

**Abstract** This article argues that many anti-violence prevention strategies have been shaped by unarticulated discourses of sexuality that focus primarily on women managing the risk and danger of unethical behaviour of men. Sexual intimacy has therefore been dominated by discourses of fear and danger and women's pleasure is once again invisible. An alternative conception of sexual ethics is presented based on Foucault's work on ethics, and sexuality. The findings from in-depth qualitative interviews with 26 Australian women and men of diverse sexualities indicate that women and men regardless of erotic choice of partner have found multiple ways to explore sexual pleasure that is ethical, non-violent and where danger is reduced. This suggests a need to develop alternative ways of shaping violence prevention strategies that acknowledge *both* pleasure and danger.

**Keywords** evaluation of education, rape prevention, sexual ethics, sexual negotiation

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## Ethical Erotics: Reconceptualizing Anti-Rape Education

Despite over 30 years of feminist campaigning, the refinement of laws, extensive community education, the provision of support services and sensitivity training of professionals, rape has not declined. Education has been a primary strategy strongly supported by governments and anti-violence campaigners to attempt to redress gendered assumptions and practices which result in women's experiences of sexual assault from male intimates (Carmody and Carrington, 2000). Why has so little changed and why is sexual assault so difficult to prevent? This article begins by exploring published research on anti-rape education in the USA and Australia and identifies the current limitations of these approaches in developing primary prevention of sexual violence. The dominant approaches to

anti-rape education reflect particular sexuality and gender discourses that are often unarticulated.

Pleasurable sexual intimacy for women is almost always constructed as risky and positions women as lacking in sexual agency and choice and as Carol Vance (1992: 1) argues it 'unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live'. I propose an alternative construction of anti-rape education based on empirical research conducted in Australia with women and men of diverse sexualities on how they negotiate ethical sex. This alternative approach provides the space to acknowledge both pleasure and danger in sexual intimate relations and indicates the multiple and dynamic nature of sexual negotiation. No claims are made for the generalizability of these findings to other programmes, countries or cultural groups. Rather the insights gained from this exploratory study are offered as an alternative to the unarticulated discourses that underpin many anti-rape education strategies.

## **Educating about danger**

Published evaluations of rape 'prevention' programmes have increased since the early 1990s in the USA and Canada. However given the large number of programmes offered by community organizations, schools and universities, published research in this area is, to date, minute. A similar trend towards evaluation does not appear to be happening in Australia. This may be partly due to different policy requirements and that many prevention programmes are implemented by victim support services who usually conduct in-house evaluations but may not publish the findings. At the same time, government committees and community members regularly recommend education programmes as the answer to reducing sexual violence in the community.

In the USA, the Federal government now mandates rape prevention efforts on college campuses that receive federal funds (Heppner et al., 1995). This social policy directive does not apply in Australia, where governments have consistently recommended education programmes in schools and other educational settings as a preventative strategy, but have stopped short of tying their implementation to funding. The US government directive has resulted in a plethora of rape prevention programmes but researchers argue that little is known about what types of programmes are most effective, what attitudinal, cognitive and behavioural outcomes can be expected; or how stable any changes are over time (Schewe and O'Donohue, 1993; Heppner et al., 1995).

Some school-run programmes have been evaluated in Canada (Lavoie et al., 1995; Hilton et al., 1998) and in Holland (Winkel and De Kleuver, 1997). However most of the evaluated programmes have been in either

university or college settings in the United States. In 1999 Carmody and Carrington (2000) analysed 18 evaluations of rape education programmes. A further analysis was conducted of Australian anti-violence education funded by the Federal government (Carmody, 2001). The Australian Federal government has until recently used the generic term of domestic violence to target anti-violence policies. This term incorporates sexual assault. In response to the continuing high levels of domestic violence in the community and a desire to attempt to change this for young people, the Federal government funded eight organizations to conduct 40–50 domestic violence prevention workshops involving 13,500 young people. The evaluation report of this strategy found that there are significant problems in the current evaluation of Australia anti-violence programmes based on methodology and an assumption that attitudes reflect behaviour (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000: 25).

While all of these education initiatives were well intentioned a closer examination reveals they are underpinned by a number of very powerful discourses that have limited potential to actually reduce violent behaviour. Examining both the US and Australian programmes indicates that awareness of definitions of sexual assault, knowledge of the impact of the crime on victims and support services is assumed to lead to behavioural change – in other words that it will reduce the incidence of violence. This is a tall order when you consider the US programmes varied in length from one hour to four months with most clustered around several hours of input. The Australian programmes were also limited in the amount of time allocated to input.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from these structural programme design limitations what is of even more concern is the way in which dominant gender relations are reinforced by the programmes. Parrot's (1990) survey of 26 US universities found 21 of these universities had programmes for women, while only two had programmes aimed at changing male behaviour. No published evaluations were found of anti-rape programmes targeted at lesbians or gay men. The cultural identity of the participants was primarily Caucasian, with a number of the programmes providing no clear information about the cultural mix of the students. This seems a rather obvious limitation given the multi-racial population of the US but may also reflect the profile of university students in the settings researched (Carmody and Carrington, 2000). Schewe and O'Donohue (1993) argue that many programmes referred to as rape prevention are in fact risk avoidance programmes, which focus on teaching women how to avoid potentially dangerous situations. As Kitzinger and Frith (1999) argue the teaching of 'refusal skills' is common in many date rape prevention assertiveness programmes for young women. They aim to teach women to 'just say no' to avoid victimization. These approaches

reinforce women's sense of fear and keep us separated from fully exploring our sexual potential. Ethical non-violent men can also experience the negative impact of their unethical brothers in their desire for sexual intimacy. Constructing violence prevention based on refusal denies negotiation, positions women as responsible for managing another's sexuality and reinforces gendered expectations about who initiates sex. It maintains some males' expectations that 'no really means yes' if I can just bring her or him around. Refusal discourses are also recommended to lesbians and gay men.

The universalization of men as violent and women as passive recipients of violence is still a pervasive contemporary feminist theory (Mackinnon, 1987; Lees, 1997). There is nothing positive in such an over-arching negative conception of femininity or masculinity (Jefferson, 1997; Carmody and Carrington, 2000). It is not only misleading to represent all men as 'dangerous' (see Messerschmidt, 1993; Connell, 1995), it tends to assume that all men are either biologically, socially or culturally prescribed hetero-sexed creatures of patriarchy regardless of the multiple pathways and sexualities associated with masculinity (See Collier, 1998: 6–33). The flip-side of a totalizing concept of masculinity, is an equally totalizing concept of femininity which robs women of any agency or ability to exert power, express desire, take control, resist, prevent or avoid their victimization in intimate sexual encounters with men. Prevention is a virtual impossibility within this theoretical framework. Women are 'in waiting' to experience violence and that men are forever paused to engage in it. This approach reflects a fixed subjectivity in which power relations between women and men are deterministically constructed as oppressive and exploitative to women and in which men are all powerful. It also fails to acknowledge the diversity of women's subjectivities due to age, class, culture, sexuality or dis/ability and how these are inscribed in women's experience of sex (Carmody and Carrington, 2000).

## Rethinking violence prevention

Recognition of the fluidity of female and male subjectivities and the constant negotiation of power within intimate relations opens up the possibility of finding new ways of conceptualizing violence prevention (Carmody and Carrington, 2000).

Exploring an alternative discursive space led me to pose the following question:

What can knowledge of ethical practice between adults of diverse sexualities teach us about sexual assault prevention education?

Foucault's work on sexual ethics is helpful here (Carmody, 2003a). Inherent in all relationships, as Foucault reminds us, are relations of power.

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His notion of power as mobile and productive and in a constant state of negotiation contrasts with grand narratives such as radical feminism in which it is always structurally defined by patriarchy (Card, 1991). In this later model ethical behaviour is to be achieved by gender equality or by regulation through laws and sexual conduct codes. Foucault argues there are three elements to understanding sexual behaviour – acts, pleasure and desire. Greek society he suggests placed the emphasis on sexual acts and pleasure and desire are seen as subsidiary. He contrasts this with a Chinese approach where acts are put aside because you must restrain acts to get the maximum duration and intensity of pleasure. The Christian formula puts an accent on desire and tries to eradicate it. Acts have to become neutral; you act only to produce children or to fulfil your conjugal duty. Pleasure therefore is both practically and theoretically excluded (Rabinow, 1997: 268–9). He takes this analysis further and argues that the modern formula is desire, acts become less important and nobody knows what pleasure is.

Foucault's central argument about ethics involves what he calls *rappor* *à soi* – the relationship you ought to have with yourself which determines how an individual is supposed to constitute himself (sic) as a moral subject of his (sic) own actions (Rabinow, 1997: 263). Foucault argues therefore that the care of the self is intimately linked with ethics and that ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection (Rabinow, 1997: 284). Further 'The care of the self is ethical in itself: but it implies complex relationships with others insofar as this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others' (1997: 287). Foucault invites us to consider that acts are the real behaviour of people in relation to the moral code or prescriptions. The code tells us what is permitted or forbidden and determines the positive or negative value of the different possible behaviours. This is clearly where laws about consent and community education come into play. The ability of laws and education to impact on regulating people's sexual behaviour is however contested. While many individuals support and follow consent prohibitions, the high incidence of exploitative sexual encounters in most communities suggest that the threat of coercive power over individuals is not enough. Intimate relations between individuals are more complex than this. The abuse of power manifested in exploitative sexual relations 'exceeds the legitimate exercise of one's own power and imposes one's fantasies, appetites and desires on others'. Therefore 'one has not taken care of the self and has become a slave of one's desires' at the expense of another (Rabinow, 1997: 288). It is important here to remember that Foucault understood the subject or the self as constructed within discourse and thus he is arguing for a conception of subjectivity that avoids the modernist conception of an essential self. Despite his gender blindness, a critique of modernist notions of the

essential rational subject, the role of power/knowledge and the subsequent social practices that flow from this have proved useful to poststructuralist feminists (see Sawicki, 1991; Bryson, 1999; Zalewski, 2000 for detailed discussion of these issues).

## Researching ethical subjects

Working from this alternative discursive space, I embarked on a small qualitative research study of 25 women and men of diverse sexualities and their experiences of negotiating ethical sex. I was interested to discover whether participants revealed evidence of *rapport à soi* and how this might impact on their ability to negotiate power and both pleasure and danger.

## The participants

Participants were recruited through email lists and advertising in a lesbian magazine based in Sydney, Australia but widely distributed. The final sample resulted in 20 women and five men. Of the 20 women, 13 identified as lesbian or queer and the remainder heterosexual. Only one gay man and four heterosexual men were recruited. Of the sample, 13 lived in rural areas in the state of New South Wales and 12 in Sydney. Their ages ranged from 21 to 58 years of age. The mean age for women was 35; for men 51 years. They were predominantly Anglo-Australian. As a group they were well educated with all but one having completed an undergraduate degree, while 11 had completed postgraduate qualifications. The sample was not designed to be representative of the wider population. Rather the study aimed to understand how a small group of women and men of diverse sexualities negotiate ethical sex. My intention here was not to produce generalizable 'facts' but rather, I see interviewees as experiencing subjects who actively construct their own social worlds. The data were analysed to represent 'an authentic insight into people's experiences' and their views about sexual intimacy (Silverman, 1997). A range of methods was used to analyse the data including; thematic, narrative and discourse analysis.

The qualitative interviews lasted between one hour and one and a half hours. There were 12 interviews conducted face to face and 13 completed by telephone. The interviews were semi-structured and used a series of prompting questions. Each interview began with information about sex education experiences, sexual history and a gender-neutral scenario followed by a series of questions which then proceeded to in-depth questions about their own sexual experiences.

## Stories from ethical women and men

I can think of one situation where I was having sex with a guy and I just became very fearful. He was a very much bigger person and quite an aggressive person not when you met him but transferred into the bedroom situation he was very aggressive and I actually said ‘I don’t feel comfortable’ and I said something that was very silly, I felt I was about to be raped. I said that, got out of bed and I was quite fearful of his reaction but I had to say it as I was really concerned and I respect the fact that he just stopped and let me go. That is the only time I felt fearful (Rick – gay man).

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Interviewer: You were talking about sound before, like moans, is one moan different from another?

Diane: No, there are moans that say yes and there are moans that say much more yes [laughs out loud]. (Diane – lesbian woman)

Gayle Rubin (1992: 281) argues there is a hierarchy of sexual activity where distinctions are made between good, normal, natural and blessed sexuality, ‘the charmed circle’ (heterosexual, monogamous, vanilla, focus on procreation, in private for example) and the outer limits that is bad, abnormal, and unnatural and thus a ‘dammed sexuality’ (unmarried, homosexual, promiscuous, sadomasochistic, non-procreative, in public for example). These discourses are evident in religious, psychiatric, popular or political arenas and seek to ‘delimit a very small portion of human sexual capacity as sanctifiable, safe, health, mature, legal or politically correct’ (Rubin, 1992: 282). One heterosexual woman in the study clearly demonstrated her resistance to dominant discourses of women’s sexuality. A profile of her is presented in detail as it highlights her changing subjectivity and her attempts to push the boundaries of sexual pleasure and resist the power of gender expectations.

Mandy is 44, lives in a rural area, works as a life coach and is currently studying for a postgraduate diploma in psychology. She has had three male sexual partners, has been married previously and has been with her current husband for 16 years. She describes herself as always having been interested in sex but as a younger woman she felt guilty about this. She was a Christian and apart from some sexual exploration at 18 she remained a virgin till 23. She met her first husband two months before they married and they had sex prior to marriage that included a private non-legal commitment ceremony in their bedroom prior to the formal marriage. She feels she really wanted to get married so she could have sex. She has an 18-year-old daughter who was with her when she and her second husband got together. Her 19-year-old niece also lives with them.

Mandy describes a dynamic and creative relationship with her husband in which the exploration of sex is central to the intimacy they share. She describes how

they have learnt to negotiate having space for regular sex despite having two young adult women in the house. They both work part-time and make time when the house is free to have sex and they also focus sex on weekends when they both have time and energy to explore. Mandy describes sexual exploration as 'our project' to which she and her partner are both committed. They discuss, explore different approaches and she describes sexual encounters that explore deep spaces within themselves. She says they have a lot of fun and are constantly reflecting on how their love for each other and their sexual desire continues to grow after 16 years.

Some time ago Mandy decided she wanted to try an experiment She decided she would say yes to sex whenever her partner wanted it.

'So I said to him, look, after a lot of discussion and thinking, I said I'm gonna try an experiment, I'm gonna say to you I will have sex whenever you want it and that's gonna free me up to no longer think do I feel like it, don't I feel like it, I just wanna try this'.

She felt they were stuck in a dynamic where her husband never knew if she would agree to sex and she was always thinking whether I will or not. She is quick to point out that this

'was a way to free us, free up from of all of this . . . it sounds on the surface like I'm being really compliant but that is not actually what I was doing'.

Mandy says this hasn't exactly changed the frequency of sex but has allowed her to be 'less bashful', and a lot more assertive in saying what she wants from each encounter and the practices she wants her partner to perform. She feels this has also freed her husband to be more outspoken about this needs. Within her relationship monogamy is very important and she feels it would undermine the deep intimacy she feels with her husband and that it would be impossible for her to share this with another; 'I guess we in many ways believe in soul mates, in one true love, believe in that, and so we want to cherish that and nurture it and we are still so very much in love, so monogamy is absolutely crucial at the moment'.

In this narrative we can see a range of competing feelings and shifts in Mandy's ideas about sex and the way in which cultural pressure impacts directly on her experience of pleasure. Her desire to marry early so 'I could have sex' highlights the traditional acceptable role for a heterosexual woman raised with a Christian upbringing. The potential for sexual pleasure was initially only possible for her within marriage and her current view about monogamy within her marriage echoes this and positions her within the 'charmed circle'. Sex with love is important to her. In many ways she may appear as quite a 'traditional woman'. However her commitment to pleasure and pushing herself beyond her own boundaries is evident in her 'experiment' to yes to sex whenever her husband wanted it.



And my theory was that men will think they want sex more often than they actually do because it's an image that men want to uphold, I'm this horny person that would have sex every day if I could but my wife just can't, doesn't want sex as often.

This seems to suggest that she was prepared to challenge not only her own subjectivity about gender and sex but also to encourage her husband to move beyond his own traditional male subjectivity about sexual frequency and a woman's role to hold the power of refusal or agreement. This woman's experience seems to suggest that even within those who fit the criteria for membership of the charmed circle, we can find some interesting examples of resistance and fluidity of power relations.

If we move beyond this case study to a consideration of the broader group of participants we also find further examples of resistance to dominant sexuality and discourses. Both heterosexual women and lesbian women indicated evidence of engaging in both 'good' and 'bad' sexual practices. For example both heterosexual women and men indicated a diversity of sexual practices within monogamous relationships including long-term marriages, but they also had casual sexual affairs, had multiple partners, some engaged in role playing and sadomasochistic or bondage and discipline (BDSM) sex. The lesbian/queer women also were diverse in the ways they found sexual pleasure including casual sex, monogamous relationships, cyber sex, BDSM role playing, non-monogamy. Within these contexts a range of sexual practices was enjoyed. The idea of a fixed erotic choice of partner was also challenged by the participants with only three of the 13 lesbians having no experience of heterosex. Of the seven heterosexual women two had sexual encounters or affairs with women and of the five heterosexual men two had some sexual contact with men. The one gay man in the study had experience of casual sex in commercial venues as well as sex within ongoing relationships. He had no sexual experience with women. These findings suggest that pleasure was experienced in many different ways and in the context of quite different types of relating and was not tied to a fixed sexual identity. However a consistent theme that emerged was the importance of self care and care for the other. This study indicates that women and men of diverse sexualities use a multiplicity of ways to negotiate pleasure. These included verbalizing clear expectations and limits, non-verbal bodily movements, trial and error, time, taking risks in self disclosure, trust, flexibility and receptiveness of a partner, self reflection and monitoring their own responses. However they also indicated that there are a number of barriers to being able to successfully negotiate their own needs. Performance anxiety and shame, self-consciousness regarding their body, fear of rejection, anxiety about certain acts, lack of experience or bad previous experiences, pressure

to please others and changing levels of desire were identified. Despite these barriers 'conditions of possibility' existed which allowed the individual to move beyond the barriers to self-expression. Sarah, a 30-year-old woman in a long-term relationship with a woman, reflects on her past behaviour and experiences:

I've had a couple, one or two or three or something (one night stands), um feeling vulnerable and unsafe and insecure and like I have to perform and I'm not relaxed and going oh that's horrible, I don't wanna do that again, um so feeling bad stuff and going I don't want that again, so knowing how . . . kind of processing in my head how to um not let that happen again or protect myself more.

Sarah exemplifies a characteristic identified by many of the participants – the ability to self reflect on negative experience, to avoid repeating it and ensuring that in future she takes better care of herself. This highlights the importance of self-reflection in constructing ethical subjectivity and self care. Previous negative experiences like an abuse history can also be seen as a possible barrier to self-care and self-expression. For example: Mark, a 44-year-old heterosexual man living in the country who had been abused as a child:

If I . . . if I expect to be rejected then I don't bother to ask for what I want . . . And if I repeatedly don't ask for what I want then I sort of lose touch with the things I want.

Through a process of self-reflection, emotional support and some risk taking he has found a way to look after himself and have his needs met. He expresses agency in his reflection and resists the power of past abuse to prevent him from sexual pleasure as an adult.

A willingness to negotiate around slightly different needs between partners was evident in Nick's story. Nick is a 56-year-old heterosexual man with a history of many sexual partners. He had just started seeing a woman again he had known some years before. They had only just started seeing each other again when she took the risk and made it clear she was not interested in sex for the sake of having sex. Nick's response was:

I hear what it is for you and I can say I'm willing to go, step by step, without a promise of anything along the way, and just see what it is like for me.

Nick's response reflects a clear example of Foucault's notion of *rappport à soi*. He is mindful of the woman's stated needs and therefore demonstrates care for another. But he is also able to articulate his needs to see what a slowly developing relationship might be like for him which demonstrates self care.

The women and men in this study both reported a high value on mutuality, consent, negotiation, respect of own needs and choices and those of

their partner and active verbal and non-verbal communication. This concern for self care and care for the other supports Foucault's proposition about sexual ethics and in Rubin's (1992: 283) terms indicates a democratic morality which judges sexual acts based on how partners treat each other rather than some arbitrary hierarchy of 'natural' and 'unnatural' acts. Participants indicated self care and care of the other was dynamic and agreements made about sexual desires, acts and pleasures constantly shifted and developed or changed depending on the couple's needs at the time. If these changes could not be accommodated, they changed their behaviour, ended the relationship or sought out other partners who were more compatible.

## Sex and danger

Traditional feminist explanations of understanding women's sexuality have constructed heterosexual relationships as exploitative in which patriarchal gender relations structurally determine power (Carmody, 2003a, 2003b). Hollway (1996: 91) argues there has been little space in the political criticism of heterosexuality to develop feminist sexual desire outside of erotic domination by a man. I would extend this further firstly in relation to young women, following Deborah Tolman (2002) who argues that young women often describe sex as 'it just happened'. This allows them one of the few 'decent stories' that covers their own sexual desire and reinforces the dominant belief that good girls do not have sexual feelings of their own. Lesbian sexuality is also problematic. The 'outer limits' of the sexual hierarchy construct lesbian women's desire and pleasures as 'unnatural', 'sick' and 'sinful' and the lesbian faces homophobic assumptions as a potential sexual predator. Therefore sex, especially heterosex is constructed as dangerous not only because of the risk of sexual exploitation but from dominant discourses that seek to deny women's agency of their own sexual desires.

Rape and other forms of sexual exploitation are a reality but this is not the total picture of sexual intimacy. About 20 per cent of this sample had experienced unwanted sexual practices; several of them as young children. Despite this they had developed pleasurable sexual intimacy with others as adults in which self-care was crucial to their pleasure. Both women and men reflected a dynamic process of negotiating ethical sex in which power relations shifted between partners regardless of the gender or erotic choice of sexual partners. It also varied within long-term relationships and short-term or casual sexual encounters.

A sense of danger had wider meaning for a number of the participants. For Pat, a lesbian, danger was based around her desire and involvement in SM sex and the fear of this information being misunderstood and

damaging ‘her professional reputation as an anti-violence worker’. She also made the point that while clearly negotiated sexual acts were central to SM practices, negotiation of relating outside of the specific sexual encounter was more risky and she felt emotionally dangerous. For Kala, who identifies as a queer dyke, it was her commitment to non-monogamy and her cultural heritage that she felt left her open to condemnation. For Jane danger was acutely material when she was thrown out of home at age 16 when her parents discovered her affair with another young woman. For Emma, it was the rigidity of gender expectations about lesbian sexuality. For Nick, a heterosexual man, the pressure of performance from female lovers and for Mark, also heterosexual, it was about a fear of expressing his sexual needs rather than just going along with the needs of his female partner. These experiences suggest that a unitary idea about risk or danger as being only about rape or sexual exploitation fails to acknowledge the complex ways in which danger can manifest itself.

The women and men in this study developed a number of strategies to negotiate the often slippery slope between pleasure and danger. Once again the role of self-reflection was identified as important in caring for oneself as exemplified by Julie, a 29-year-old bisexual woman:

I suppose because I used to be pretty messy around sex I wasn't really sure what I was doing or why I was doing it, I was really just doing it for the other person . . . so now I do think that reflection on your sexual kind of practices or activities or whatever does give you . . . it makes it conscious, it makes it something that you can choose to do and choose to do in all these wonderful interesting ways.

The process of self-reflection indicates Julie moving from a place of passivity to one in which her own agency becomes central to her experience of pleasure. Her changing understanding of her own needs alters the power relations between sexual partners. It also indicates self-care and thus in Foucault's terms represents one aspect of ethical subjectivity. This process of self-reflection which led to increased agency was not something that came easily. It certainly did not come from formal sex education that the participants felt had failed miserably to prepare them for the complexity of intimate relations. Rather it came from experience and a willingness to consider their own needs as well as the needs of another. This raises an interesting challenge for sex educators and for anti-violence education to which I will return later.

Participants used a diversity of other strategies in negotiating the balance between pleasure and danger. For the women it was important to know something about the potential sexual partner. What they wanted to know varied; for some they wanted to know about their sexual safety in terms of possible infections, for others it was about seeing sex as an intimate act that

they only wanted to share with someone whom they found attractive in other ways. For others it involved a conversation about preferred sexual practices so they could assess compatibility and risk expressing their desires. Women and men had varied views about the limits of sexual acts they would engage in and this again varied whether it was the first encounter, a casual affair or the possibility of an ongoing relationship. Interestingly a number of women and men felt their usual protective limits often went out the window if they intended a casual sexual encounter where lust and/or alcohol took over. Despite this variation, there was strong evidence that women and men were able to negotiate their wants and desires either verbally or non-verbally. For a number of the group a developing sense of trust in an ongoing relationship gave them the freedom to extend their sexual boundaries and desires. The majority of participants felt they were able to change what was happening if they felt uncomfortable or fearful. They clearly asked the person to stop, or indicated they did not want to continue with a particular act or they moved their body away and redirected activity to something else. Some stopped the entire encounter, depending on the nature of the relationship; they left or talked to their partner about what was happening. Importantly this had not always been the case and this raises some interesting challenges for anti-violence education particularly targeted at young women and men.

These experiences suggest the fluid and dynamic nature of sexual pleasure in the context of shifting personal needs and desires. It also reflects how power in relationships can shift and challenges the notion of power as monolithic. As Louisa Allen (2003: 236) argues in her work with young people there is a need for ‘a conceptualization of power which captures both women’s experiences of agency in heterosexual relationships and the way in which these relationships are simultaneously governed discursively and materially by male power’. I would like to suggest that we could understand the negotiation of pleasure and danger as dynamic with the potential for developing an ethical erotics. This would shift our thinking away from a fixed notion of some desires and acts determined by gendered expectations as being universally seen as either pleasurable or dangerous or ‘good’/‘bad’, ‘natural’/‘unnatural’. Ethical erotics involves negotiation in which care of the self is linked to care of the other. For either to be missing or limited tips the balance from mutual pleasure to dangerous sex either physically or emotionally. This then would be unethical and would significantly increase the risk or danger for the individuals concerned.

## Implications for anti-violence education

This review of anti-rape education strategies suggests we are currently failing to address the kinds of information and skills that especially young

people need to negotiate pleasurable ethical sexual intimacy. Most sexual assault occurs between people known to each other and it is the negotiation or lack of negotiation of consent that poses most problems. My research suggests that many programmes are reinforcing heteronormativity and are limited to attempts to 'police' unethical behaviour and continue to place the primary responsibility for this on women. The continued prevalence of sexual violence in our communities suggests these approaches have had little impact on primary prevention. If we shift focus from teaching refusal skills and awareness-raising to a focus on promoting and developing ethical non-violent relating there may be a greater possibility of preventing sexual violence within intimate relationships. The findings of the qualitative research with women and men of diverse sexualities highlights the dynamic nature of negotiating desire and pleasure. This is currently invisible in anti-rape education discourses. A young woman may desire sex but feel she must say no to protect her reputation amongst peers or potential lovers or to avoid danger. A man may feel obliged to challenge resistance as he has learnt this is the 'game' to achieve sexual intimacy and establish his masculinity. This is particularly difficult terrain to negotiate especially for young people who we know are most at risk of sexual assault. Current programmes fail these young people by retreating to simplistic advice. Sexual intimacy is not a simple matter, it is imbued with a multiplicity of expectations about gender, varying desires and motivations and overlaid by heteronormative discourses that place a moral value on specific acts and choice of erotic partners.

My recent interviews with 25 women and men of diverse sexualities reveal some of the untold sexual stories of our time (Plummer, 1995). Clearly all narratives are open to multiple interpretations. This study indicates there are many and varied ways in which people negotiate intimate sexual encounters. They have found multiple ways of engaging in the dynamic nature of pleasure and danger. There is evidence in this small study that Foucault's notion of *rapport à soi* – the care of the self and others was present in the narratives of the participants who identified as ethical subjects. They describe ethical erotics in practice. The empirical evidence in this study was based on a small sample and the findings invite further exploration with larger and more diverse samples. Despite these limitations it provides an alternative approach that celebrates multiplicity and the positive ways in which some people negotiate both pleasure and danger. As such it provides a positive analysis of intimate relationships and suggests that anti-rape education would be substantially enhanced if these factors were taken into account when planning educational interventions.

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## Note

1. See Carmody and Carrington (2000) for a detailed discussion of the US and Canadian programmes analysed.

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