women and society. As one can see these are extreme ends of a potential continuum of feminist perspectives on sex and sexuality and have been criticised for their approaches.

Indeed Chapkis (1997) has argued that the two sides of the sex wars were not as single minded as is usually depicted and that they had their own internal variations. However the main difference between the two camps is the approach to seeing sex outside conventional relationships as liberating and seeing sex based on a power imbalance that is an extension of male power.

Third wave feminist positions build from the pro-sex feminists of the sex wars in that they embrace sexuality and view sex as power. Going one step further Paglia (1992) sees women as the dominant sex, claiming that one of the reasons men continue to represent women as sex objects is because they are trying to regain power from the femme fatal who has controlled them throughout history. Moreover, another distinctive perspective is found among a growing number of writers who examine contemporary sexualisation as a distinctly postfeminist phenomenon linked to discourses of celebrity, choice and empowerment (Coleman, 2008). This new feminism embodies a 'sassy-don't-mess-with-me-adolescent-spirit' (Bellafante, 1998, p.61) that tells women they can be powerful, independent women and can look hot doing it.

The 'Sexualisation of Culture'

This phrase is used by Gill and Harvey (2011, p.53) to capture the increasing view that sexual representations have begun to saturate our culture so much so that it has a led to a transformation of contemporary culture. As Attwood (2006, p.77) explains it covers a range of things,

> '*a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay; [and the] fondness the scandals, controversies and panics around sex.*'

Again, *50 Shades of Grey* exemplifies the proliferation of sexual texts, sexual music videos and advertising are common and practices we once associated with the sex industry have become ordinary. Where once you could dial a hotline for phone sex from someone whose job that was, now it is increasingly common to text or instant message online peers, colleagues or strangers for the same thing. Indeed pole and lap dancing have become sources of mainstream entertainment and even fitness exercises. These all exemplify the

mainstreaming of a sexualised culture and show the shift from obscenity to onscenity (Williams, 2004).

Furthermore, in Attwood (2008) 'Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Culture', she reviews emerging academic approaches to the study of a sexualised culture. Attwood claims that porn has turned chic and the style of porn stars can be found in music videos and advertising and even on the streets. 'Women with surgically enhanced body parts and scantily clad can be seen in our daily lives' (Attwood, 2008, p.xiv). Moreover Brian McNair (1996, p.23) coins the term 'pornographication', which is used to describe a process evident in art and popular culture where the iconography of pornography has become commonplace alongside the development of a 'pornosphere' within which obscene texts proliferate. The pornosphere simply describes the exchange and circulation of sexually explicit materials within our culture. 'Striptease culture' is another term McNair (2002, p.87) uses to describe a shift that can be understood as 'the latest stage in the commodification of sex, and the extension of sexual consumerism.' Specifically 'striptease culture' refers to the various forms of sexualised performance that is done by women who are not professional porn stars, striptease artists or lap dancers. This would include things such as burlesque, which has grown in popularity in the recent years, especially since the film *Burlesque* in 2010. These terms highlight the way in which the boundaries between what is private and public have become less distinct within contemporary society. Indeed Attwood recognises that arched backs, exposed breast and simulated orgasms are regular parts of the iconography of advertising in the 21st century despite the feminist critique of objectification for the past four decades.

Specifically Gill (2009) notices an upsurge of interest in the midriff part of the body since the 1980s. She states that within advertising midriffs are often exposed on women in a much more sexualised way, showing women as desiring sexual objects, playful and egalitarian instead of passive and objectified. Thus Gill, (2009) notes that there is a shift from objectification to sexual subjectification based on a discourse of choice and autonomy with an emphasis upon empowerment. Subjectification is a key term that Gill coins which enables one to understand the view that many feminists hold; that the objectification of women's bodies has been deliberately re-sexualised and re-commodified, neutralising the more overt representations. Indeed Gill would argue that newer representations are a response to feminism making them far less innocent than earlier sexualised depictions. Rather than depicting women as passive objects they present them as knowing, desiring and sexual subjects (Gill, 2009). This is the shift from objectification to subjectification that Gill argues is salient in media and popular culture today and typifies postfeminist thought on mainstream sex and sexuality. However Gill criticises the new found freedom and choice as being

restricted and tied to the possessing the right look and the right body (Gill, 2008). In light of these new images of the sexually liberated, seemingly agentic women, Gill (2008) asks :'Why is the look that women hope to achieve so similar? Why is there no diversity in what constitutes sexuality and sexual desire?' (p232). Thus postfeminism has undergone much criticism and a more contemporary sex war has ensued where feminists are contested over whether the proliferation of representations of women as desirable and sexually agentic represents a real and positive change in the depictions of female sexuality, or whether it is merely a postfeminist repackaging of feminist ideas that presses them into the service of patriarchal consumer capitalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Indeed Levy (2005) asserts that the sexual objectification of women is being repackaged as empowerment, but contends that raunch culture is not progressive it is essentially commercial. Raunch culture is the term Levy uses to describe the way women are objectified, objectify one another, and are encouraged to objectify themselves today. Furthermore Levy (2005, p29) asserts that 'raunch culture isn't about opening our minds to the possibilities and mysteries of sexuality. It's about endlessy reiterating one particular – and particularly saleable – shorthand for sexiness.'

As we have seen, sexual themes within the media and popular culture are not a particularly new phenomenon. Throughout adolescence and adulthood we continually learn about sex and the media are a major source of that information (Harris & Barlett, 2009). Indeed according to a Time/CNN poll (Stodghill, 1998 cited in Harris et al, 2009) 29% of teenagers in the USA identified television as their most important source of information about sex. In addition, children and adolescents spend more time with entertainment media than they do any other activity except school and sleeping (Roberts, Foehr & Rideot, 2005). Thus, one can see that the media has an influential role in the creating and strengthening of cultural values because it responds to demand and is a reflection of culture and it also contributes to it (APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls, 2010).

Within the plethora of media options available to us today sex and sexuality encompass a wide variety of forms but sex within the media is not limited to explicit portrayals, it may include any representation that portrays or implies sexualised or gendered behaviour. Sexual desire and seduction is extensively used within advertising particularly for products like perfume, make-up and alcohol but also for products like food and cars. Goffman's (1979) seminal critique of gendered media advertisements was groundbreaking for its time and demonstrated that despite the progress of the women's right movement in the 1970s advertising infantilised women. He believed that the advertisements 'depict for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we think men and women behave' (Gornick, 1979, pvii). This would mean that the advertisements are essentially

viewed as depictions of ideal, socially acceptable instances of masculinity and femininity. Goffman contended that carefully posed models and carefully selected settings of advertisements create 'a pseudo-reality that is better than real' (Goffman, 1979, p23). Focusing on the subtleties of advertisements rather than the overt sexuality enabled Goffman to demonstrate the less obvious, yet clearly apparent upon closer inspection, disparities between men and women in advertisements.

One of the major developments of Goffman's work has been an analysis of how cropping is used in adverts. Studies have highlighted the way in which women's bodies are fragmented in adverts, visually dissected so that the viewer sees only the lips, or the eyes or the breasts. Gill (2003) suggests that current images are far less innocent than earlier depictions of women as objects prominent in the 60s and 70s because they are happening in a time when women are told they can have it all. Analyses of the content of advertisements support the conclusion that nude or semi-nude models (females more so than males) are a common element in advertising in the United States and other countries (Wiles, Wiles & Tjernlund, 1996). Furthermore The APA Task Force state that massive exposure to media among youth creates the potential for massive exposure to portrayals that sexualize women and girls and teach girls that women are sexual objects.

Music videos are particularly inclined to contain sexual imagery whether it relates to the actual song or not. Vincent, Davis, and Boruskowski (1987) found that 57% of the videos featured a women portrayed exclusively as a decorative sexual object. More recently Ward & Rivadeneyra (2002) found that sexual imagery in popular music videos on Black Entertainment Television found sexual imagery in 84% of the videos and the two most frequently occurring themes were sexual objectification and women dancing sexually. They also found that seventy one percent of the women in these videos were dressed in mildly provocative clothing or wore no clothing at all, compared with 35% of male characters (cited in APA Task Force Report). Resonant with postfeminism an analysis of music videos by Andsager and Roe (2003) has shown how artists exploit their sexuality to establish a more mature and edgier version of themselves. Thus in terms of the medias influence on cultural norms and values this would contribute to views that being a successful sexual object is the way to be perceived as mature.

The internet is a significant source of concern in the 21st Century for its seemingly limitless access to pornography, sexual services and sexual imagery. A study by the University of East London surveyed over 350 teenagers, male and female, to find out about their internet habits. They found that social media sites were central to the circulation of sexual images and of all the participants 97% of the boys and 80% of the girls reported to having seen

sexual imagery (Roberts & Turner, 2013). Furthermore the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook, Tumblr and Instagram has encouraged people to describe themselves and present themselves in idealised and sexualised ways. Indeed Livingstone (2008, p.393) points out that they promote a 'narcissistic fascination with self-display'.

Though Goffman did not consider the advertisements to represent real life Kellner (2003) argues the opposite, positing that radio, television, film, advertisements and other forms of media culture provide materials out of which we form our identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality. Furthermore Jacobson (2002, p. 14) adds that the media is a given contributor, among others, to the formation of gender identity as a young person. It has been found that a young woman's perception of her body can be changed by just 30 minutes of television viewing (Myers & Biocca, 1992). This shows how strongly advertisements can affect society, especially women. As we have seen a common finding is that females are depicted as sexual objects more often than males. In music videos females present themselves in provocative clothing more frequently than males. Female sexuality is presented as exhibitionist and nymphomaniacal and is used to sell various products (Jacobson, 2002, p.22). Therefore, it is evident that there is a major emphasis on the female appearance and being sexually attractive in the media.

Postmodernism, Identity and Consumption

To speak of postmodernity is to suggest an epochal shift or break away from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organising principles (Featherstone, 2007). The post immediately signifies it comes after modernity, which is generally held to come into being the Renaissance and implies the process which brought the capitalist-industrial state. Typically postmodernism emphasises multiplicity, ambiguity, ambivalence and fragmentation (Gray, 2009), which highlights the reasoning for carrying out research that seeks to understand where people's rationale for acceptable commodification of sex lies. Postmodernism denotes that reality and the way one defines themselves and the world around are governed by dominating cultural signs and media images. As Strinati (1995) asserts, postmodernism tries to comes to terms with, and understand, a media saturated society.

Identity is now more frequently distinguished by what and how we consume, more so than ever before (Brewis & Linstead, 2002). The consumption process itself becomes a process of symbolic production and reproduction – the consumption of signs as much as commodities (Brewis & Linstead, 2000). Consequently, prostitutes, a person/body, a sexual suggestion or thought becomes the commodity that is thus consumed. A concept by Jean

Baudrillard (1998) could also be applied to this notion whereby through pleasing oneself one is likely to please others. In other words pleasing has become an activity in which the person to be pleased is of secondary consideration because their first priority is to please other people. Using women as a prime example of this notion he states, 'Women is sold to women . . . while doing what she believes is preening herself, scenting herself, clothing herself, in a word 'creating' herself, she is, in fact, consuming herself.' (Sulerot cited in Baudrillard, 1998: 95). That is to say that women view advertisements, music videos, and all the other forms of sexual portrayal in popular culture and want to be that person because that is what is considered desirable by others. Thus, the woman is essentially consuming herself because she is aiming to become the sexy and desirable woman that she admired in the first place. Furthermore, the product that is being sold (music, book, lipstick etc) is no longer what is being consumed, rather the women is consuming herself in order to become the desirable person that is being represented. And this process happens so that woman is desirable to onlookers, not necessarily herself. One could conclude that 'being sexy' comes at a cost, the material cost of buying the products to ensure 'sexiness' is one thing but the commodification of oneself is a sinister other. Through consumption women are constructing their identity in conformity with what a post-modern society expects a (sexy) woman to look like, be it through the mediation of signs, norms or styles, which are traditionally male orientated. Thus, in accordance with Baudrilliard's concept, capitalism drives the commodification of sex in the guise of individual freedom, which is central to the production of needs, wants and moralities.

It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that consumption has become the key concern of late twentieth century sociology. Indeed, consumption, shopping, advertising and the ownership of possessions continually play a significant role in the way of experiencing modern life, thus consumption continues to arouse sociological interest. I intend to present a brief overview of the meaning of consumption in previous literature and discuss how this can inform the notion of consumption within this research.

Elliot (1997, p.286) proposes there are five analytical frames that can be used to understand the meaning of consumption, 1) the material versus the symbolic, 2) the social versus the self, 3) desire versus satisfaction, 4) rationality versus irrationality, and 5) creativity versus constraint. I wish to explore the first three dialectics in further detail, as they are pertinent to my research. The material versus the symbolic, reminiscent of postmodern theory, relies on the idea that rather than consuming the product for their material utilities consumers consume the products for their symbolic meaning. As Baudrilliard (1981) states, products become commodity signs. However, a symbol itself can be quite ambiguous in this instance since it can relate to the product that carries meaning or to the meaning the product carries.

The interpretation of meaning is a complex idea of what is contained in the representation and what the individual brings to the representation. Elliot (1997) notes that the function of the symbolic meaning is two-fold, social symbolism is the outward function, which constructs the social world and self-symbolism is the inward function, which constructs our self-identity. Thus, the symbolic meaning of consumption serves to aid the self and the social. This juxtaposition of the social versus the self accentuates the meaning of consumer goods as grounded in their social context and the demand for goods derives from their role in cultural practices. Consumer goods, then, are more than just objects of economic exchange, 'they are goods to think with, goods to speak with' (Fiske,1989).

Thirdly, desire versus satisfaction denotes that one is motivated to consume at the unconscious level by a search for an imaginary self, which is presented to us in advertising. Advertising feeds the desire to achieve the unobtainable unity of the self with destabilized meanings (Featherstone, 1991 in Elliot 1997). Images used which are separate to the commodity offer the consumer the possibility to reconstruct themselves by purchasing the symbolic meaning. Much of the promotional activity in postmodernity has the symbolic focus of desire, which is inextricably linked with aspects of sexuality. It does this through imagery and representations of desire and promises satisfaction from these both consciously and unconsciously, which makes even the mundane consumer actions highly significant in our psychic lives (Bocock, 1993). However, Taylor & Saarinen caution 'desire does not desire satisfaction. To the contrary desire desires desire. The reason images are so desirable is that they never satisfy.' This notion supports the idea that consumer society creates and sustains the desires through symbolic linkages that create meanings for our identity and the pursuit of sexual satisfaction. It also shows how mundane consumer activity can be highly significant and the idea that it never satisfies highlights the cyclical nature of consumption. Thus, the concept of consumption plays a key part in construction of meanings and values, particularly those regarding sex and sexuality because investing products with a style of sexuality the consumption meaning becomes a potent cultural form drawing its energy from the desires of the body and as such it has an integrative role within this research.

Although a financial aspect of consumption is significant in contemporary consumption one can see that the notion of consumption is more than just a financial exchange or agreement, people do more than consume the product they purchase, it provides the individual with the opportunity to construct, maintain and communicate identity and social meanings. As Baudrillard (1998, p.70) asserts 'consumption is a system which secures the ordering of signs and the integration of the group: it is therefore both a morality (a system of ideological values) and a communication system, a structure of exchange. Furthermore, as Parsons notes 'the goal of the economy is not the maximization of the product for the individual but

the maximization of production linked in with the value system of the society.' (cited in Baudrillard, 1998, p. 70) Here the consumption is not so much driven by need of a product but rather it is driven by the need for values. Thus it is the society that drives the choices of an individual which means any autonomy the individual may have had is refuted.

Consumption within the context of post modernity has a natural bond because post-modernity is said to refer to a reality that is governed by dominating cultural signs and media images. Post-modernism tries to come to terms with a media saturated society (Strinati, 1995). What we buy and what determines what we buy is not through ones' personal choice, rather it is influenced through dominant media images which begin to govern our lives. As we have seen the media permeates society in a variety of forms and is, arguably, the chief distributor and communicator of sexualized imagery and ideals. Thus it is not too farfetched to regard them as a mode of consumption and exchange in which a value system is produced and sustained. Baudrillard (1998) claims that the domination of the signs and images involves a dehumanisation of the individual. He assumes this dehumanisation occurs through the pervasiveness of signs and objects which within a consumer society people attempt to make themselves as much like these objects as possible. Reminiscent of Marxist theory, Baudrillard sees the post-modern society as a consumer society by which the exploitative nature of capitalism is upheld. Therefore, people are not consuming because they want the things or they fulfil any purpose; they are consuming them because they are lead to believe that they need these things (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis, 2006).

Conversely, Boorstin (cited in Baudrillard, 1998, p.127) argues that we take pleasure and have a desire to be seduced by advertisers. He uses the example of Barnun, an American showman, businessmen and entertainer, whose 'great discovery was not how easy it was to deceive the public, but rather, how much the public enjoyed being deceived.' However, it would be false to suggest that this seductive hypothesis is based on cynical manipulation and perversity. Boorstin elaborates further saying that it does not deceive us because it is *beyond the true and the false,* just as fashion is beyond ugliness and beauty. The concept here is that advertisers speak prophetically - they make things true by saying they are so - evocative of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968). However, it does not create an alternative truth, it creates an ulterior confirmation by the reality of the prophetic sign it sends out, making the true and the false indiscernible. This notion emphasizes the ambiguity of post modernity and the way in which things can easily get blurred. This explanation furthers our understanding of consumption in regards to sex because it draws on seduction and desire, two key aspects of sexuality. It presupposes that individuals have innate desires to be seduced and consumption is one of the most accessible ways of achieving this. However, one must note consumption will never cease because ultimate satisfaction or seduction can

never be achieved. This notion is of particular interest when thinking about how sexual representations can influence our thoughts and behaviour and whether or not the participants resist or accept this notion will be of interest.

The most predominant consumer object is undoubtedly the body, indeed Baudrillard (1998) says the body is the object of salvation. He speaks of a beauty imperative whereby beauty is a form of capital. He argues that women become objects and no longer have a natural beauty but their bodies now have an exchange value, whereby a reinvestment takes place and beauty becomes nothing more than sign material to be exchanged. Subsequently we get the eroticized body and sexuality orientates the rediscovery and consumption of the body today.

> *'In any culture whatsoever, the mode of organization of the relation to the body reflects the mode of organization of the relation to things and of social relations. In a capitalist society, the general status of private property applies also to the body, to the way we operate socially with it and the mental representation we have of it.'*

> (Baudrillard, 1998, p.129)

As we have seen, consumption from Baudrillard's point of view is not concerned with possessing or belonging but with communicating through a system of signs. When thinking about the body and its use as a sign one can see that it underpins this research. The body is the object of sexuality and is omnipresent in society, particularly within the media. It is how the signs that the body projects and the way we consume those signs that are of particular interest when looking at the sexualisation of culture. The blurring of falsehoods and truths echoes the blurred spectrum on which sex is represented in our society. As Gervasi states 'It is not just any old goods which are produced or consumed: they must have some meaning with regard to a system of values.' (cited in Baudrillard, 1998) This view of consumption expresses the idea that values of society are passed around through the mode of consumption, though here the text is speaking of products carrying that value system. Elliot (1997, p.291) states that 'Advertisements can be seen as cultural products in their own right and young people consume them independently of the products and have a creative symbolic relationship with them.' Therefore the understanding of consuming signs and symbols is imperative when thinking about the consumption of values and meaning. In effect the sign and the symbol represent the value and the meanings that are available.

21

<u>Empirical Research</u>

Much empirical research of the media has often focused on media advertisements through the eyes of the consumer building on Goffman's (1979) original work on gendered advertisements. Recent studies (such as Elliot, Jones, Benfield, and Barlow, 1995, Ford, LaTour and Lundstrum, 1991, Mittal and Lassar, 2000 and Zimmerman and Dahlberg, 2008) have sought to measure attitudes and responses to sexually explicit and/or objectifying advertisements. Elliot et al (1995) measured the extent to which males and females differ in response to overt sexuality in advertising. Using a discourse analysis their key finding was that for both genders overt sexuality was legitimated providing that men and women were equally involved with the sexual action. Their explanation for the gender consistency is said to be a result of the public language of advertising giving shared meaning to sexuality in a way that enables women to speak of their sexual needs and desires (Elliot et al, 1995, p.211). Furthermore, as advertisements are a manifestation of consumer culture, using the notion of the consumption, they claim that consumption choices allow women and men to achieve 'an independence not just of sex, but *with* sex' (Davidson, 1992 cited in Elliot et al, 1995, p.211). This research affirms the idea that independent of the product, advertisements communicate their own symbolic meanings and within a consumer culture they are a means of purchasing the symbolic meaning to reconstruct the self.

Zimmerman and Dahlberg's (2008) study sought to quantitatively measure attitudes of young women to sexually objectified advertising. Their research combined elements of Ford et al (1991) and Mittal and Lassar's (2000) previous studies and compared the results with their own findings which indicated as the portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements became more common, young educated women were less offended by them. They drew upon post-feminist theory to explain their findings stating that their participants were raised in a sexualised world and because of this culture young, educated women interpret these formerly negative and sometimes harmful images as acceptable. They go on to state that their participants considered the advertisement they showed them to be tasteful, even though it contained high levels of sexual objectification of women, which shows that the images must be graphic for them to be offended. Furthermore Zimmerman and Dahlerg (2008) state that is does not matter whether the advertisements is ethically or morally right because they accept sex as part of their culture, consistent with the attitudes of post-feminism. Unlike Elliot et al's (1995) finding, this study would not express accepting attitudes of sexualised advertisements based on equal representation but on autonomy and free will. It could be said that the participants within this study may have been influenced by postfeminism and are not fazed by sexual objectification in advertising, choosing to view them independently of the representations they portray. Comparing their findings to findings

in previous studies Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) conclude that it is largely due to our culture that today, young, educated, women appear far less offended by the portrayal of women as sex objects.

Rising concerns of the sexualisation of culture is the effect this has on children and young people and as a response to this The Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2010) was formed in the US. Their report sought to explore the cognitive and emotional consequences, consequences for mental and physical health, and impact on development of a healthy sexual self-image. Similarly, in the UK, the *Sexualisation of Young People Review* by Linda Popodopolous (2010) was commissioned by the Home Office to uncover ways in which sexualisation has contributed to a climate in which violence against women is condoned and to contribute to initiatives to combat the problem. Both reports are similar in their claims about the production and consumption of media with sexual themes stressing false ideas about sex, sexuality and women, devaluation of love and relationships, aggrandizement of masculinity, prescribing feminine and masculine ideals and creating the continuance and acceptance of violence against women. The reports are significant in that they demonstrate the genuine concerns over the sexualisation of culture and the government's efforts in reviewing and challenging it. However, the reports have received much criticism from academics for their narrowness of conceptual understanding of media and consumption. Smith (2010, p.177) argues of the Popodopolous report that 'she presents sexualisation in simplistic terms, as a singular object of concern and children as incomplete beings unable to resist the blandishments of the media designed to seduce them.' The reports highlight the topical and current public concern of sexualisation that can inform this research but also bear warning to ensure I do not oversimplify and overlook the myriad of media forms at work within society.

Attwood, Bale and Barker (2010) recognised an inaccurate reporting and sometimes sensationalist information circulating publicly about sexualisation and therefore compiled 'The Sexualization Report' to set out clearly what 'current good research tells us about these issues' in the UK. They particularly try to address the wide range of issues that seem to underpin the anxieties and concerns that are commonly expressed about sexualisation. Looking at sex, sexuality and sexual health and wellbeing the authors draw upon a wide range of research from different subject areas such as psychology, sociology, health, cultural studies. Specifically, they emphasise the importance of considering the wider cultural context within which forms of sexualised media exist, stating that narrow ideals of female attractiveness (Mostly, young, thin, white, middle class etc) can be found across advertising, fashion, women's and men's magazines (Attwood et al, 2013). Indeed, some have argued even this needs situating within the Western tendency to separate ourselves from our bodies

and treat them as objects (Barker, 2013). Of particular interest to my research the report highlights the complexities of the representations of women as being objectified in contrast with recent research that argues they are frequently shown more as active and agentic (for example Gill, 2003). Seeing where my participants attitudes lie and what aspects they resist and accept within these complex positions will be of interest as this shift is considered as quite recent therefore there may be a difference in views between the age ranges of the women. The Sexualization Report also highlights how advances in technology have changed the way sex can be produced and consumed. A particular current example of this is 'sexting', which is the exchange of sexual messages or images (Livingston et al, 2009) through mobile phones and/or the internet. A qualitative study by Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey (2012) was done to respond to and enhance understandings of sexting and teenagers use of social networking sites and mobile phones. This was a small scale study but the authors believe that the findings that emerged are not unique to the two year groups they studied believing it underscores the urgent need for expanding this research (Ringrose et al, 2012). Similarly it may be seen as post modern, not only because of the disruption of traditional views that it affords, but because of the very radical ways in which it combines intimate acts in a public sphere

Other empirical studies have been done to look at the effects of sex in the media has on people's sexual behaviour (for example Harris & Barlett, 2009, Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy & Jackson, 2006 and L'Engle, Brown & Kenneavy, 2006). However, what appears to be lacking amongst research is women's views on the sexualisation of culture. Given that women are often the objects or subjects of this sexualisation it seems natural to ask them their thoughts and what they feel about it. Therefore, wuthin the interrelated context of postmodernism and emphasis on diversity and the multifaceted face of feminism I wish to analyse women's views.

Research Question:

1. How do women feel about the diverse sexualisation of culture?

Methodology

<u>Methodological approach</u>

A qualitative approach has been used for this research as I am intending to make an in depth exploration of women's views on cultural representations of sex and sexuality. As I wish to understand the relationship between sex and sexual representations and their place and meanings in the lived experiences of women, plainly, an interpretative mode of inquiry was essential for this study. Thus, a methodology which enables one to explore not only what the participants consider acceptable and unacceptable but also why they do so was required to ensure the success of this study. Crotty (1998) suggests that an interrelationship exists between the theoretical stance adopted by the researcher, the methodology and the methods used. Therefore, it is necessary to state the epistemological stance influencing this research as it will affect the perspectives adopted and the methodologies used.

The method I will be using is qualitative as one can see postmodernism does not offer a positive theory of society. It promotes a culture of negation, claiming that there is no legitimacy or authority in this world but only human constructions. Truth is dependent on contextual factors, focusing on relative truths for each person within paradigms. Qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things (Berg, 2009). Quantitative research chiefly relies on numbers; therefore, many people inaccurately regard it as more scientific but as Borman, LeCompte and Goetz (1986, p.51) argue, 'criticism for qualitative approaches arises out of an erroneous equation of the term empirical with quantification, rather than with any real defect in the qualitative paradigm itself.' Therefore, as empirical does not equate directly to quantification, qualitative research should not be labelled unscientific. If science is defined as a specific and systematic way of discovering and understanding social realities (Berg, 2009) qualitative research can be considered scientific as it allows unquantifiable facts to be discovered through a systematic process. Based on these principles the qualitative orientation of the research is justified as it is based upon an empirical foundation. Furthermore, quantification of the data would not guarantee the fruitfulness of this research topic as certain experiences and attitudes cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers.

As already noted the purpose of the research is to investigate women's opinions and attitudes towards the commodification of sex in society. Qualitative techniques allow researchers to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 2009), how the participants give meaning to what they consider acceptable will be of interest throughout, which is why a qualitative approach is necessary.

Method

The method for eliciting the data was three focus groups. Focus groups lend themselves well to qualitative research, indeed it is argued that within qualitative research focus groups realise their full potential (Barbour, 2007). Loosely defined 'any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction' Kitzinger and Barbour (1999: 20). This method excels at allowing us to study the processes of attitude formation, developments of consensus and the construction and modification of views. Therefore, it is essential that the participants interact with each other and not me as the researcher, so attention can be given to the group dynamics. As David Morgan (1998, p.25) observed, 'focus groups are useful when it comes to investigating *what* participants think, but they excel at *why* participants think as they do.' Thus, it is not simply a group interview that collects data from several participants simultaneously; it is focused on the group interactions as part of the data gathering method.

The use of focus groups to elicit data provides an insight into how individuals formulate their opinions because it is a micro social situation, where participants are encouraged to be as honest and natural as they would be in normal circumstances. As the moderator I allowed group discussions to take place that were not strongly directed by me in order to reduce the possibility of my personal opinions being unintentionally expressed. My main role as moderator was to actively encourage all the participants to talk and to respond to each other's comments. Participants have a chance to express their genuine feelings on the topic under study and can bring up any aspect that they feel is important. The group process also allows them to come to understandings about the topic that none of them could have achieved alone (Manheim, Rich, Wilnat & Brians, 2008). Therefore, focus groups should be valued for their unique capacity to provide an understanding of how such views are formed. However, Billig (1991) warns that views expressed in focus groups are highly specific and bound up in the argument that is happening. Furthermore, one should not forget that individuals have a number of possible social identities but tend to refer to an identity that they see as shared in the group, while in other contexts they may have referred to others. However, as the qualitative tradition and postmodernism acknowledge that truth is relative and recognises the existence of 'multiple voices', this is what was sought to capture rather than one definitive view. Additionally, Callaghan (as cited in Barbour, 2009) argues that focus groups can afford participants the opportunity of simultaneously managing their individual identities and making a collective representation to the researcher, thereby providing valuable insights into the construction of meanings and their impact on action. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' can be drawn on here as this term refers to the way socialised norms and tendencies guide behaviour and thinking (Bourdieu, 1990). Specifically

habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant 2005: 316, cited in Navarro 2006, 16).

<u>Sampling and Recruitment</u>

Each focus group aimed to have five participants and they varied according to age. The age grouping was adopted based on the belief that it is better to select relatively homogenous groups in order for the participants to have sufficient basis for communicating. Morgan (1998) reminds that focus groups should be homogenous in terms of backgrounds and not attitudes; therefore, I planned to include people that had enough in common with each other to make discussions seem appropriate, yet have sufficiently varying experiences or perspectives to allow for debate or differences in opinion. Therefore the age groups I decided to split the three groups into were 18-25 (Fg1), 26-35 (Fg2), 36 plus (Fg3). There are a number of reasons why one should keep the size of the group fairly small, firstly, because large groups are more difficult to manage and there is a possibility they could divide into sub groups, which could complicate the understanding of the information offered. Secondly, if the group was large it would become difficult when trying to transcribe as I may not be able to associate the speaker to their comments, which would get confusing. Krueger (1994) suggests that focus group size should be kept to no more than about seven participants because of these reasons.

The sampling strategy I used is known as snowball sampling whereby the basic strategy is to identify several people with the relevant characteristics and interview them. These participants are then asked for the names of other people who possess the required attributes (Berg, 2009). My sample was white British women aged 18 and above. I chose the age of 18 as having participants younger than this age would be more complex to gain ethical approval because of the need for parental consent. I am aware that ethnic diversity would provide different insights to what is deemed acceptable in representations of sex; however, I believe the sample would be too broad for the size of my project and anticipated that using snowball sampling it was likely that the resulting sample would be quite homogenous. Furthermore, I am conscious that looking at male and females would also produce more diversity within my results, however, I believe the diversity of females will be sufficient due to the short period of time my research will be undertaken. Including a male perspective into the study would mean doubling the sample, therefore, it is not suitable for the size of this research and this could possibly be of interest in their own right in future research. Furthermore, I have decided to actively exclude homosexual participants as I

anticipate further variation of responses, something which could also be of interest for a separate study in its own right.

From the sample of white British women I desired diversity of age, class and experience I endeavoured to cover as much diversity as possible, within a realistic expectation for the size of the study. The rationale for diversity is rooted in the range of views I wish to explore:- this will be maximised by the diversity and should not be confused with a comparative study. Typically class and occupation have been regarded as synonymous with each other and has sought to identify class exploitation within the labour market, specifically by Karl Marx. However, more recently class analysis has taken on an 'employment aggregate approach', which distances it from income based definitions to ones based on certain attributes (Crompton,1998) such as assets, capital and resources to categorise class groups. Therefore, employment based classes are excessively 'economist', and fail to encompass the cultural dimensions that shape class. One can see that the ambivalence of class distinction is complex and difficult to determine. To overcome the plurality of the concept I focused on sampling a variety of occupations, which will not be used as class descriptions. Bourdieu (1987) recognises that occupation is generally a good and economic indicator of position in social space since employment provides wealth to an individual which significantly attributes to the life condition of that person. Thus, adding the occupation to the criterion recognises that economic and social practices are embedded in each other rather than separate spheres. Moreover, Crompton (1998) states that employment categorisation has proven to be relatively robust, particularly as far as empirical research is concerned.

To recruit participants I sent an email around staff and students at the University of Huddersfield, put a call out on my Facebook page and asked people I knew to pass on information of my study to women they knew who might be interested and fit the sample criteria. All possible participants received an information sheet explaining what the research is about, why they had been approached, what they were required to do should they decide to take part, and what would happen to the information they provided (see appendix B).

Participants

The first focus group included participants aged 18-25 years. Due to unforeseen circumstances two of the participants cancelled on the day which meant there were three remaining. The participants were all students at the University of Huddersfield studying drama, psychology and education. The second focus group was comprised of participants aged 26-35 and were also all students at the University of Huddersfield. There were four in total coming from different academic backgrounds; politics, sociology, midwifery and fashion. Finally, the third focus group was made up of six participants aged 36 plus. This group was

the most diverse in terms of occupation. Four of the women were students at the University of Huddersfield, one a secondary school teacher and the third a non-teaching assistant. As one can see the majority of the women were currently in academia or had been at some point in their lives. Though a diversity in occupation was desirable the participant recruitment was harder than anticipated in addition to cancellations I did not have the capacity to be selective. A redeeming factor to all the participants coming from an academic background was that they were different subject backgrounds, which meant they were coming from differing academic positions. Furthermore, as you will see from the transcriptions and analysis, the women were well informed about the issues which contributed profoundly to the discussions they had.

Research Materials

Given the ubiquity of images, within popular culture their consideration must form part of my research. Indeed, Martin Jay (1995, p.2 cited in Banks, 2007, p.17) argues that the modern world 'is very much a seen phenomenon.' Therefore providing the participants with visual imagery that they are used to engaging with facilitated the discussions and helped ensure they were meaningful for my research. Furthermore Banks (2007) states that there is, or can be, an immediate sensory experience that comes from encountering a visual image that other forms of text cannot replicate. Therefore, not including visual stimuli into my research design would have limited the richness of the data. A variety of mediums have been used to avoid repetition and encourage different flows of thought. Moreover the aim of the use of research materials was to a cover a wide variety in which sex is currently represented and sold in our society. The development and final choice of materials took a lot of consideration as I wanted to include a wide range of materials to demonstrate how sex can permeate society in many form, however some are much easier to represent than others. Sexualised advertisements are more accessible and tangible than the consumption of sex from a prostitute and as such it was, to some extent, easier to represent this section of culture than the more hidden sexual commerce. I did not want to load the focus groups with sexualised representations that were picked too subjectively by me, therefore, I chose materials that were current and topical which also meant the participants would easily engage with them. To try make sure the participants were aware of a wide range of the ways sex is sold I decided vignettes would be a suitable way to demonstrate the harder to represent forms such as prostitution, escorting and lap dancing.

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Advertisements are, undoubtedly, the most pervasive of forms that sexualised imagery can permeate our lives as they exist on billboards, in magazines, on television and on the internet. Thus, it seemed highly appropriate to include a selection in the focus groups. As seen within stage one of the research design I tried to ensure a varying selection of advertisements were used so as to not only choose ones that I considered acceptable or unacceptable myself.

The book '50 Shades of Grey' (E.L James, 2011) is a recent successful book that is renowned for its sexually explicit content. It is fair to say that the book has gained so much publicity not because of the main narrative but because of the spectacle, which the narrative supports, which is anchored in its overtly detailed sexual acts. A short excerpt from the book was incorporated into the interview for the participants to gain a brief insight into to the content of the book, which enabled them to have a discussion about it (see appendix D).

A music video by Rihanna called 'S&M' (Matsoukas, 2011) was chosen to show the participants (many were already aware of it). This was chosen due to the sexually explicit lyrics and video which charted in the top ten, thus displaying the infiltration of sex into mainstream media – exactly what I wanted the participants to discuss. Indeed the video was banned in many countries as it portrays sadomasochists' acts and fetishes further exemplifying McNair's (2013) porno chic aesthetic (see appendix D).

Vignettes were used to describe a scene and picture of the realities of being a sex worker and a dancer in a strip club. These were incorporated to enable the participants to look at sex across a broad range of situations in order to echo the breadth of sexual commerce available within our society (see appendix D).

<u>Procedure</u>

The stimuli were given to the participants via email prior to the focus groups. At the beginning of each focus group I introduced the research and recapped on the research materials they had looked at. The participants were also asked to sign a consent form (appendix E). Having brought a copy of the research materials with me this created a good opener to focus allowing me to ask the group what their initial reaction was to them. I had a prompt sheet (appendix C) at each focus group with open-ended questions on such as: what *thoughts do they evoke? What differences do you notice?* These questions prompted the participants in their discussions and helped me draw out their reasoning for what they were saying. Each focus group lasted between 45 minutes and 1 and ¼ hours and were audio recorded and later transcribed.

<u>Ethical Issues</u>

When gaining ethical approval for my research a couple of issues arose. Particularly the exclusion of non-white women was a concern. It is true that the identity 'white British women' is problematic, indeed, this is the case for any identity. Furthermore, given the widespread use of white women in sexualised images it could be argued that non-white women may relate to these images in quite a different way to women who may see themselves as more 'similar' to them. I tried to ensure diversity among my targeted sample by not restricting class, religion and sexuality. However, using a snowball sample it is likely that the resulting sample is quite homogenous, consisting of women who share similar demographic features with me in terms of ethnicity, class and background. This homogeneity should not be seen as problematic as it has in fact lead to greater coherence in the research data.

It was anticipated that it was unlikely for me or my participants to require psychological support due to anything relating directly to my research. However, should the focus groups have triggered any unsettling or troubling circumstances I offered the participants information on an appropriate support service. This was the University of Huddersfield's counselling service for current students or staff and the Women's Centre for the participants that were not currently staff or students. These detail were included in the information sheet that the participants received prior to confirming their participation in the research (Appendix B).

The audio recordings were only accessible to me and were kept in a locked drawer when I was not using them. Once the focus groups had been transcribed the information was stored on a password protected computer and any printed pieces of data were kept in a locked drawer when not being used for analysis. These steps enabled me to ensure the participants confidentiality and I explained to them the only other people with access to data that I showed them would be my supervisors. Furthermore, all participants were ensured anonymity as I gave individual pseudonyms at the beginning of each focus group and these names were used throughout the whole study henceforth.

<u>Stage One</u>

Prior to carrying out the focus groups I decided to undertake a small research task in order to select suitable advertisement images for use in the focus groups. This involved a number of sexualized advertisements and six participants that were not included in the focus groups to rate their acceptability. It is well accepted that individuals interpret stimuli very subjectively on the basis of their own background, experiences, aspirations and sociocultural contexts. Consequently this stage of the methodology was developed to endeavour to overcome and go beyond my own interpretations and judgements so as to not load the research with my

own value system and opinions from the beginning. After collating 23 advertisements that seemed to me to have a sexual connotation attached to them I then asked six women who were friends, colleagues and acquaintances and fit my targeted population, to sort them into piles depending on whether they considered them acceptable, unacceptable or unsure. The results can be seen in fig 2.

Fig. 2

Picture*	Unacceptable		Acceptable		Unsure	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	2	33.3	2	33.3	2	33.3
2	3	50.0	2	33.3	1	16.7
3	3	50.0	1	16.7	2	33.3
4	6	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
5	2	33.3	4	66.7	0	0.0
6	5	83.3	1	16.7	0	0.0
7	6	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
8	1	16.7	4	66.7	1	16.7
9	6	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
10	5	83.3	1	16.7	0	0.0
11	2	33.3	4	66.7	0	0.0
12	3	50.0	3	50.0	0	0.0
13	4	66.7	0	0.0	2	33.3
14	3	50.0	3	50.0	0	0.0
15	1	16.7	3	50.0	2	33.3
16	6	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
17	1	16.7	4	66.7	1	16.7
18	1	16.7	1	16.7	4	66.7
19	1	16.7	1	16.7	4	66.7
20	2	33.3	2	33.3	2	33.3
21	4	66.7	0	0.0	2	33.3
22	5	83.3	1	16.7	0	0.0
Total	72	54.5	37	28.0	23	17.4

*see appendix A for all images used.

As one can there was significant lack of agreement on most of the images, except three (Fig 4, 9, 16), which suggests they are good to use within the focus groups to tease out subtle differences of opinion. Due to these results I was happy and confident in taking the chosen advertisements forward for the three focus groups.

Rigorous discussion and planning was been done to refine the research materials that were used and to decide how they would be used within the focus groups. However, it was not practical to carry out the same developmental stages for every text due to small nature of the study and the short timescale. There would have also been practical difficulties in trying to examine a selection of videos or extracts from books. Advertisements seemed especially

appropriate and suitable due to their availability, ubiquity, and familiarity enabling a swift process for this stage in research design.

<u>Analysis</u>

As thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches, such as grounded theory and discourse analysis, it can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career.' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81) Furthermore, Boyatzis (1998) characterises it, not as a specific method, but as a tool to use across different methods. Thus, the accessibility and usefulness of thematic analysis will provided a useful research tool for my study and grounding for future methods. Due to the flexible nature of the approach it is often critiqued for an 'anything goes' method (Antaki et al, 2002 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006) and it is therefore imperative that it is undertaken in a way that is theoretically and methodically sound. Indeed for qualitative research to yield to meaningful results it is important that the data is analysed in a methodical and rigorous way. Thematic analysis offers an orderly approach to encoding and analysing data through careful reading and re-reading of the data in search for themes. The themes identified then become the categories for analysis.

Upon reading a journal article by Attride-Stirling (2001) 'Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research', I decided to follow the procedure of thematic networks outlined to facilitate the structuring and depiction of the themes within my data. Thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of the themes salient in a text and finding within it explicit rationalisations and their implicit significant (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The networks are made up of three classes of themes; basic themes, organising themes, and global themes. The network is developed starting from the basic themes and working inwards toward a global theme. The global theme represents the concluding theme of the organising themes in light of their basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001), thus, the objective is to summarise particular themes in order to create a larger, unifying theme.

Template analysis shares many similarities with thematic networks in terms of the development of themes and their grouping into broader themes with an overarching 'master theme' (King, 2004). The template is organised in a way which represents the relationships between themes, as defined by the researcher, most commonly involving a hierarchal structure (King, 2004). However, thematic networks differ in that they are presented graphically as web-like nets to remove any notion of hierarchy, giving fluidity to the themes and emphasising the interconnectivity throughout the network (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Accordingly, to begin the analysis of the three focus groups I began by re-reading the transcriptions and making notes on particular passages that were of interest and making notes of themes that I identified. I began highlighting certain excerpts that showed views of acceptable and unacceptable uses and representations of sex. Upon going back through the transcriptions it became apparent that highlighting chunks of text was not ideal because a lot of the data overlapped and could be coded in more than one way. Therefore I began a list of codes for the data based on the salient issues that arose and went back through the transcriptions making notes and applying the codes accordingly. This enabled me to devise a coding framework and then dissect the text into manageable and meaningful text segments which could then be analysed (See Appendix F).

Findings

As the women were quite educated and well informed the discussions that took place were very well thought out and particularly engage with feminist ideology and issues they try to challenge, which are reflected in the themes. Furthermore the participants offered valuable insights into the concerns that they face being women, mothers and consumers. Treating all three focus groups as one data set the salient themes I will discuss are Commification, Objectification, Equality, Love and Oppresion, Learning about sex and Consumption.

Commodification

Within the focus groups all the participants reacted negatively to the portrayal of woman as sex objects and believed that women are more sexualised than men. This unequal gender dynamic can be seen in the below comments from Catherine, Bobbie and Roberta.

> Catherine: '*It always seems to be like women as well in the music videos, there's not really any music videos which have a different gender dynamic to them, it's always the woman, well, it's either pointless women walking round in their bikinis to a song that's not actually about women in bikinis…*' (FG2)

> Bobbie: '*I think as a general rule women are used more in a sexual way publicly because like it's, especially if it's advertised to men like if it is a man's product because women are meant to be see like boobs and whatever and an arse then it's a good way to get to a man you know that's the kind of thinking behind it. So I think women are exploited to it a lot more than men are but men are becoming... the same thing is happening to men.. very slowly.. but it's becoming more kind of recognised.*' (FG1)

> Roberta: '*... there was a thing on BBC news quite a while ago about basically men saying why they use prostitutes and one of the main things was 'I'm very busy and I don't have time to go out and meet women' and it's like this attitude that a woman is just something you're entitled to and that you just buy like anything else and you don't get, and you just don't get women going 'well my job keeps me extremely busy so I pay a man to sleep with me.'* (FG2)

Firstly, Catherine is commenting on the random importation of women into music videos that are not in any way linked to the song, noting that they are basically being used for their erotic appeal and thus she describes their use as 'pointless'. Bobbie is observing the commodification of the female body for the attraction of men, with particular reference to

advertisements. This notion of commodification is expounded by Roberta's relaying of a story she heard on the news that describes men as conceiving sex as a commodity that can be bought from women when their lives are too busy to build relationships naturally. These quotes from the focus groups best highlight the view held by the participants that women are commodified and their dissatisfaction with that.

Commodification and objectification have been central criticisms levelled at advertising in the past few decades, particularly by feminists and it is perhaps not surprising that these views were expressed within the focus groups. Indeed Stern (1991) termed the overt use of sexuality in advertising as commercial pornography. The comments made by the participants highlight the radical feminist arguments that claim the sexualised images of women that we are exposed on a daily basis contribute to men's attitudes towards women and sex. That is to say if woman are used as commodities within advertising and popular culture this is a step towards the view that they can buy sex from women as a quick fix because of their hectic lives. This notion is an issue because the sale of sex challenges our social norms regarding exchange and sexuality by redefining the sexual use of the body as a commodity that is available like any other goods and services. This challenge to our social norms is interesting because it particularly challenges female sexual norms and expectations. The selling of a women's body contradicts conceptions and ideals of femininity, which can be best seen in the marginalisation of prostitutes throughout history. Pile (1996) notes that female prostitution has historically been constructed as an Other identity through contradictory images of desire and disgust within processes defining dominant notions of respectable feminine sexuality. The idea of sex being available like any other goods and services is reminiscent of sex positive feminism which advocate prostitution as sex work and consider it work like any other (See Davidson, 2001).

On the other hand the notion of men buying sex from women, Dominelli (1986) claims, reinforces societal gender paradigms because it is an extension of male power over subservient women. Holt and Blevins (2007) researched internet chat rooms and bulletins of men who solicit sex and found a consumer mentality among regular users of prostitutes which reinforces the view that sex is often conceived as a commodity. Monto and Julka (2009) claim that research on the commodification of human qualities shows the process as highly negative, resulting in the dehumanisation of the participants, particularly those who are commodified. Their study (2009, p10) measured the degree to which prostitution customers conceive sex as a commodity and found a significant relationship between frequency of prostitution encounters and conceiving sex as a commodity. However one cannot presume that one is the cause of the other, but if sex is seen as an impersonal act and a need to be met then soliciting sex from a prostitute would seem the subsequent

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action. This notion can points to the assumption that regular use of prostitutes leads to the development of the view that sex is a commodity. One of the indicators used by Monto and Julka for measuring the view of sex as a commodity was not having time for a conventional relationship, which echoes Roberta's views and other comments from focus group two which can be seen below.

> *Catherine: 'cause that in it, that's what it comes down isn't it that there's a market so that there are people out there that think that that's normal, healthy sexual behaviour is to go and pay someone to do whatever they want to them and that kind of all comes from porn as well doesn't it?' (Fg2)*

> *Everyone: yeah (Fg2)*

> *Catherine: 'it all kind links to each other an I think we've got this attitude that there's like a spectrum of what's acceptable and what's not so like strip clubs and lap dancing but essentially it's the same just without penetration, it's a different, it's still selling sex and the majority of the time when sex is sold its men paying women for sex in whatever form that comes' (Fg2)*

> *Sarah: 'It's fantasy isn't it, I mean it's that idea of you can have what you want and it is going shopping isn't it, and it's on sex or it's like putting the two biggest things that men might like ya' know spending money and sex ya'know, it's a thrill. I dunno, so, I'm not sure we could change those kinds of minds though I think they've always, I think there's quite a lot you could do but I just get the feeling that there'll always be men that think like that no matter what..' (Fg2)*

One cannot ignore the undertone of patriarchy running through this theme since these issues do not exist within a vacuum. Rather they exist within a culture and feminists such as Brownmiller would argue they contribute towards the oppression and exploitation of women. The participants comment on the gender specific nature of paying for sex echoing the fundamental characteristics of commodification and patriarchy. She expresses the view that women would not entertain the idea of paying a man for sexual gratification because of the busyness of one's career or life.

> *Roberta: And you read people's like there was a thing on BBC news quite a while ago about basically men saying why they use prostitutes and one of the main things was 'I'm very busy and I don't have time to go out and meet women' and it's like this attitude that a woman is just something you're entitled to and that you just buy like*

anything else and you don't get, and you just don't get women going 'well my job keeps me extremely busy so I pay a man to sleep with me' (Fg2)

Catherine: '*And that's got to be something about the way we've been socialised as a gender'* (Fg2)

Roberta: '*yeah, 'cause it's such a gendered thing'* (Fg2)

Catherine: and maybe right from the beginning as well and I think maybe it stems from this like ya'know typical, what people think masculinity is and what people thing feminity is ya know, ' women are emotional and they need to be needed and they need to fall in love'

Roberta: Yeah.,

Roberta's comment is followed by the above exchange which draws upon socially constructed views of gender and proposes that women would not view sex as a commodity in the way that men do because of these. Indeed Basow (1986) suggests that the gender differences of attitudes to sex may turn out to be the strongest of all gender differences. Feminism denotes that relations between men and women occur in such a way that there is a connection between gender and power and it is these socialised genders that construct a patriarchal society. I think the participants are hinting at the fundamental notions of radical feminism here as they are commenting on the gender dynamic, which is underlined by a power imbalance between men and women.

Masculinity can enable us to understand why a man would expect that it is acceptable to pay a woman for sex. Drawing upon Connell's (2000, p.71) work, masculinity, to the extent the term can be defined, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.' If we take the gender identity of the man buying sexual services from a woman because he is too busy to spend time building a relationship with someone, there is a constructed norm attached to this identity that deems this behaviour acceptable. This behaviour is acceptable because it is associated with the accepted characteristics of masculinity and is validated through this gendered conduct.

I must note that it is not uncommon for women to pay for sex. It is often older women paying for 'boyfriend experience' in exotic places such as Jamaica and Kenya (Bindel, 2010). Very little academic research exists in this area, however, feminist journalist Julie Bindel has reported the phenomenon of female sex tourists and has cited an opening of a male brothel in New Zealand. Bindel (2010) warns that exploitation does not disappear when women are

the buyers as and it does not divert from the fact that the sex industry mainly benefits men and harms women. The participants comments beg the question of the development of sex as a commodity and the consequences that such an orientation has on buyers attitudes toward prostitution, prostitutes, sexuality and violence. A quote from Caitlin summarises the participants view of the commodification of both men and women;

> Caitlin: '*But, I mean, the idea that women are commodities is... and men to a certain extent you know it's not just about women I suppose, but the idea that people are commodities that can be ya know sold and that kind of thing is a little bit disturbing in some respects. Erm.. especially when we're in a time when we've moved on from a lot of things.' (Fg1)*

Thinking off women as commodities and as objects to buy is exemplary of how sex is can be consumed. When thinking of Baudrillard's (1998) notion of dehumanisation because of the pervasion of signs and objects within a consumptive society we can begin to see resistance from Caitlin. She describes the idea of women as commodities as *disturbing* contradicting the idea that our experience of the world being thoroughly interwoven and overlaid by virtual representations.

As we have seen this theme encompasses aspects of consumption, patriarchy, femininity and masculinity as factors and contributors to the commodifcation of sex, and particularly women, within society. The participants express a real concern with the way women are represented as objects for male consumption within music videos, advertisements and prostitution. Their comments draw light on patriarchal power at within contemporary society.

Objectification

This theme was closely linked with commodification and was developed mostly in focus group three where the participants reacted particularly negatively towards a car rental advertisement (Appendix A3). The advertisement is a picture of the bottom half of a women's body from the back, depicting only her legs and a bit of her bottom wearing stilettos and suspenders with the slogan 'get there faster'.

> Bushy*: 'Yeah like some of them are kinda a bit funny. Like there was one where like somebody had had sex in the snow an stuff and there was like hand prints an stuff and that was quite funny and there's one like that laptop one saying something about being curvy that's like its kind of. But then that one (see Appendix A12) it's like what's the point of them being there.'* (Fg1)

Anne: *'I feel the product does have an impact because just to mention that one (A3) again and if you compare it with that one (A1) where at least there is ya know you could say it's 50/50 male and female and it is sexy lingerie or sexy underwear so there's little bit more leeway in the use of sex to sell it, whereas that's (car rental) just obviously erm ... I just feel it's quite degrading to women'* (Fg3)

Lovella: '*Ya know it's not sort of a whole person it's just piece of a meat basically erm, so I think that's quite offensive too.'* (Fg3)

Anne*: 'Cause it's just like she's there for the taking to me, it's just she's bent over ready for the taking'* (Fg3)

Scarlet: 'And *it's dismembered, there's nothing else!'* (Fg3)

The participants are, again, echoing radical feminist arguments with their offense to the sexual objectification of women in the advertisements. Their concerns are about the lack of autonomy and agency the woman seem to have and are disgruntled with the actual dismemberment of some of the representations I showed to them:- indeed Lovella actually says she finds this particular image quite offensive. This is interesting because in contrast to the study by Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) that found young women to be less offended by sexually objectified advertisements, based on my own findings the participants did not comply with this pragmatism and did not view the representation of women, particularly in the discussed advertisement as empowering, thus adopting a more traditional second wave feminism approach. Simply by viewing the representations of women as objectified and rejecting them as empowering they were not embodying the postfeminist attitude. It is hard to say why my participants held different views to those of Zimmerman and Dahlberg's study as they are both live within a sexualised culture. One reason could be that my research included a variety of materials for the participants to comment upon whereas Zimmerman and Dahlberg centred their research upon one specific advertisement. Additionally my study focused upon a broader age range whereas their study specifically researched younger women. It is suggested by the authors that older respondents preponderance of years of objectified imagery might have dulled their criticism of this tactic. As we can see the main quotes highlighting the theme of objectification here are from the oldest age group of my research, which would contradict their speculation.

Lovella: '*Yeah, I think a lot of these women seem a bit passive don't they and so accepting of whatever you know, it's sort of I don't know, it just seems to be sort of submissive and plastic, mannequins if you like .'* (Fg3)

Though the participants did not explicitly demonstrate a post-feminist ideology they did, however, comment on the passivity and submissive portrayals of the women in the advertisements which could suggest they expect representations of women to be autonomous and to possess agency. In the light of neo-liberal society with its emphasis on personal choice, post-feminists point to the importance of sexual pleasure, freedom and choice and it would seem here that the participants would like these ideals to be real in these advertisements. Instead the participants feel they are represented in the opposite way. I am reminded of Gill's (2003) of subjectivity here as it could be said that the participants would like this shift from objectification to subjectification and for the women to be portrayed as active and desiring.

However, some of the participants commented on the advertisements as being quite artistic which served to diffuse the negativity of the objectification and instead legitimate a positive interpretation by changing the category to art. In Particularly Leanne and Lovella expressed the Budweiser (Appendix A5) and the Vegetarian (Appendix A10) one as appealing in this way.

> Leanne: '*Yeah some of them are quite artistic aren't they, I mean I suppose it's about drawing a line between what you thinks art and what you thinks ya know..*'
> (Fg3)

> Lovella: '*... One or two I find quite appealing in a sort of erotic way erm sort of a bit artistic, like that one there (Budweiser Ad) I think that's quite appealing ya know*'
> (Fg3)

By redefining the sexualised images as art they became more acceptable to some of the participants and indeed less offensive. Nudity within art has often been depicted, particularly within the renaissance period and as we are aware judgement of art is very subjective and can change through history and cultures (see Berger, 1972). What is of particularly interest here is the modern manifestation of art in popular culture that the participants have recognised. The concept of the advertisements being artistic or erotic fits well with postmodernism because within postmodernity art can be any creative activity (Zon, 2013). With postmodernisms emphasis on individuals establishing for themselves what is good and bad and revealing relative truths of their own, finding artistic merit in the advertisements enables this subjective declassification enabling the individuals to form their own truths. Furthermore, Adorno's (1984 as cited in Elliot et al, 1995) sociological analysis of art highlights it fetishistic status which gives it artistic autonomy against the threat of commodification and objectification (cited. Consequently, viewing the images as art may enable the participants to resist dominant meanings.

> Sarah: '*So ya know I think If it shows two people loving each other*' (Fg2)
>
> Catherine: '*yeah..*' (Fg2)
>
> Sarah: '*even if it's slightly sexual, is that wrong because love and sex do actually go together, hand in hand*' (Fg2)
>
> Roberta: '*yeah*' (Fg2)
>
> Catherine: '*I think that's why that one (Calvin Klein) is more acceptable than like that one and some of the lynx ones, which are basically about getting laid on a night out*' (Fg2)
>
> Everyone: '*yeah*' (Fg2)

In the above exchange the participants are negotiating their ways through the advertisements provided in the focus group and are pointing out the somewhat more acceptable representations of sexuality and are perhaps making a distinction between commodification and romantic sexuality. The portrayal of sexuality was viewed more positively if it was judged to be between equal partners, equal in terms of their involvement with sexual activity, nudity, consensual and congruent with use of the product. The Calvin Klein advert (appendix A11) was particularly key in surfacing ideas around representations of romantic ideals and love. Thus, overt sexuality was legitimated deeming it more acceptable when it represents men and women as equally involved. The Calvin Klein advertisement depicts a man and women posed in their underwear, adorning each other quite sexually as the female model has her hand as if to pull the male's boxer shorts down. The fact that both sexes are depicted in this advert and the sexualising of one another is depicted quite consensually, I think, is significant to the participant's views on it. Perhaps because this is the only advertisement that I have given them that shows this kind of scene is refreshing for them in comparison to the array of semi-nude women.

This preference in representation that the participants refer to becomes problematic when thinking of libertarian feminism as the participants views represent a 'normal' and 'vanilla' representation of sexuality as it excludes sexual acts that may be promiscuous and others types that are on Vance's outer circle. Friedman (2003) argues that love when examined in a social context is guided by norms and stereotypes, foremost these are gender norms and ideals of romantic heterosexual love. Thus it could be said that underpinning the participants views on the representation of equality and love are notions of heterosexuality. Their

emphasis on love and sex being mutually dependent is highly criticised by feminists as the pivot of oppression for women (see Vance, Firestone, Beauvoir). It is not love in itself that feminists consider oppressive but the way it becomes so within a dependent relationship. '*Patriarchy's ideological armament through which women became hooked into dependent relationships with men, entered into an unfavourable legal contract (namely marriage) and ultimately ended up with care of the children." (Smart, 2007, p.60).*

Rich (1980) argues heterosexuality is a political institution that needs to be re-examined for women to escape oppression. She believes that we have internalised the institution of marriage and we reproduce it within society. The extension of this assumption is the assertion that in a world of genuine equality, where men were non oppressive and nurturing, everyone would be bisexual (Rich, 1980). Furthermore, Bell and Binnie (2000) argue that love must move away from couple and include non-monogamy, polyamory, and episodic sexuality. This is not something the participants discuss as being acceptable representation within popular culture, however it is not something the stimuli I provided them with engages with.

What is of particular interest based on the stimulus I provided is the participant's negotiation of equal representations and men and women as sexual objects, which is reminiscent of liberal feminist's notion of equality. It highlights the tensions between equal representations of genders and objectification because objectified representations of men and women should not legitimate objectification.

> Catherine: '*And I think erm it's worse if you're only ever seeing one set of images and not the other*' (Fg2)

> Catherine: *'Cause you get the male model , like I think David Beckham's done it hasn't he, where it's just a shot of them in their pants it's like wherever they exist you can't really argue for not having pictures of women in their underwear because what's the difference?* (Fg2)

This excerpt from Catherine demonstrates her preference for not having sexualised imagery of women but leads onto show signs of resignation that they are even more likely to exist if images of men do. The discussion then turns to the juxtaposed idea of men in the same poses as the ones the women are seen to be in. The participants beg the question that under patriarchy, do representations of men function in the same way?

> Robert '*Imagine how ridiculous they would look if they were men...'* (Fg2)

Bushy '*Like, if that (see appendix A2) had a pair of guys legs on there it wouldn't have the same effect would it..*' (Fg1)

This gender dynamic was also commented upon when discussing music videos, therefore it led to a 'thought experiment' of gender swapping. At the same time as I was analysing the data a song called 'Blurred Lines' by an artist called Robin Thicke caused controversy because the video included nude female models and lyrics which suggest non-consensual sex. Indeed the sexually explicit nature of it and the title of the track capture the essence of this research. *Blurred Lines* is precisely the superordinate theme of this work since it is capturing the hazy and indistinct sexual messages that currently dominate our culture. Specifically in terms of gender it might be argued that this music video reflects the common mainstream views of gender and the objectification of women. Interestingly, as Roberta and Bushy commented on the switching of the genders this song becomes of particular interest to this theme because there are a number of parody versions of this song where the gender roles are switched and it is women singing to semi-naked men. This visual shows how men look in similar poses to women and allows one to recognise the problems that often go unnoticed within our culture. As Catherine notes *it's always the woman,* which implies a certain view held by Catherine that women are exploited and always portrayed in a way that oppresses them.

The song represents the masculinity that exists within our culture today, something which Catherine has picked up on when commenting on the gender dynamic of music videos;

Catherine: '*It always seems to be like women as well in the music videos, there's not really any music videos which have a different gender dynamic to them, it's always the women is, well its either pointless women walking round in their bikinis to a song that's not actually about women in bikinis it's ya know wielding power tools wearing a bikinis'* (Fg2)

Masculinity is a concept that is constructed within society that has a direct influence on the deviances and the norms attached to it. Masculinity and femininity are concepts which are significantly drawn upon and reinforced within the media and popular culture. Drawing upon Connell's (2000) work on masculinities we can summarise that masculinity has three components; it is a social position, a set of practices understood to be masculine and the effects of the collective embodiment of those on individuals and relationships. Indeed, Connell (1995) notes that masculinity is a very relational term in that it does not exist without the notion of femininity. Connell (2000) proposes there are many masculinities and femininities, which could all sit along a continuum but drawing upon the notion of patriarchy he notes that there are no femininities that are hegemonic, 'all forms of femininity in this

society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men.' Connell goes on to say that femininity is defined around compliance with this subordination and is orientated to accommodating the interest and desires of men. Thus, according to Connell, within the gender continuum Hegemonic masculinity would dominate the rest of the gender identities and this idea can be heard within the ways the participants talk about the gender dynamics of the music videos and the advertisements discussed in the focus groups. A specific problem with the gender switching within one of the parody versions of *blurred lines* is that the genders have switched so that the women are masculinised and the men feminised, which continues to reinforce the idea of male patriarchy because the women are performing the same predatory behaviour as the men previously were. Thus, the parodies support the notion of hegemonic masculinity because in order for men to be sexy they have display masculine characteristics that active and oppressive and it becomes funny when they express submissive feminine behaviour.

Furthermore the parodies display the assumption that it is acceptable for one gender to be exploited by the other. This idea was also picked up by some of my participants when discussing the glamour model Jordan and how she justifies what she does as a career.

> *Catherine: 'Well she really positions herself as a business women but also she uses that to justify why a lot of the things that she's done is kind of acceptable'* (Fg2)

> *Tabitha: 'She's one of the people that said something along the lines of she's not being exploited but she's exploiting men, to a point in that she's making money and aware of what she's doing'* (Fg2)

> *Sarah: 'I suppose that I think even if that is true as women we still shouldn't think that that's alright because why should it be good that she's exploiting men, ya know we're thinking it's alright because she's not getting exploited but she's exploiting men but neither should be exploited'* (Fg2)

This exchange is really interesting because the participants arrive at the same position as I have with the blurred lines parody videos. They have arrived at a place of resistance to Jordan's rationale for being in that career and are not happy about any exploitation of either gender.

Learning about sex

A salient theme within the data was the way we learn about sex from dominant media and popular culture imagery. This led to concerns about the way we are presented with an

unrealistic portrayal of sex and sexuality and how, particularly younger people, engage and consume the messages that are portrayed in a decontextualised way.

> Roberta*: 'I think it's like you were saying before about sex and love being separated, like they get all these messages, all these sexual messages sort of songs and books and adverts and everything and they don't have any of the context behind it, they don't have any of that relationship behind it.'* (Fg2)

> Catherine: *'maybe as well that's all about education for children and young people about respectful things and about why you would want to pay for sex.'* (Fg2)

> Caitlin: *Yeah, I think, yeah you're completely right in that it goes back to that idea as well of kind of promoting an unrealistic idea of sex, dya know what I mean?*

Many of the participants express the view that sex education is an important factor in the way young people should develop sexual knowledge. The discussion about how we learn about sex highlighted some fundamental issues around the current sex education taught in schools. The theme illustrates concisely the key themes on which the participants discuss learning about sex is anchored: pornography and relationships. This generated an interesting discussion in which the participants outlined how learning about sex is essential, however, because the current education within schools teaches mainly the biology side to sex young people lack context in which it should take place and turn to pornography for how to do it. In this sense sex education emerged as characterised by tensions of what and how young people should be taught, which would then provide a basis and a context for consuming sexualised messages and imagery in society.

The participants emphasise the importance of the education system as a key contributor to gaining knowledge and are placing a significant amount of responsibility onto sex education lessons for teaching young people about sex and providing a positive attitude about themselves and others. In concurrence with the participants views on including more on love and the relationship side to sex education a study by Buckingham and Bragg (2004) on young people, sex and the media found that children believed the current sex education lessons received in schools was too focused on medical and scientific information. Indeed, one of the participants within the study states that 'it doesn't tell you how to do it or how you will feel when you first do it' (2004, p.56).

The idea that sex education should be taught from an early age is reinforced when the participants discuss their experiences from when they were younger claiming they were much more repressed and it was all 'cloak and dagger' practices. This was evidence for how

much more enlightened we are now and how it is much more acceptable to be open about sex, which is why the participants consider sex education from a younger age would be practical.

> Anne*: 'And I think that can bring relationships closer, you know, I think I'm becoming a friend as well as a parent to my daughter erm an I like that because I can discuss lots of things with her. So you know I like the liberalisation of sex in many ways.'* (Fg3)

The older participants with children also spoke of a more personal approach to educating their children rather than within a school setting. However, it is important to note that currently sex education is not compulsory in the United Kingdom. Indeed it was nearly made statutory in the Children, Schools and Families Act (2010) but was abandoned due to complaints that the proposals removed parental rights to decide what was best for the children, promoted questionable attitudes towards sex, advocated practices that were deemed dangerous or morally suspect, encouraged experimentation, and sexualised young people (Smith and Attwood, 2011). This highlights how problematic the debates about how adequate education can be provided and the contradictions of how these views are not reflected in current legislation.

Coupled with the inadequate sex education at school a fundamental explanation for young people using porn to sexually educate themselves is because they have far easier access to it than ever before. Sex education in schools focuses on reproduction and risk, which tends to ignore the pleasurable aspect of it leaving people quite fearful or ashamed and curious and poorly informed. The internet provides people with a secret space to look up their intimate questions. Pornography would provide the participants of Buckingham and Bragg's (2004) an answer to what to do and how to do it, to a certain extent, however, as my participants say it has '*No feelings attached to it'*. Therefore, the participants do not express a positive attitude towards pornography as they feel that the sex that it portrays lacks love and relationship which, as discussed, is what they consider integral to sex and what should be taught about it.

A survey by the NSPCC (2012) found that young people are three times more likely to seek out their sexual education online than to ask questions of their teachers, parents, or carers. This survey supports the notion that sex education is currently lacking something and brings to light the idea that we are embarrassed to talk about certain realities of sex, which is why education is failing young people as they are having to seek answers online. Additionally the study found that nearly a third of pupils aged 11-18 said that porn 'dictates how people should behave in a relationship.' One can see that the participants have brought forward a

current and topical issue regarding pornography. Indeed there are current debates happening within parliament that aim to limit access to some pornographic websites. Concurrently there is a current discourse that *porn is bad* and one could assert that the participants are subscribing to this.

One of the concerns of learning about sex from pornography can be found in this comment from Sarah:

> *'… they're starting to learn about sex from porn and porn's not real an like they're almost from what I've heard like boys don't think that women grow pubic hair because in porn they don't see the pubic hair so they don't even know what a normal female body looks like and that's the frightening thing.'* (Fg2)

The comment from Sarah implies that a distorted view of how woman should look is being learnt particularly by young males, which could have further implications for the way men treat women. The point being that if or when young people have sexual encounters and the women does not match what they have seen it can lead to feeling underwhelmed and disenchanted. Furthermore the woman could be ridiculed and deemed abnormal. Indeed, Channel 4 have recently aired a sex season looking at how pornography is affecting our lives based on the premise that the ever-increasing consumption of freely available internet pornography is distorting people's expectations of sex, particularly young people who have grown up in the age of the internet where hardcore porn is just a click away (Channel 4, 2013). Thus, one can see that the participants somewhat echo this notion in that education on pornography is needed in order to contextualise the reality of it. Furthermore, this view is perhaps not limited to porn. Representations of women within popular culture also contribute to people's expectations of women's behaviour and appearance more generally.

> Anne: *'Yeah erm an I personally found that really shocking you know when my daughter came home and said she'd seen all, in fact she'd had one and I made sure it had been passed to her and that it was deleted erm real sort of between the legs pictures that girls had taken of themselves and then distributed an it's caused massive issues at school. But clearly they're seeing these sort of photographs and thinking it's the norm.'* (Fg3)

Going back to the discussion on sexting, Anne's comment literally demonstrates the influence of pornography can have on behaviour.

An implicit theme that runs through the participant's views on pornography and sexualised imagery was the need to protect children from it. Indeed Prime Minister David Cameron is

currently trying to enforce stricter access to online pornography sites to safeguard children. The focus groups took place before this agenda by Cameron began, therefore, we cannot assume the participants have adopted this stand from current political agendas but it can seen that this is an important contemporary issue from many positions. It can be argued that the reason this issue is at the heart of the participants is because they express the social significance of childhood. Edelman (2004, p.12) has noted that the child often stands for the future of the culture itself, and this is why it acquires such significance and arouses such strong feeling. This could explain why the participants find teaching the younger generation about sex such an integral issue.

In thinking about pornography and the unrealistic representation of sex and women it depicts the participants began discussing how they felt should be portrayed and learned about. Central to their views on sex was that it should come out of relationship and, where possible, love.

> Catherine: '*we've kinda got it all wrong haven't we, like we don't talk about normal healthy sex with children and parents aren't happy whenever there's a discussion about making sex ed compulsory or like a lot of the stuff I've read about doing stuff about healthy relationships and trying to reduce relationship abuse, parents start going crazy when you talk about doing it with four and five year olds and actually all they're doing is talking about being nice to people and not hurting people...*'

> Sarah: '... *also with love and sex people don't associate the two together so in primary schools it's almost like the sex education needs to be about love and sex together an the body image, ya know it should be kind of given to them at an earlier age...*'

> Anne*: 'No I'm not unrealistic about that, I mean erm I you know in an ideal situation I do think if you can build up a bit of a relationship first but I think sex should be fun and enjoyable and I suppose it's getting that happy balance isn't it.'* (Fg3)

> Scarle*t: 'And consenting..'* (Fg3)

> Anne*: 'And consenting yes erm I have to be honest I'm not in favour of young women just sleeping around you know regardless, or men. I don't like sex to be cheapened to that extent you know I think it is something that should be a more deeper part of a relationship erm and I also think that the best sex can be had when you develop a relationship you know I've spoken to my own daughter about this, she's 18, about sexual experiences she's had that we've talked about quite openly and I've thought*

well how can you have possibly enjoyed that really when she's talked about it to me and I think that's a little bit worrying when they feel they are compelled to have sex erm because of society, the pressure of society..' (Fg3)

It is clear that the participants believe there to be a value placed on sex that incorporates some kind of moral code echoing Rubin's (1999, p.151) claim that 'modern western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchal system of sexual value'. This can be further exemplified by Catherine's use of the phrase '*normal healthy sex'.* The coupling of love and sex becomes problematic because it excludes, at the least, casual encounters and suggests desire to exert a cery conservative influence over children's developing of sexual tastes.

Therefore, the theme of *learning about sex* demonstrates the participant's knowledge of current debates on sexual education and expresses their views on the need for it due to the unrealistic representations that are available and influential. Their views to teaching sex education from a younger age at first seems quite liberal when compared with our current system. However, upon looking at the context of what they consider somewhat unacceptable ways of learning (pornography) and their call for sex to be within a loving relationship a tension develops leading their views to seem conservative.

Consumption

> Scarlet: *'Yeah. And also we've never been in society you know with facebook an twitter and phones that can send images and all this, there was never a time where you could, which will be out there forever.'* (Fg3)
>
> Anne: '*yeah!'*
>
> Scarlet*: 'Forever! That will be accessible, whereas if you did something when I was a teenager if I did something I certainly made sure my mum and dad didn't know and my mates mum and dad didn't know! And that was, you know, was my own, whether I felt bad or shame or whatever, pride, whatever it was but actually, whereas these days it's so and probably you're right that's part of what this is, its consumer society and bodies are for consumption as well'* (Fg3)

The notion of consumption within this research has been central from the start. The idea that bodies and sex are commodities that can be consumed within society is fundamental to the body of this research. Indeed, consumption within the contemporary world is integral to its function, emphasised by its pure magnitude and circulation. Likewise, so is sex and coupling the two together was something that happened naturally within the focus groups creating an integrative theme which infused the data. It can be seen within almost all the themes as it

toys with the idea that the rest of the themes are discourses that the participants *buy* into and the very concept of them suppose some form of consumption is taking place. Therefore it can be said that the views regarding pornography were based on the idea that the images that saturate our society and the viewing of pornography are internalised by people, which would lead to them thinking and acting in accordance to that.

Scarlet is clearly making a connection from consumption at a basic general level to one which goes further to elucidate the key point of this research which is that bodies are for consumption as well. The comment Scarlet is making refers to a discussion the participants are having regarding the circulation of sexual images on the internet and they are expressing concern that young people are so used to sexualised imagery that it has led to the boundaries of what is considered acceptable behaviour to be lowered. Specifically the participants talk about this in relation to sexting, which is the exchange of sexual messages or images (Livingston et al, 2009). Anne relays situation at her daughter's school where sexting had occurred between some students but the messages had been shown to more people than the message was originally intended. The participants were really shocked by this behaviour and there was a great sense of discomfort from the group regarding the idea that the students would actually take these pictures of themselves to send to their peers. Anne goes on to say '... *clearly they're seeing these sort of photographs an thinking it's the norm.*' The way in which this behaviour is described and discussed within the group suggests that they believe the students to have accepted that 'sexting' is normal behaviour and in effect consumed this idea that it is. Attwood (2010, p xiv) refers to people that engage in these activities as 'sexual cyborgs' that stitch technology and sex together. This emphasises the way in which pornography is no longer just a matter of commercial production, but it has become something that individuals can create and produce for pleasure and not profit. Echoing Levy's (2005) notion of a 'raunch culture' that is preoccupied with self revelation and the objectification of one another.

Conversely, later on in the focus group Scarlett says something that questions the effect of consuming the images and messages we are constantly under.

> Scarlett: '*And it's very hard to make the link, I think, also kind of images and the things like this and then what effect this has on society so some of those like it's very difficult to know that that is a link. I feel like yeah you're right, of course this must push sex to extreme but does it? Do we consume image and that then I don't know...*' (Fg3)

What is interesting here is the way Scarlett is negotiating and constructing her opinion whilst at the same time questioning what she thinks. Indeed, what she says challenges the whole

notion of the theme of consumption because she is querying whether or not these things actually affect the individual, whether or not we do buy into it or just see it for the moment and leave it there? If the latter was the case then the theme of consumption would be redundant as we can assume that the consumption has not taken place. This claim can be made as the notion of consumption is based upon the premise that when one consumes something in this context it becomes internalised and carried forward and is not something that starts and ends so easily.

Reflections on methodology

The design of the study does have possible limitations that should be outlined. It is possible that the context of focus groups may have affected the participants responses compared to if they were interviewed in isolation. The social setting of being within a group can influence the views you wish to express due to the pressures of agreeing with the dominant views of the group. I don't feel that this was the case in my focus groups, indeed all three of them felt open and relaxed and the participants were confident in expressing their view.

It is also possible that the views expressed have to some extent been influenced by the condensed aspect of viewing all the stimuli together. However, given the inability to realistically simulate society and the ubiquitous nature of sex and sexuality that this study is based upon I do not feel this to be too problematic. However, within all three focus groups the advertisements were what seemed to generate most discussion despite my attempts to represent a broad spectrum of sex and sexualised materials. Given the ubiquity of sexualised advertisements and given that the stimuli were to serve the purpose of instigating discussions perhaps the participants would have leaned to these discussions anyway. I also wonder whether an even more diverse range of advertisements could have been included though I am happy with my attempts at being objective and ensuring some diversity was reached.

Dividing the groups by age I think worked well and ensured the participants shared enough in common to have meaningful discussions, as I had hoped. However, as some of the themes were more salient within age groups perhaps mixing the ages would have yielded interesting data on how the groups formed and negotiated their views and came to shared conclusions. This could be seen within the theme of *objectification* where the older women held stronger views. This could be due to their greater experience of sexualised representations because of their age and/or their educated backgrounds and current occupations in comparison to the younger participants

Overall I think the research design of the study was suitable for the size of the research and any perceived drawbacks could be negotiated and improved upon in future research.

<u>Summary and conclusions</u>

In summary, the women included within this study yielded some very interesting and diverse discussions in relation representations and consumption of sex. Looking at the nature of the themes identified within the analysis and the discussions taken place within the focus groups it is clear that the women interviewed were well informed individuals who are able to critically engage with the sexualisation of their culture. Upon analysis we can see that their views try to find a middle way between the pessimistic view that all sexual representations and activity is bad or morally tainted and the libertarian view that all sexual representations and activity, as long as it is consensual is morally benign (Marino, 2007). Their views towards the commodifcation and objectification of sexuality is dependent upon love, respect and mutuality of the representations. They are very aware of the sexualisation of western culture, therefore they express concerns about how this can influence people's behaviour. The participants often refer to others as being influenced but refer to themselves as being resistant to the dominant messages and imagery of postmodern culture. Indeed, resisting the influence of sexualisation would disprove Baudrillard's notion of dehumanisation.

The research participants have exemplified contemporary, public issues and the shift towards a more sexualised culture. Specifically, their identification and discussion of sexting is exemplary of the ways sex is taking on new forms which disrupt older conceptions of its status and place in society. This is anchored within a concern about how others engage with sexualised images and one could conclude that these perceptions show how the women are indirectly affected by the sexualisation of culture.

This study calls into question the moral responsibility advertisers and other media distributors have as they create and disseminate images and messages to the consuming public. The women have not shown accepting attitudes of the constant sexual objectification of women in music videos, advertisements, books nor prostitution but acknowledge that an audience must exist for it to be so relentless and popular. Drawing upon notions of gender we can begin to understand bigger dynamics and relations at work and future research could seek to unpick this more thoroughly. It is interesting to ponder the possible cultural effects of sustained sexual objectification my participants on society.

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Reflections

The research process has brought me on a journey, one which should be reflected upon and written about so that the whole picture of the research can be seen and understood. Recognising the need for reflexivity within my research is driven by the understanding that people's attitudes and beliefs are intrinsically woven together and produced by their background, culture and experiences. Clearly these factors are individually unique, thus, it is necessary to critically consider one's own subjectivity and to be aware of the influence this may have on the research. Keeping a research diary has helped me document my thoughts and reflections of every stage within the research. I also feel writing up my reflections will enable me, as the researcher, to have an identity within the research.

Confronting my own subjectivity, as a Christian, woman, student, consumer etc was a challenging process and one which has had to be continuously re-evaluated when undertaking research. Indeed, going into the research my views on what I deemed acceptable and unacceptable were very fixed and rooted in my faith. However, throughout the journey my research has forced me to question my own opinions, indeed, the meaning of acceptable is a slippery one, one which I have had to renegotiate throughout. I have found myself becoming more tolerant of things, which at the beginning of the research I had fixed ideas about, however, I am still debating and battling with the thought that does this now mean I find them acceptable? The research journey has enabled me to see how easily judgemental and rather linear in my thinking can be until a moment is taken to think critically about the representation and interpretation of sexualised material.

Indeed, within the focus groups my views were challenged and I find it interesting and crucial to the findings to understand how I dealt with these emotions and how I reacted at the time. In the first focus group one of my participants expressed the view that it would not be shocking for you to find out your boyfriend watches porn. When I first heard this statement I was particularly shocked that the participant would not be shocked also. I found this difficult to hear because I do still find pornography completely unacceptable and idea of a woman not minding her partner watching other people having explicit sex really unsettled me. The challenge to me was twofold, firstly I was quite saddened by this acceptance from Caitlin because itconfronts my views of monogamy. Secondly, the acceptance of sex as a commodity that can be engaged in outside of an intimate relationship and the assumption that the rest of the group would agree with threw me a little. I was comforted to read that 'most women have a complicated relationship with pornography, which includes contradictions between their beliefs, feelings and actions' (Ciclitira, 2004, p.293). However due to the nature of my research I was shocked that I was shocked! But as a reflexive diary

was kept I was able to write my concerns down and critically confront my own subjectivity to ensure this was not carried forward into the subsequent focus groups.

What also became apparent on my research journey was how unfixed opinions can be. Highlighted by my own changing views I began to question how valid those expressed by the participants were. This enabled me to realise that opinions and views are fluid and regularly renegotiated and data gathered in the focus groups is not gospel. Rather the views expressed are for that time and in that moment and what is interesting is how the participants negotiate their views with each other and how they form a consensus. An example of this can be seen in focus group two where Sarah, a fashion lecturer, is describing the Dolce and Gabbana advertisement (see appendix A1) as being quite glamorous however, Roberta and Catherine disagree with her and find it very bothersome and make reference to sexual abuse. In light of these comments Sarah begins to question how she originally viewed this image and begins to take up the views of Roberta and Catherine instead.

> Sarah: *'See I don't know why but that didn't offend me as much but now you've said that it's made me think oh yeah I didn't even notice that. I was just seeing it as your typical fashion shot now where you have got a lot of men that are standing there as the women pose and I didn't even realise that it was actually holding her down, which is quite worrying really 'cause it's quite subliminal how it's just kind of going over my head a bit.'*

I started this journey with a very narrow view and naive view of what I thought I wanted to do with this research. If I have not added anything significant to the literature of this area, at least I have managed to reach the end of my research changed. The minimum purpose of research is to change people for the better and reveal truths, I feel changed and I have revealed truths about myself that perhaps would never have otherwise known. However, I like to think this research has informed at least one other person on the notion of acceptability of sexualised things and maybe prompted them to think twice about whether they consider something acceptable or not. It is good to confront one's own subjectivity once in a while and I hope this will cause others to do the same.

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Appendix A

A1

A2

A3.

A4.

A5.

A6.

A7.

A8.

A9.

A10.

A11

A12

A13

A14

A15

A16

A17

You know you're not the first.

A18

True beauty is curved.

The revolutionary curved Samsung SF notebook.

A19

A20

A21

A22

A23

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

My name is Danielle and I am a postgraduate student from The University of Huddersfield. You are being invited to take part in this study because I am conducting research on the way sex is consumed within society across a wide range of situations and I am interested in women's opinions on this.

Before you decide whether to take part please read the below information, which provides a brief outline of the research and what it will involve should you agree to take part. Please read the information carefully and do not hesitate to discuss anything with me if you find that it is not clear or you would like some more information.

What is the research about?

The use of sex within society is present in various forms, for example using racy poses to sell products, some more explicit than others. Prostitution, pornography, music and the media are a few areas where sex is sold and consumed. Some people consider the use of sex in some circumstances more acceptable than others, therefore, I will try to explore where women consider the boundaries of acceptable uses and unacceptable use to lie.

Why have I been approached?

You have been asked to participate because I am interested in the views of white British women.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to take part in a focus group with four or five other women, which will last approximately one hour. You will be given a range of images and some texts to look at, which will be sent to you electronically and you will be asked to examine these prior to the focus group. The materials will vary in how explicitly sexual they are, however, they are all readily available within the public domain. At the focus group you will be asked to discuss your thoughts and opinions on the material sent to you. The interview will be recorded for later transcription.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be free to withdraw at any time with no consequences. Your

participation is voluntary, therefore, you can withdraw your data at any time before it has been analysed.

Will my identity be disclosed?

All information disclosed within the interview will be kept confidential. I will create a false name to refer to you throughout my research. In order that I can identify your contribution a list of participants' names and their corresponding pseudonyms will be kept on a password protected computer.

What will happen to the information?

The interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone, which will be kept locked away until it is transferred to an mp3 and kept on a password protected computer. It is anticipated that the research may, at some point, be published in a journal or a report. However, if your words are used in the presentation of the findings your anonymity will be ensured, and your permission for this is included in the consent form. Any information that could lead to you being identified will not be included in the report or in any publication.

Will I be affected?

It is highly unlikely that you will be directly affected by the research. However, if you feel you are and would like to seek support there are contact details below for appropriate helping agencies:

Women Centre Calderdale and Kirklees
23 Silver Street, Halifax, HX1 1JN
01422 386500
www.womencentre.org.uk

University of Huddersfield Student Counselling Service
Tel: 01484 472227

Who can I contact for further information?

If you require any further information about the research please contact me on:

E-mail address: U0751778@hud.ac.uk
Telephone No: 07933 597203

Alternatively you can contact my supervisor:

Viv Burr
Telephone No: 01484 472454
E-mail address: v.burr@hud.ac.uk

Appendix C

Focus Group Prompt Sheet

The participants will have previously been sent the stimuli and should have looked at this prior to coming to the focus group. The advertisements, vignettes and book exerts will be printed out and brought to the focus group for the participants to refer to if needed. Below are some questions to prompt the participants if needed.

What was your immediate reaction to …… ?

What similarities and differences do you notice in the materials you have examined?

What kind of thoughts and associations do they evoke?

Do you consider some more acceptable than others? Why? Why not?

Can you tell me about why you find X more acceptable than Y?

To what extent do you think the portrayal of sex in the forms we have looked at might affect how people view sex? Why? Why not? In what way? Is that important to you?

How do you feel about the use of sex to sell something?

How do you feel about the selling of sex?

Appendix D

Research materials used in the focus groups in addition to the advertisements in appendix A

Vignette of an escort:

My name is Sofia and I am 21 years old. I work for a high class escort agency and have done for the past 3 months. I can get up to £200 for one nights work, which would include going for dinner with a client and staying overnight in a hotel. During the week I am a student so the money I earn covers my living expenses.

Vignette of a lap dancer:

My name is Charlotte and I am a student of podiatry at the University of Leeds. I work as dancer in Wildcats on weekends, which involves giving customers private dances.

Vignette of a prostitute:

My name is Louise and I have worked as a prostitute for 3 years now. I work on the streets every weekend with five other girls who work for the same pimp. We get a cut of the money we earn each week, which covers our basic living costs.

50 Shades of Grey by E.L. James excerpt:

"*Before I know it, he's got both of my hands in his viselike grip above my head, and he's pinning me to the wall using his lips … His other hand grabs my hair and yanks down, bringing my face up, and his lips are on mine … My tongue tentatively strokes his and joins his in a slow, erotic dance … His erection is against my belly.*" (Page 78)

Music Video – Rihanna S&M

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZJw0aKzEEs

(Matsoukas, 2011)

Appendix E

Danielle Cutler

Interview Consent Form

I have read and understood the information sheet provided and understand the nature of the research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

I understand that the information I provide will be audio recorded.

I give permission to be quoted (by use of a pseudonym) and understand that direct quotes from the focus group may be used in future publications of the research.

I understand that the recording will be kept in secure conditions at the University of Huddersfield.

I understand that no person other than the interviewer will have access to the recording.

I understand that my identity will remain protected by the use of a pseudonym in the research report and that any information that could lead to my identity being revealed will be omitted from any publication of the research.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Codes	Issues Discussed	Themes Identified
- Choice	• Free Will • Option • Autonomy • Morals • Prostitution	1. Choice is important when viewing sexualised imagery 2. Choices limited for women 3. A women should have the choice to do what they want with their body. 4. Do women *choose* to engage in sex work?
- Childhood	• Sex Education • Learning • Caring • Innocence • Protect • Cultural Construction • Morals	5. Sex education should be taught from a young age. 6. There is a need to protect childhood innocence. 7. Children should be taught about the relationship side of sexual relationship.
- Sex	• Consumption • Relationship • Safe • Psychological Affects • Love • Heterosexual • Monogamy • Consensual • Exploitation • Representation • Enjoyment • Morals • Physical • Trust	8. Sex should be within a loving relationship. 9. Public portrayals of sexual relationships gives a bad impression to young girls. 10. Predominantly heterosexual portrayals of sexuality in media. 11. Sex has psychological effects 12. Distinction between selling sex and using sex to sell 13. Sexual morals shaped and sustained by media
- Media	• Pervasive • Obtrusive • Uncontrollable • Passive • Morals • Advertising • Women • Body Image • Commodities • Unrealistic • Gender • objectification	14. Uncomfortable with the lack of control 15. Sexualisation in adverts questions morals of businesses 16. Sexualised messages within media are ubiquitous 17. Women are sexually exploited within the media 18. Images promote an unhealthy body image. 19. The unrealistic images will have a negative impact on women.