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**The Impact of Raunch Culture on the Development of an Autonomous
Female Sexuality in Ireland**

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Abstract

The Impact of Raunch Culture on the Development of Female Sexual Autonomy in Ireland

Raunch Culture is the relatively recent term given to the mainstreaming of sexualised images, language and messages within popular culture and the popular media over the past two decades. This thesis seeks to expose the ways in which this mainstreaming has resulted in media-led sexualisation processes that, despite appearing 'pro-sex' have actually succeeded in hindering the development of an autonomous Irish female sexuality.

Using the joint methodological lenses of feminism and social constructionism, two distinct research methods were employed to achieve this aim. The first of these involved a quantitative questionnaire with 1764 young Irish women and the second involved a series of 12 face-to-face interviews with a voluntary sub-group of that sample.

These methods resulted in the generation of a significant body of data which has lent itself to the argument that Raunch Culture has the potential to inhibit the development of female sexual autonomy in Ireland. Central to this argument is evidence within the study of Raunch Culture's institution of a 'sexual rulebook' that normalises certain sexual attitudes, identities and behaviours as 'good' and rejects those which do not fit the same criteria as 'bad' or 'other'.

The importance of adhering to this 'rulebook' is palpable within the study's findings and manifests itself in the reported experiences of its participants, through their fear of being labelled as 'other', a pressure on their part to be 'good' at sex and, in its most inhibitive form, through a form of sexual self-regulation that affects their mode of dress, their sexual behaviour and, in extreme cases, their sexual choices, including consenting to *unwanted* sex and the refusal of sex that is *wanted*.

These fears, pressures and self-regulatory behaviours provide evidence of the ways in which Raunch Culture has and continues to have a profound impact on the development of an autonomous female sexuality in Ireland.

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Introduction

The initial motivation behind this research project was to explore the sexual messages communicated by Raunch Culture, the ways in which Irish people interpret and consume those messages and ultimately whether or not this exchange impacts the lived sexualities of young Irish women. The central research question of the project's thesis, then, is 'To what extent has the recent expansion of Raunch Culture posed barriers to the development of an autonomous Irish female sexuality?'

This is a question which encompasses a range of extremely broad conceptual areas such as Irish sexualities, the sexualisation of culture, feminism and autonomy, and has in turn prompted a series of sub-questions that have been devised to best inform the central thesis. Among these are questions such as:

- What characterises 'Irish Sexualities' and what social, cultural and historical factors have contributed to this characterisation?
- What are the social, historic and cultural features of female sexuality in Ireland?
- What characterises 'Raunch Culture' and what social, cultural and historical factors have contributed to this characterisation?
- How visible, present and relevant is Raunch Culture in Irish society?
- To what extent does this culture impact the lived sexualities, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviours and sexual treatment of Irish women?

Each of these questions contributes to building a greater picture of what Irish female sexual autonomy might look like. Given the presence of patriarchy and of a gendered habitus that, even at a pre-conscious level limits the scope of female choice and freedom, the concept of 'autonomy' within the context of this thesis can be seen as an ideal that is ultimately unattainable, but which can be extremely useful as a yardstick against which existing practices can be evaluated.

The broad scope of 'autonomy' as a concept which incorporates freedom of choice, action, thought and behaviour, therefore, lends itself to a detailed discussion such as

this one which incorporates, not only the wider sociological concepts of habitus, discourse and symbolic violence but also the significance of individual women's experiences of sexual expression, choice and freedom in twenty first century Ireland.

Chapter One

Saints and Sinners: An Introduction to Irish Sexuality since 1845

In order to best place this thesis within its socio-historic context, the opening chapter provides a brief overview of Irish sexuality and the cultural, historic, social and legal forces that have shaped it from the Great Famine of the 1800s to the height of Raunch Culture in the early twenty-first century. It discusses the key milestones within Ireland's socio-sexual history and aims to provide a cohesive background to the study and its central research questions.

1.1 Ireland from Famine to Free State

The great Irish famine of 1845 brought with it such immense changes that they are still resonant in the country's collective memory in the twenty first century. In fact, so significant was this watershed period, that today Irish historical narrative is now frequently divided between pre-famine Ireland and post-famine Ireland. The famine itself and the death toll it incurred, however, merely served as catalysts to the already palpable social, political and economic unrest that existed within the country at the time. Ireland had been directly governed for seven hundred years prior to the famine and under the Act of Union 1801 was ruled by Westminster as part of the United Kingdom, a hierarchical system which favoured landowners and imposed restrictions on the economic development and political mobilisation of tenants, cottiers and small farmers who were in the majority.

The result of this system was an impoverished and dependant population heavily reliant on the land, and in particular on their staple crop, the potato. When this crop failed in 1845 due to severe blight, it ravaged not only their primary source of nutrition but also their primary source of revenue. The British government, however, failed to see either the urgency or the extreme gravity of the situation in Ireland and their poor response to it was a devastating blow to the country's chances of combating the effects of famine and of making a strong recovery from it. In fact, so apathetic was the feeling in Westminster towards the disaster that former Chief Secretary for Ireland and then Prime Minister Robert Peel was quoted at the time as remarking that there had always been 'such a tendency to exaggeration and inaccuracy in Irish reports that delay in acting on them is always desirable' (Woodham-Smith 1962, p41). The reality for

Ireland, however, was that approximately one million of its people died from either starvation or from famine-related illness during the period, while a further million, the majority of whom were women, were forced to emigrate to England, the United States, Canada and Australia.

The government, however, could not be said to have washed their hands completely of Ireland and its crisis. Several relief measures were put into place during the period, though many of these proved counter-productive in the long term. These included road building schemes which were intended provide employment to those whose livelihoods had been destroyed but as the roads often led nowhere, these schemes came to be seen as physically taxing exercises in futility for weakened and starving men. Peel also ordered the import of £100,000 worth of American corn to Ireland. The Irish people, however, were not adept at processing such corn, and many became ill after ingesting it. These measures were also counteracted by the continued export of Ireland's successful crops to England throughout the five core years of famine.

Post-Famine: De-Anglicising Ireland

The effect of the famine of 1845 on the Irish psyche was so cataclysmic in fact that it altered concepts of identity at national, community and individual levels. The bitterness towards the British government as a result of its poor efforts to limit the devastation of famine combined with the extreme sense of loss and grief felt by the Irish people and set in motion a wave of heightened nationalistic feeling, one which marked the beginning of Ireland's struggle for Independence. This was led by those whose families had suffered as a result of the famine or immigrants who had fled when they felt there was no alternative. A powerful collective 'folk memory' emerged among this new Diaspora and acted as an evocative rallying point for various nationalist movements both in Ireland and abroad. A romanticised vision of their homeland prior to British rule and the famine dominated¹, depicting a free, fertile, cultured society and creating a nostalgic desire to return to traditional value systems².

¹ Lee, for example describes Douglas Hyde's romanticised vision of Ireland as follows: 'Hyde's vision of 'traditional' Ireland...involved the imposition of boyhood recollections on 2000 years of history. He equated virtually everything existing in his youth with 'real' Irish and denounced virtually every development during his adult years as 'Anglicisation' (Lee 1973, p142)

² Hyde...dreaded the threat of a modernised Gaelic Ireland...The whole infrastructure of modernisation appalled him, and he assumed that the Irish could not survive in a modernised world (but)...should... opt out from the modernisation process and continue to dwell in a mythical world of knee-breeches, free suits and marital ballads' (Lee 1979, p143)

These ideals culminated in Gaelic movements such as the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association being established with the primary aim of reviving elements of this traditional Irish culture including its language, music, dance, literature and games, which its people felt had been eroded with 'Anglicisation'. Though these movements proved slow in achieving significant political progress, the period marked an enormous shift in Irish thinking and the formation of a new national identity. Most poignantly, perhaps, was its move towards the traditional and away from the modern, as modernisation, in the Irish imagination of the time, remained intrinsically linked to Anglicisation. Douglas Hyde, a founding member of the Gaelic League, was one man who saw a great need for this move. In 1882 he published his manifest on '*The Necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland*', a document which suggested that Ireland had become a 'nation of imitators' cited by Lee (1973, p143) and expounded the need for the country to return to a more traditional way of life.

Catholicism in Post-Famine Ireland

This return to the traditional was combined with a widespread anti-British sentiment, and the continuous attempts by the English crown to promote the Protestant faith led to heavy resistance and a resultant 'identification of Catholicism with freedom from foreign interference... (which)... in turn prompted the development of a version of national consciousness which saw a fusing of religious, political and cultural elements' (Williams 1999, p318). Unsurprisingly this led to an upsurge in the popularity of the Catholic Church and the beginning of its role as a major social and political power player in Irish society. In fact given the disparate nature of the political factions at work in Ireland at the time the Church quickly became the most unified and cohesive institution in the country.

As the quest for Catholic Emancipation then built momentum and groups such as the Catholic Defence Association³ gained support, Catholicism became inextricably linked in the Irish imagination to a symbolic independence from Britain, and before long its Church emerged as a bastion of nationalist ideals. Such was the strength of this connection in fact, that revolutionaries such as Daniel O'Connell were famously quoted as defining their struggle in terms of 'our religion from Rome, our politics from Ireland' (Lee 1973, p53).

³ whose aim it was to challenge the Protestant belief in 'the natural inferiority of Catholics' (Lee 1973, p53)

One man in particular who played a significant role in the increased social and political status of the Catholic Church in Ireland was Cardinal Paul Cullen. Having worked as rector of the Irish College in Rome, he 'considered himself ... the Pope's chief whip in Ireland' (Lee 1973, p45) and sought to systematically bring 'the Church into line with Roman discipline' (Lee 1973, p45). His contribution to Irish life however, was not restricted to the areas of policy and theology. In fact his investment in and encouragement of the building of a huge number of churches (which has since been directly linked to the rapid increase in Mass attendance at the time) and the major role he played in the establishment of hospitals and of the secondary schools system still exist in Ireland today as physical evidence of his life's work. During his time as Cardinal, he 'tightened ecclesiastical discipline and introduced uniformity into religious observances' (Lee 1973, p45) to such an extent that the legacy of which continues to have resonance in Irish society in the twenty-first century⁴.

Cullen's efforts during the later half of the nineteenth century to reform Catholicism in Ireland and the Church's resulting participation in what were usually secular spheres such as education and health (catering specifically to the poor Irish Catholics who made up a significant percentage of the population) led to an enormous elevation in the status of the Catholic Church in Ireland. As this status continued to rise so too did the Church's influence on the wider Irish society and the reliance of the people on the Church for guidance, not alone in the areas of morality and spirituality but in the larger social and political spheres 'Until at least nineteen sixty Irish life was influenced more by Catholic social teaching than any other social or political ideology' (Borowik and Abela 2008, p51).

In fact, such was the elevation of the Catholic Church's status at the time that it came to be seen as the national regulator of social order and the country's primary executor of social control; 'They (the Irish) were barely able to scratch together a living: they found consolation and compensation in the Catholic Church' (Inglis 2008, p12). Bishops were regarded as religious royalty and parish priests were employed as much to ensure that Catholic doctrine was adhered to in their parishes as to provide parishioners with moral and spiritual guidance. These local clergymen were highly revered and they were rarely disobeyed or their advice ignored. As a

⁴ Most significantly this involved the establishment of churches which encouraged higher Mass attendance and the establishment of the secondary school system which survives in Ireland to date and which ensures that its pupils are taught according to Catholic values and doctrine

result, Mass attendance remained extremely high well into the twentieth century, with a recorded ninety per cent of Irish Catholics attending mass at least once per week at the turn of the century, a figure which was still estimated at 85% in the early 1990s⁵.

This consistently high turn out made weekly masses the most widely and regularly attended public fora in the country. In the absence of television, Mass, for the Irish Catholic in the early twentieth century became as pivotal a centre of information as the media and internet are for Ireland today. Local, political, national and international news were all relayed through the pulpit and as a result the parish priests were empowered, not only to deliver this news, but to do so through the language of Catholic morality.

This was a morality based on a conservative canon from Rome that emphasised an austere lifestyle of chastity, modesty, abstemiousness and obedience to the Church. It's influence in Ireland was far-reaching both as a result of high mass attendance and of the high levels of involvement and activity of priests within their parishes, which included visits to families and to the homes of those who were sick or in need of spiritual or moral guidance. Priests, as a result, were consulted as authorities in matters of family, politics, sexuality and fertility. This was a means of providing a link between the flock and their church but also of monitoring the lifestyles of that flock to ensure they were in line with Roman dogma.

'From its early days, the government of the Irish Free State showed a willingness to use the powers of the State to protect Catholic moral values. It is difficult not to notice, even at this early stage, the contradiction inherent in the clerical campaigns. The clergy were hostile to the intervention of the state in the area of morality and social support for families, considering these were the domain of the Church, but nonetheless they wanted the government to legislate precisely these areas' (Hug 1999, p78). The legacy of the Catholic Church's golden reign in Ireland, therefore, was not inherited simply at an institutional level, for as the Church became one of the country's foremost institutions in political life and in regulating social order; so too did Catholic doctrine begin to make a significant mark on the habitus of the Irish people.

⁵ According to data produced by a European Values Survey conducted in 1990 [European Values Study EVS 1990 – Ireland Field Questionnaire. (Archive-Study-No. ZA4470, doi:10.4232/1.4460)]

Ireland as a Free State

The struggle for Irish independence from Britain did not cease during this period and with the bloodshed of the Easter Rising in 1916, came revolutionary changes in the country's social and political situation. With the birth of the Irish Free State in 1922, the ways in which identities were formed at national, community and individual levels also changed and for the first time in centuries, a responsibility for all that was right and all that was wrong with the country lay squarely on Irish shoulders. This new independence only served to exacerbate Ireland's 'bias towards a conservative rural society, with efforts to prevent any incursion of modern and specifically urban values and to valorise the role of the family as the essential cornerstone of society' (Murphy-Lawless & McCarthy 1999, p73).

Despite this clear break from Britain, however, the adherence to Victorian ideals of 'order' and 'social statuses' became paramount to the foundation of the new State. In the absence of a British enemy, 'disorder' and 'immorality' emerged as new threats to the Irish way of life. Increasingly the advice of the Catholic Church was relied upon in such matters and a powerful partnership formed between the emerging State and the already well established Church. In fact it could be said that the Church took advantage of the young government, with one clergyman describing their position as follows: '...who else could lead? The politicians are new; we have few economists; our professional people leave; who stays? We do...' cited by Girvin (2008, p76). This partnership led to the adoption by the Church of the role of social and moral regulator in Ireland and the intensified influence of Catholic doctrine on the social habitus of the Irish people.

The most striking evidence of the profound intervention by the Church in the nation's politics is to be found in *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, the Irish Constitution, which was first enacted in 1937. This document, unlike the secular manifestos of most other countries, was as much a product of Catholic dogma as of Irish political agenda. Unusually for such a document, its original text famously acknowledged the 'special position' of the Church in Ireland and was littered throughout with allusions, not only to God, but to issues of morality and moral propriety. This influence and the resultant traditionalistic and conservative view of society that has been

cemented in the document since 1937, has had enormous repercussions for the development of Irish law, society and identity ever since⁶.

Irish Catholic Sexuality

According to Tom Inglis in his analysis of *Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality*, the ravages of famine had removed the issue of 'population' and the habits of that population as a concern for the State. Instead, responsibility for the size of the Irish population and the surveillance and regulation of its habits was assumed by the Catholic Church. The reduction of the growth of the population, in particular, was seen as being 'at the heart of the modernization of Irish society (and) centred on the strict control of marriage and on a repression of sex outside marriage' (Inglis 1997, p6). The Church's response to this was to introduce 'the systematic ordering and disciplining of bodies in schools' (Inglis 1997, p11) as well as any other areas of Irish social life within their control.

Among these areas were what the Church classified as "occasions of sin" and any place where men and women met socially became problematic. Public dances were the most common of these occasions and as a result, the monitoring of dances by priests was a practice that became widespread throughout Ireland. In fact, such was the perceived threat posed by these dances to social order that in 1935 the Public Dance Halls Act was passed to 'make provision for the licensing, control and supervision of places used for public dancing and related matters' (O'Connor 2003, p58). The Act provides further evidence of how Church and State united during this period to construct and manage 'an ideal Irish body politic...through the shaping and control of individual 'citizens' bodies' (O'Connor 2003, 53).

As a result of the implementation of these social controls, late marriage and high celibacy rates became 'a feature of post-famine Ireland that were supported by the monitoring of relations between the sexes and the control of sexual desire and behaviour by the Catholic clergy' (O'Connor 2003, p52/3). In fact, so successful were these measures that 'By the middle of the twentieth century, Ireland had the highest proportion of bachelors and spinsters in Western Europe. It also had the highest level of postponed marriage' (Inglis 1997, p6). Though attempts

⁶ Among these is Article 41 which come under constant scrutiny since the 1990s, first for its prohibition of divorce (which was removed in 1995) and more recently for its legal definition of marriage that excludes the union of same sex couples

to regulate the growth of the Irish population had succeeded, the lasting effect of these measures, and in particular the problematisation of the pursuit of pleasure, the stereotyping of gender roles and the institutional discouragement of self-expression are still resonant in the Irish social and sexual habitus today.

This was reflected in the Church's denunciation of foreign influences such as Hollywood cinema which was seen, in the early twentieth century as a potential vehicle for social disruption as well as sexual and moral decay. In Sean Crosson's analysis of the consequences of globalisation for Irish film, he explains this phenomenon using Luke Gibbon's suggestion 'that the Catholic Church and political establishment's fear of film was also to do with the threat film posed to the tight structures imposed on Irish society post independence: Cinema's capacity to awaken dormant desires was particularly threatening to a rural society that regarded marriage as primarily an economic transaction, a means of securing or consolidating the family farm. For this reason Hollywood's version of romantic love and tempestuous passions were not simply escapist dreams...cinema flowed into the smallest capillaries of Irish life. Hollywood love did much to undermine the ethos of matchmaking and emotional accountancies that regulated relations in Irish society' (Crosson 2009, p4).

This problematisation encouraged an association within the Irish imagination of 'sex' with negative emotions such as guilt and fear and, as Inglis puts it 'Along with the curbing of public festivity, fun and enjoyment there was a private renunciation and denunciation' (Inglis 2005, p23). This denunciation and accompanying shame, led to a compulsion by the Irish people to confess, thereby making priests privy to even their most private sexual thoughts and acts. According to Inglis in fact; 'Confession was the primary means by which sexual discipline and control began to be exercised over Catholics during the first half of the nineteenth century' (Inglis 1997, p11). This practice was further enforced with the elevation of the Church's status in Irish society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and through which 'transgressions were identified, monitored, examined and punished' (Inglis 1997, p11).

1.2 Irish Womanhood

These measures, however, were not implemented single-handedly by the Catholic Church in Ireland. Instead, parish priests formed close alliances with those who held the strongest

positions of influence within the domestic and family spheres; mothers. This coincided with a period, following the establishment of the Free State, which had a profound affect on the categorisation of gender roles and the creation of gendered identities in Ireland. It was a time during which romanticised nostalgia and nationalist ideals dominated the Irish imagination and combined with the devastating effects of famine and the bloodshed of the 1916 Rising spawned a national vision of ideal Irish manhood and Irish womanhood. This is in keeping with Geraldine Meaney's assertion that 'sexual identity and national identity are often seen as being mutually dependent' (Meaney 1993, p231) and in Ireland during that period women were expected to adhere to the 'self-sacrificing republican tradition' (Hoff and Coulter 1995, p160). The majority of these women, though denied access to paid labour and positions of public or political power were primarily responsible for many of the significant social and cultural changes that occurred in Ireland in the wake of the famine.

One of these changes was a high level of out-migration by women at the time, caused primarily by a profound lack of opportunities for women in Ireland. This lack of opportunity lay primarily in the fact that historically, sons were the traditional heirs to Irish farmland or homesteads and daughters as a result, were left with no significant property rights. Instead they were expected to marry, to become nuns, or to work the land or as domestics for their brothers. Their only alternative was to emigrate and in the late eighteen hundreds, Irish women who were working abroad and sending their earnings home to their families made significant contributions to the Irish economy during the period..

Though Ireland was far from matriarchal in its socio-political structure, several factors lent themselves to the authority of mothers in Irish society at the time. The first of these was the slow pace at which the Industrial Revolution and its related patriarchal capitalist systems hit the country. Post famine, cottage industries continued to survive and women produced saleable items such as dairy products and woollen goods. 'Money was turned over to the mother of the family and mothers made important decisions and contributed more to family economic stability than would have been typical of other Western countries at the time' (Radosh 2008, p306). Their close alliances with their priests also gave them moral authority in the home, an authority which was guided by a strict 'moral code that revered sexual purity and taught moral discipline' (Radosh 2008, p308). Among the changes brought about as a result of these alliances,

were the unique patterns that emerged within Irish sexuality such as 'Late marriage, permanent celibacy, low rates of cohabitation and non-marital fertility, very high rates of marital fertility and high rates of out-migration especially of women' (Murphy-Lawless & McCarthy 1999, p70).

While these changes were initially advocated by mothers as a survival mechanism for families struggling economically in the late eighteen and early nineteen hundreds, they also sought to reinforce 'the Church's teachings about sin and sexuality by teaching children to avoid temptation, to be ashamed of their own bodies, to be morally guided by the Church and to shun contact with the opposite sex outside of the family' (Radosh 2008, p308).

This staunch Catholic rhetoric encouraged a total denial of pleasure and desire and advocated instead, chronic feelings of guilt, inhibition, repression and a fear of intimacy that infiltrated the national psyche. Children who deviated from proscribed norms were severely punished by parents, clergy and their community both physically, through beatings and through psychological manipulation in the use of threats, scolding, ridicule and withdrawal of affection.

Though Irish mothers are often blamed, as a result, for 'preserving and promoting intergenerational sexual inhibitions, emotional repression (and) perennial personal guilt' (Radosh 2008, p305) that continue to permeate Irish sexuality to date, Radosh goes on to argue that their dogmatic mechanisms can be blamed on an inherited fear and refusal to return to the state of helplessness and starvation experienced during the famine.

In support of this, it could also be argued that while mothers of the period exercised high levels of domestic and familial authority, the barriers that existed to women's (particularly married women's) participation in public and political life were extremely restrictive and Irish women were persistently denied access to these spheres at the time, despite the pivotal role they had played in Ireland's struggle for independence and in their diligent spreading of the Catholic agenda.

'Government exclusionary policies and the Catholic Church's social teachings against the employment of wives' (Seward et al. 2005, p416) further hindered their public status, with powerful political figures such as then Minister for Justice Kevin O'Higgins expounding that since

the 'natural function' of women was to have children, they "should not be allowed to serve on juries (or) to participate in the body politic" while Attorney General Hugh Kennedy surmised that Irish women were 'frightened out of their lives' cited in Hoff and Coulter (1995, p124) at the thought of a public role.

These unfounded beliefs became enshrined in Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution *Bunreacht na hÉireann*⁷ and brought about the prohibition of women from serving as jurors and the introduction of a 'marriage bar' which denied wives the right to employment as civil servants due to the fact that the training or promotion of a woman within such jobs was seen as 'wastage' by her male colleagues. Therefore, while Irish women's strength was promoted and encouraged in both the fighting of the Republican cause and the upholding and dissemination of the Irish Catholic agenda, the country's patriarchal political voice simultaneously exaggerated their femininity, magnified 'their relative weakness into complete helplessness, their emotionality into hysteria, and their sensitivity into a delicacy which must be protected from all contact with the world' (Radosh 2008, p308).

Irish Female Sexualities

Perhaps the most oppressive of what Hoff and Coulter refer to as the 'administrative restrictions' on women's independence and agency in Ireland in the early twentieth century were those which interfered directly with the control of their own 'reproductive strategies' (Murphy-Lawless & McCarthy 1999, p70) including censorship of information regarding their sexual health and birth control methods, the banning of sales of contraceptives, the prohibition of abortion and the banning of divorce until the late nineteen nineties. These restrictions were brought into force by the State under pressure from the Church and although they were legally implemented they bore the unmistakable mark of Catholic moral piety.

⁷ Which refers to a woman's 'life within the home' and the endeavour of the State to ensure that mothers would not be financially obliged to work outside the home and thereby 'neglect' their domestic duties

These constraints placed upon the dissemination of information regarding birth control methods outside of those proscribed by the Church, and the subsequent outlawing of sales of contraceptives stunted the development of female sexuality in Ireland most significantly⁸.

The first of these measures was introduced into Irish law in 1929 when all literature referring to or explaining artificial methods of contraception was banned under the Censorship of Publications Act 'which purported to protect the marital family from sexual immorality' Lee cited in Murphy-Lawless & McCarthy (1999, p75). This initial move to restrict access to contraceptive advice was then escalated in 1935 when the Criminal Law Amendment Act outlawed the importation, sale and advertisement of contraceptives. As Chrystel Hug asserts in her 1999 work *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* 'The impact on women's lives was immeasurable, particularly when it is remembered that by the law of the State they were denied access not only to fertility control but to knowledge of all aspects of sexuality including information on sexually transmitted diseases' (Hug 1999, p83/84).

Despite these rigid attempts at controlling fertility, however, sexuality did exist in Ireland outside of the married couple and inevitably, given the forced sexual ignorance of the Irish people and a denial of access to contraception, so-called 'illegitimate' pregnancies occurred. Abortion however, was, and still remains, forbidden by Irish law⁹. In fact, it is referred to specifically in *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, acknowledging the rights of the 'unborn child'. This remains a contentious issue today that has divided the nation, with some defending the Catholic argument that abortion is a form of murder while others remark on the fact that the 'born' child in Ireland has historically been granted lower legal status than that which is unborn. From a feminist perspective, Geraldine Meaney also asserts that 'The assumption that the law needed to interfere in the relationship between woman and foetus- to protect the 'unborn child' from its mother- is indicative of the deep distrust and fear of women' (Meaney 1993, p231) that existed in Ireland at the time.

⁸ This can be seen in the work of Hilliard (2003) whose interviews with Irish married women highlighted the distress and anger they felt at having been kept ignorant regarding their own sexual health and sexual choices.

⁹ As discussed further within this chapter, however, the X case of 1992 brought about certain exceptions to this law

Without abortion, illegitimate pregnancies were dealt with by the women's families in conjunction with their parish priest. It is unsurprising (given that even *married* women who had given birth were expected to be 'churched' to absolve their 'sin') that a great deal of secrecy and guilt surrounded these cases and single women were shamed and expected to repent for their actions. The families too were burdened with shame and even the babies who sprang from these 'illegitimate' unions were renounced as products of sin. In many cases, the pregnant women would be sent away until they had given birth or indefinitely incarcerated in Catholic asylums such as those run by the Magdalene nuns. These asylums required inmates to undertake physical labour such as laundry work and were commonly called Magdalene Laundries as a result. Often once the babies were born, they would be taken from their mothers who would remain isolated from families and friends and outcast from their communities. The patriarchal nature of Catholic Irish society at the time however, determined that the fathers of these children were rarely punished or ostracized in such a way, even in cases of rape or incest.

These institutional measures served to further legitimize the extreme moral burden that already existed within Irish female sexuality at the time which included a reinforcement of the traditional determinist notion that women should act as the gatekeepers of male sexuality, a fact that Diarmaid Ferriter highlights in his account of Irish childhood female sexuality between 1920 and 1940; 'Girls who were taken on religious missions and retreats at the age of 14 or so certainly heard an awful lot about the 'unbridled passions of men' but there was also a 'very heavy emphasis on that and how it was women; women had the moral responsibility of holding that in check' (Ferriter 2009, p173).

While single women were denied an autonomous and free sexuality, then, married women also faced enormous challenges and were placed under extreme physical, financial and psychological pressure. In Betty Hilliard's survey, first undertaken in 1975 and entitled *The Church and Married Women's Sexuality: Habitus Change in the 20th Century*¹⁰ she highlights the culture of surveillance and fear that existed in the realm of female sexuality at the time. Designed to explore the Church's influence on marital sexuality, the survey exposed the state of fear and ignorance these married women were kept in with regard to their sexuality. Expanding on the

¹⁰ The participants of this 1975 survey were revisited in 2000 by Hilliard who found that the women's attitudes towards and opinions of the Catholic Church had changed dramatically in the 25 years that had passed. The quotes used within this passage are taken from the [revisited survey](#)

culture of silence and guilt surrounding the topic of sex in Ireland at the time, one participant; Mrs Kelly recounted 'Well everything was a sin. Every blessed thing was a sin from my childhood up...we were very subdued by the church (Interviewer: It was a general sense of the church being in control?) Oh yes and we were afraid of everything' (Hilliard 2003, p31).

This culture of fear inhibited Irish women and prevented them from asking questions about their own health and sexual development. This enforced ignorance was accompanied by the teaching that it was a sin to deny one's husband his conjugal 'rights', and left Irish women with no control over their own fertility. This imposition was deeply resented by the women surveyed, many of whom were mistreated by priests and even in the cases of ill health or extreme poverty, were never shown compassion by the Church. 'Mrs Black stated "I was angry all that time about them (sic) things." By 2000, the time of the follow-up interview, she was certainly very angry, and would have nothing to do with church or clergy' (Hilliard 2003, p41). This theme of Church intervention into sexual and family matters is resonant throughout Irish history since the inception of the Free State and continues to impact the sexual habitus of the Irish women to date.

Ireland during this period was relatively sheltered from external sources of information or education such as foreign cultural influences and the international media. Therefore, while feminists in other Western countries such as the UK and the US were making enormous strides in their struggle for equality since the early nineteenth hundreds, Irish women only began to pursue the feminist agenda with vigour in the nineteen sixties. This was a period that marked the introduction of television as well as rock and popular music genres and rumours of a sexual revolution began to slowly infiltrate Irish popular culture and broaden the minds of its youth to possibilities beyond the shackles of Catholic repression.

As women began to earn their own money, migrate to urban areas and enjoy life away from the watchful eyes of their still staunchly conservative mothers, their increased levels of freedom encouraged them to demand similar levels of choice and agency in the areas of fertility and sexuality. This became most evident in May of 1971 when a group of Irish feminists controversially demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the law by taking a journey to Northern Ireland on what has since become known as the 'contraceptive train' and returned to the

Republic laden with contraceptives. Customs officials chose not to intervene and the rebellious actions of the women are now widely recognised as having set in motion the beginning of Irish women's fight for full control over their bodies and their fertility.

Even in the twenty first century, this fight has yet to be won. While legislation regarding sex education and the sale of contraceptives became more relaxed from the late nineteen seventies onwards, and eventually the ban on the latter was lifted in 1985, restrictions to women's control of their sexuality still apply under Irish law. The most infamous of these surrounds the subject of abortion. This is an area within moral, cultural and legal debate that has divided Irish feminists since the inception of the new state and remains as contentious in Ireland today as it was at the beginning of the last century. Despite the overwhelming shunning by Irish Catholics in recent years of religious attempts to restrict sexuality, the Church's long standing portrayal of all forms of abortion as a form of murder along with Ireland's obsessive focus on the rights of the 'unborn child' since the drafting of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, have had a colossal influence on the Irish psyche and Irish attitudes to the issue.

The resultant stigma associated with abortion, however, has done very little to reduce the numbers of Irish women who throughout the years have travelled abroad, predominantly to the United Kingdom to procure legal abortions. In fact, in May 2011, a report¹¹ was published by the Department of Health in the UK that listed the abortion statistics for the year 2010 in England and Wales. Of the total number of women who attended British clinics to procure abortions during that year 4402 gave Irish addresses, an average of twelve Irish women per day. This phenomenon is one which has made a significant mark on every generation of Irish women over the past one hundred years. For most of this period, abortion was dealt with in a similar way to contraception in that the dissemination of any information or advice on the topic was banned under law and the rights of a woman to travel for the purposes of terminating her pregnancy was also illegal, although this was naturally more difficult to detect and to police. Though the procedure itself remains, in most cases, illegal to this day, the revelations of the harrowing 'X' (1992) and 'C' (1998) cases contributed heavily to a pro-choice debate and exposed Irish society to arguments beyond those posed by the Church.

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http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_127202.pdf

These cases both involved rape victims aged 14 and 13 respectively who became pregnant as a result of their ordeals. While the State remained initially stoic in its response, there was an unexpected public outcry that supported the two young girls and for the first time since the drawing up of their constitution, the Irish people vehemently chose humanity over the black and white morality purported by the Catholic Church. These cases, like the actions of the women on the contraceptive train were milestones in the cultural, social, political and, significantly, the legal history of Ireland. They marked a move in legislation from a dogmatic system where State and Church closely aligned to maintain traditional, conservative values, to one which began to listen to the changing needs, demands and choices of its people. However, while laws on abortion slowly became less emphatic in the wake of the 'X' and 'C' cases, access to abortion in the Republic of Ireland remains, in most cases illegal.

Feminists argue that this continued prohibition not only limits women's control over their own bodies and fertility but also places those women who travel abroad to procure terminations in a position of increased vulnerability once they return to Ireland where no post-abortion care or counselling is available to them. Therefore, although strides have been made both legally and culturally in the area of abortion and the issue still succeeds in generating enormously controversial debate, barriers still exist which prevent Irish women from achieving full control of their sexual and reproductive lives.

1.3 Irish Sexuality from 1960

The Catholic Church maintained its iron grip on Ireland's social, moral, cultural, legal and sexual affairs until the end of the twentieth century. It was then that a number of external influences began to infiltrate Irish society and culture including a newly established mass media and an increased appetite on the part of the Irish people for information and knowledge about the world that existed outside of Catholic teachings; 'At a personal level, many people were also challenging their religion and rejecting teaching they regarded as conditioning them to equate flesh with sin' (Ferriter 2009, p335). The media in particular, have contributed significantly in the past fifty years to a body of Irish sexual knowledge which might otherwise have remained thin and extremely narrow in its content. The introduction of television to the country in the 1960s for example, marked a turning point in Irish society and 'Radio, Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)', though

largely under the thumb of the Catholic Church, began to tease the boundaries of social order and pious propriety.

The Late Late Show was one such example. This Friday night chat show was originally hosted by Gay Byrne and has run from 1962 to date and has consistently been the country's highest rated and arguably most socially influential television show with an average viewership in 2011¹² of 825,900 viewers per episode. The programme frequently disrupted the Catholic status quo by tackling issues that were considered taboo at the time. Sex was one of these issues and in 1966, a man in the audience was asked the colour of his wife's nightdress the night of their wedding, to which she jokingly remarked that she may not have worn anything at all. While this aroused giggles from the audience, it provoked the outrage of the Bishop of Galway at the time who branded the programme immoral. Known as the 'Bishop and the Nightie' affair, it became a watershed moment for Irish sexuality. With the developments in media, technology and communications that have occurred in Ireland *since* then, such an incident seems remarkably tame if not laughable, in retrospect. At the time, however, it marked the first public acknowledgement of the existence of Irish sexuality.

Clerical Sex Abuse: The Ferns and Ryan Reports

By the end of the twentieth century, then, Ireland had undergone a period of rapid and transformative modernisation that resulted in its status as one of the world's most globalised countries by the dawn of the new millennium. These changes also marked Irish society's move from one driven by traditional values and a focus on community, to one which embraced late-modern ideas that place the individual at the heart of that society. In line with this, grew the demand for the equal rights of women and a concern for the welfare of children, which called into question the ways in which these vulnerable groups had been treated by the Irish Catholic Church historically.

In the late 1990s then, these questions and doubts were substantiated with strong allegations of clerical abuse in the diocese of Ferns in County Wexford. An inquiry was then launched to ascertain how such accusations had been dealt with by the wider Catholic Church. Its findings

¹² This is the average viewership given by RTÉ for the programme for the period January to June 2011 (<http://www.rte.ie/mediasales/television/research-top-programmes.html>)

revealed 'over one hundred complaints relating to child sexual abuse by twenty-one priests, covering the period 1966-2002' (Crowe 2008, p53) and became known as the *Ferns Report* which was published in 2005. This report revealed horrific accounts of rape, sexual touching and the blackmailing by priests of children to perform sexual acts on them. It also implicated the Bishops Donal Herlihy and Brendan Comiskey, in charge of the diocese during that period, as willing conspirators who were fully aware of the complaints that had been made against their clergymen.

Both bishops had failed to exclude those accused from ministry in the priesthood and instead chose to silence the issue by relocating priests suspected of sexual misconduct to other parishes or by advising that they undergo therapy before returning to their ministries which they frequently did; 'By the late 1970s Catholic treatment centres were on the cutting edge of psychiatry and psychology . . . for the treatment of Catholic priests and religious clergy who had acted out sexually with minors' (Crowe 2008,p55). No counselling or reparations were offered to the victims, however, and their experiences were often made all the more harrowing due the perceived infallibility of priests and the incredible hold that the Catholic Church had over the minds and consciousness of the Irish people throughout the twentieth century. Since the publishing of this report, however, the stories of these victims and the bringing to light of these sexual offences by the clergy have changed the face of Irish society irreversibly.

The *Ryan Report*, similarly, sought to expose instances of rape and molestation which had taken place between the 1930s and the 1990s in the country's church-run industrial schools¹³. The results of this report, published in 2009, proved even more shocking and disruptive to the notion of a pious Catholic Ireland of 'Saints and Scholars' than had that carried out at Ferns. Over thirty thousand Irish orphans and child offenders had been incarcerated since the 1930s in these institutions where, the report revealed, 'In excess of 800 individuals were identified as physically and/or sexually abusing the witnesses as children in those settings. Neglect and emotional abuse were often described as endemic within institutions where there was a systemic failure to provide for children's safety and welfare' (*Ryan Report* 2009, Executive Summary).

¹³ these were institutions originally established to house orphaned or abandoned children but became synonymous with reformatories in which children found guilty of criminal offences would be sent, though this included offences as mild as truancy

Like in the Diocese of Ferns, however, the actions of the priests and brothers who committed these heinous crimes were overlooked for decades and they were frequently reinstated following complaints against them. The victims, most of whom are now over fifty years old, have since described their harrowing experiences, their subsequent rejection by both church and state authorities and the irreparable damage to their identity, esteem and social and sexual development. In fact, the argument could be made in light of both of these reports, in fact, that similar damage has been done to the development of Irish society as a whole in terms of *its* national identity and esteem.

Though the process of modernisation in Ireland since the 1950s has corresponded with a slow decline in Mass attendance and the realisation by Irish churchgoers of the human and fallible nature of their priests, nothing has shaken Catholic Ireland as violently as these abuse scandals; 'Even fervent Catholics who would normally defend their church had to concede that no defence was possible for this violation and betrayal of vulnerable children' (Crowe 2008, p51).

Sex Education in Ireland

Over the past twenty years an understandable level of anger and resentment (seen for example in the work of Hilliard) has built up within the Irish populous, not alone as a result of these unprecedented levels of abuse within their religious institutions, but due to the culture of secrecy and socio-sexual ignorance enforced and maintained by the Church under the supervision of the State. In fact, as recently as twenty years ago, formal sex and relationship education was virtually non-existent in Ireland.

In the 1990s, however, a series of tragic events highlighted the damage that this lack of sex education could cause. Among the most memorable of these cases was that of a young girl who became pregnant and, keeping it secret, she gave birth alone in a graveyard where she died along with her newborn infant. The decade also saw a spate of other newborn deaths, abandonment of newborns and cases of infanticide. These cases shocked the Irish public and for the first time since the inception of the Free State a serious challenge was posed to the standard of sex education received by young people in Ireland and the *Department of Education* was forced to re-evaluate the ways in which matters of sexuality were dealt with in schools.

The previous century had been one during which sex was shrouded in secrecy, fear, guilt and shame. It was not spoken of in terms modern relationships but only in relation to its place in Catholic doctrine. Even at the end of the twentieth century, despite the rapid socio-economic expansion in Ireland due to the Celtic Tiger and the boom in its information technology sector, the secondary school system, still dominantly owned and governed by the Church, had not modernised their curricula in line with global advances. In fact, even amidst public outcry following the upsurge of newborn deaths, a significant number of school boards, parents' organisations and Church officials attempted to impede the implementation of any curriculum that was considered outside the 'context of Catholic moral teaching' (Inglis 1998, p4). This, of course, included the omission of teachings on safe sex and any sexuality that exists outside of the heterosexual married couple.

In 1999, the response of then Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach to this outcry was to introduce the *Relationship and Sexuality Education* programme with the aim of providing Irish children and young adults with the foundation of 'a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of developing attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy' (cited from RSE policy guidelines published 1999). It aimed to focus on young people's experiences, changes in their base of knowledge and their own sense of right and wrong. As Inglis explains, however, the idea of an open forum for discussion on sexuality without moral or spiritual instruction was an overwhelming shift that many believed Ireland was not ready for.

Since it was launched in 1999, the RSE programme has been developed as a compulsory part of Irish school curricula and taught in the context of *Social, Personal and Health Education* (SPHE). In practice, however, it has been met with staunch opposition stemming from a history of adherence to strict Catholic doctrine and a legacy of sexual ignorance and awkwardness on the part of parents and educators alike. In fact, as recently as March 2011, *The Irish Examiner*¹⁴ newspaper reported that Mount St. Michael Secondary School in Cork had 'decided about three years ago to cease teaching RSE in response to parental concerns'. Therefore, although the programme marked a turning point in the modernisation of Irish sexuality, poor methods of application and varying degrees of enthusiasm in its implementation hindered its possibilities

¹⁴ <http://www.examiner.ie/ireland/school-to-review-policy-on-sexuality-education-149389.html>

and today school children and young adults still rely heavily on the media and their peers as primary sources of sex education.

Advances in Media and Technology

The introduction of satellite television, mobile telecommunications and internet technology since the 1980s, therefore, has completely revolutionised Irish life and the ways in which people commune, consume and are informed; and the internet, in particular, can be credited with a complete transformation of the Irish cultural landscape. This revolutionary technology has provided Ireland, and the rest of the connected world, with an infinite source of information and where once curiosities and concerns were silenced by stiff moral and religious codes, there is now an unlimited base of knowledge which can be accessed by all. Cyberspace also now acts, not alone as a data source and an easy communications link between people, countries and continents, but as a forum for those who cannot express their desires, concerns or impulses in face-to-face interactions. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Irish sexuality as it has broken the centuries-old silence imposed upon it, first by British Rule and then by the Catholic Church.

There are no rules, moral or otherwise, governing the Internet (or at least, where they do exist they are almost impossible to enforce) and it has opened up a world of new sexual possibilities for the Irish people who are now free to access information on sexualities which exist outside of those proscribed by the Church and traditional Irish social norms, including homosexuality, non-monogamous relationships etc. This freedom, combined with the anonymity which the internet provides, allows people to fully explore any aspect of human sexuality imaginable. It has also made way for an online sexuality in which people enact full sexual lives online which may or may not spill into their sexual lives *outside* of the cyber realm. This phenomenon has been enhanced by unlimited access to pornography and to cybersex through chat rooms and online groups. The introduction of this global network has encouraged sexual expression, experimentation and development and thus can be seen as a positive change from Ireland's longstanding repression.

As a result, Irish people who currently fall between the ages of eighteen and thirty 'have clearly developed or been socialised into significantly different moral and cultural experiences than their parents had before them' (Borowik and Abela 2000, p2). The fact is that in the twenty first

century, young people in Ireland enjoy greater lifestyle choices and more freedom to question rules, regulations and doctrine than previous generations. They may continue to marry later in life, but often experience a wide range of relationships and openly cohabit with their romantic partners. They are among the first generation to know a society where ‘uncertainty, ‘risk’, ‘choice’, ‘freedom’, ‘autonomy’, ‘dependency’ and ‘lifelong learning’ are all prevalent buzzwords’ (Borowik and Abela 2000, p3).

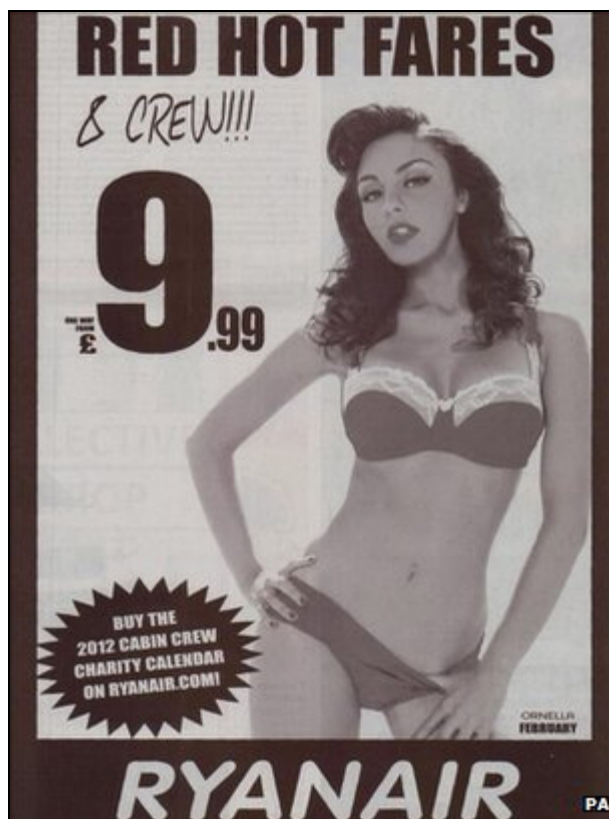
From a nation filled with fear and imposed silence fifty years ago, therefore, a globalised, technologically sophisticated society has emerged. In the twenty first century, Ireland, like the rest of the Western world is consumed by sex, sexual behaviour, sexual activity, sexual knowledge and ultimately what is or isn’t ‘sexy’. The influence of Catholic repression for Irish sexuality in the twenty first century, however, should not be underestimated and, as Borowik and Abela assert ‘in a society in which it is almost natural to be Catholic it is virtually impossible for children to escape the influence of Catholicism’ (Borowik and Abela 2000, p55). This echoes Foucault’s assertion that; ‘If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable ask; nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of fear will be required’ (Foucault 1978, p5). Therefore, while this legacy still lingers in the sexual habitus of the Irish people and their formation of sexual and gendered identities, they are simultaneously being bombarded with sexual imagery and consumption in mainstream media and culture.

1.4 Ireland and Raunch Culture

This is a debate which is integral to the central research questions of this thesis and is linked to what academics call the ‘sexualisation of culture’ or ‘Raunch Culture’. The term Raunch Culture was first coined by Ariel Levy in her 2006 investigation of the overt or *hyper*-sexualisation of contemporary popular culture. In her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Levy uses the term to describe the infiltration of contrived sexualities into mainstream society and culture which once existed solely in the realm of the ‘sex industry’ and pornography. It is a culture, therefore, in which the image of the sex worker (the prostitute, the

stripper, the 'glamour model' and more recently the 'porn star') embodies ideal female sexuality and is represented as a figure of aspiration in the media and in popular cultural texts.

The infiltration by this phenomenon of mainstream popular culture has been subtle in its approach but rapid and extremely pervasive in its influence over the past two decades. In fact, in order to highlight the prevalence of Raunch Culture in Irish society, one need only look to the number of advertising campaigns launched by Irish companies between 2011 and 2012 that promote a fetishized image of female sexuality and the female body, that employ sexist and misogynistic messaging and that justify or make light of gendered and sexual violence. Among these is a recent advertisement by airline Ryanair which included an image of female cabin crew members dressed in underwear and bearing slogans such as 'Red Hot Fares and Crew'. This image was part of a wider campaign that included an underwear calendar modelled by female staff members as well as promotional images of the middle-aged male owner Michael O'Leary with his hands placed the young women's bottoms.



Ryanair Advertisement

Similarly, in 2011, Irish snack brand ‘Hunky Dory’ ran a campaign that included television, billboard, print and online advertising that depicted female models as rugby and Gaelic football players dressed in underwear. Many of the campaign’s central images focussed on their legs, bottoms and breasts and some included scenes of fetishized lesbianism similar to that portrayed in pornography.



Images from Hunky Dory’s advertising campaign

This pornographic representation of women as objects of the male-gaze and of male pleasure in Irish culture over the last ten years has become so normalised, in fact, that not only fetishized imagery but messages of sexual degradation and violence can also be found in many examples of mainstream advertising. In early 2012, for example, Dublin nightclub ‘Alchemy’ used the following promotional poster:



Promotional poster for Alchemy Nightclub

Despite its obvious reference to rape, however, when online forum 'Boards.ie' asked its members whether they saw this poster as an example of 'marketing gone too far', a majority of 56% of respondents indicated that they felt the advertisement was acceptable¹⁵.

This widespread acceptance of sexualised messaging within Irish popular culture and the popular media not only acts as evidence of the prevalence of Raunch Culture throughout Irish society, but also highlights the normalisation of these kinds of messages in the Irish imagination. This normalisation has occurred through a process of mainstreaming which, as Gerber et al assert lends significant power to media such as television, the messages they communicate and the level of absorption of those messages by otherwise informed, savvy and heterogenous audiences; 'Mainstreaming means that heavy viewing may absorb or override differences in perspectives and behaviour that ordinarily stem from other factors and influences...It represents a relative homogenisation, an absorption of divergent views, and an apparent convergence of disparate outlooks on the overriding patters of the television world' (Gerbner et al in Bryan and Zillman 2002, p51).

Therefore, although this study acknowledges the fact that audiences of Raunch Culture are not homogenous and include a wide variety of informed and agentic beings that have the capacity to interpret and subsequently to accept or reject media messages, it is more closely aligned with Gerbner et al's 'cultivation analysis' which, as discussed above, expounds the power associated with the mainstreaming of certain media¹⁶ and posits that in the presence of these mainstream media 'Each group may strain in a different direction but all groups are affected by the same central current' (Gerbner et al, 2002, p49).

Evidence of the mainstreaming of Raunch Culture and its promotion of women as sexual objects can be seen, for example, in the surge in popularity over the last five years of pole dancing classes which can be found, using a very quick Google search, in every county in the Republic of Ireland. In fact, such is the extent of this popularity that since 2006, Ireland has played host to an annual 'Pole Championships' which take place in September each year and which donates all of its proceeds to Crumlin Children's Hospital. This union between a 'sport' that originated as

¹⁵ <http://www.boards.ie/vbulletin/showthread.php?t=2056554601&page=6>

¹⁶ Gerbner et al focus specifically on television but this type of impact analysis can be similarly applied to other forms of mainstream media such as internet etc

a facet of the sex industry and a children's charity is significant in terms of the escalation of Raunch Culture in Ireland and the extent to which it has been normalised and accepted by Irish people.

It is this normalising influence that is of central concern to this study and further evidence of it can be seen in the fact that textual examples of Raunch Culture in Ireland are experiencing continued growth and popularity. This includes, for example, the recent airing of 'reality' television show *Tallafornia* which boasted ratings of over 450,000¹⁷ viewers for its first episode in December 2011 and which, like its American and UK equivalents *Jersey Shore* and *Geordie Shore* depict men whose central function is to 'pull birds' and women who are primarily driven by their desire to be seen as 'hot' and 'sexy' to men. For these women, this includes, for example the observance of ideal models of physical beauty and 'sexiness' as they are measured and disseminated by the popular media, a phenomenon that Laura Kipnis (2007) calls *ultrafemininity*, and that is heavily linked to what Debbie Ging (2009) describes as 'The Postfeminist Paradox' which has signalled a populist shift away from second-wave feminist ideals and towards a culture of neoliberalism, consumerism and postfeminism.

Within this rhetoric, Ging explains; 'freedom is understood less as the legacy of second-wave feminism and increasingly as something given to us by an open, liberal market, which celebrates female empowerment in the form of 'girl power', is inclusive of sexual diversity and ironises the antiquated sexism of a bygone era' (Ging 2009, p53). It is a culture in which the goals of feminism and gender equality are assumed to have been achieved and in which a woman's ability to laugh at past inequality through ironic sexism is seen to be a sign of her own empowerment and strength and has been juxtaposed within the media over the past thirty years with a 'repolarisation of gender identities...which pervades all aspects of media culture;...women and men are pitted against once another in a bid to see...which set of stereotypical traits is 'better'' (Ging 2009, p53). These polarities and resultant stereotypes reinforce the idea that women are now 'allowed' to both be empowered *and* to embrace, through consumption, the girly femininity that was once rejected by second-wave feminists. 'One outcome of this *volte-face* is that women no longer need to be liberated from the

¹⁷ According to online news site The Journal <http://thedailyedge.thejournal.ie/over-450000-tune-into-tallafornia-302835-Dec2011/>

cosmetics and fashion industries, since freedom, in the post-feminist scheme of things, is most readily expressed in terms of the ability to consume, as L'Oréal's ubiquitous advertising campaign so frequently reminds us ('because you're worth it') (Ging, 2009, p57).

This is a message propagated by the popular media and which depicts women as complicit in their own objectification and as accepting of the notion that their empowerment can be achieved through consumption; 'At the level of cultural representation, which, as Tasker and Negra (2007) rightly point out, is post-feminism's central discursive arena, this has brought about a proliferation of images of women as variously self-indulgent, narcissistic, irrational, hypersexualised and often violent creatures who conflate pornography with freedom and consumerism with self-worth' (Ging 2009, p58).

This consumer-driven model reinforces a pornographic ideal in which the women are expected to adhere to a set of physical criteria that include, not only being young, slender and curvaceous, but in keeping with the ideals portrayed in pornography, should also meet certain sexual standards. The ultimate sexual goal of the ultrafeminine female portrayed in Raunch Culture's texts is often to appeal to male fantasy and she is expected to exude sexual availability and should openly exhibit an appetite for sex and a willingness to please. In the *Tallafornia* house, for example, the three female cast members erected a 'stripper pole' in the living room and throughout the series offered to perform pole dances and give lapdances to the male occupants. These sexual standards have been generated from those portrayed in heterosexual pornography which, keeping its primarily male consumers in mind, focuses specifically on male pleasure and the provision of that pleasure by women. This porn-centred model also fuels the acceptance of certain sex acts as 'good' sexual practice.

The reproduction of these standards in mainstream popular culture including television shows, Hollywood movies, women's glossy magazines and the advertising campaigns mentioned within this chapter, has resulted in a process of normalisation which has pushed female sexuality back to a time of Freudian logic where women who did not meet heteronormative sexual ideals were considered sexually 'immature' or sexual failures. In fact, even in cases where texts in Raunch Culture are produced by women, consumed primarily by women and/ or where the content is based on women's lives, the balance of power is still tipped in favour of men or the male gaze.

Irish glossy magazines such as *Stellar* and *U*, for example, are edited, written and produced by predominantly female staff, their readership is almost exclusively female and their content focuses on the idea that young Irish women can 'have it all'.

These publications, in fact, act as a 'how-to' guide to 'having it all' and in each issue assert that by following the rules, guidelines and instructions put forward by the magazines and their advertisers, readers can attain the perfect body ('The Body You Crave By Christmas- *Stellar* cover December 2011), can achieve better sex lives ('Have the Best Sex of Your Life With Our 'Do-It-Better' Guide- *Stellar* cover June 2011) and can, ultimately be happier ('Radiate Happiness At Work, In Love & Life' *Stellar* cover October 2011). Despite these seemingly positive and empowering messages, however, they purport that a woman can only have it all through a process of consumption and transformation that focuses on becoming 'hot', 'sexy' and 'attractive' to men. This is a key theme that runs throughout the texts produced within Raunch Culture; that women are expected to be involved in a constant process of self-improvement in accordance with standards of sexiness put forward by the popular media that are derived from the dominant patriarchal discourses found in pornography.

However, it is not only women whose sexuality has been influenced by Raunch Culture, and to match its submissive, pleasure-giving female is an aggressive and self-serving male. This ideal man is expected to reproduce these sexual norms through hyper masculine or 'macho' gender scripts. His masculinity is characterised by his heterosexuality and his primary role as a man should be to attain sexual access to women, to seek only his own pleasure and ultimately, to dominate. Recent textual examples of this male include the TV characters 'Charlie Harper' (*Two And A Half Men*), 'Jason Stackhouse' (*True Blood*) and 'Barney Stinson' (*How I Met Your Mother*), whose roles and scripts are based almost entirely on their (hetero)sexual encounters.

Within both of these gendered ideals, any transgression is seen as weakness. The consequence of this transgression is a subtle but extremely powerful form of exclusion from mainstream society and culture including being negatively branded as backwards, immature, prudish or even 'gay' and is evidenced in popular Irish texts such as *Tallafornia* in which both male and female cast members are ridiculed and their heterosexuality called into question if they fail to 'score' a

member of the opposite sex on a night out. In fact, such are the lengths that people go to in order to prove their willingness to embrace Raunch, that over 25,000 users of social networking site *Bebo* have deployed the term 'slut' in their usernames¹⁸ - identifying themselves first and foremost as sexually available. These actions are supported and perhaps instigated by the fact that virginity, for example is seen not as a choice but as an affliction within Raunch Culture and the virgin acts as a frequent figure of fun in popular cultural texts, a fact made evident by movies such as Judd Apatow's 2006 comedy *The 40 Year Old Virgin*.

This shift in the direction of Irish sexuality has also resulted in a shift in power of the country's sexual regulator. In order to fully outline the ways in which these changes have come about, it is important to focus on the comparisons that exist between the ways in which sexuality was once controlled in Ireland (by the Catholic Church) and the ways in which the popular media (through Raunch Culture) now communicate messages about sexuality, and particularly those which instruct, that offer advice or that dictate the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of sex.

While the Church, for example, imposed its teachings on sexuality by instating a strict moral code and set of sexual 'rights' and 'wrongs' for the Irish people, so too has Raunch Culture instated its own sexual rulebook that similarly dictates what is socially acceptable as well as what is 'normal' and what is 'abnormal' in Irish sexuality. These rules and regulations are currently maintained by the popular media in Irish society in much the same way as they were upheld by the Catholic Church traditionally, through the implementation of strict social standards and controls. For the Church, these controls included a pervasive threat to potential transgressors, of exclusion from their particular social, familial or community situation, such as the case was for thousands of unmarried mothers who were incarcerated indefinitely in institutions such as the Magdalene asylums. While it can be assumed, however, that Raunch Culture as a social phenomenon is extremely unlikely to *physically* excommunicate those who do not conform to its 'ideal' sexuality, the threat of *social* exclusion that it encourages, can be equally as inhibitive to potential transgressors.

¹⁸ When the word 'slut' is typed into Bebo, the search shows over 25,000 user profiles, almost all of whom are young women

This threat is often enforced insidiously and symbolically through a universally acknowledged fear of gossip or being talked about, of exclusion from certain social activities and through a process of negative labelling. In a Church-led Ireland, this branded those who engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage or outside of 'legitimate' Catholically sanctioned sexuality as 'sinners', 'dirty', 'impure' and ultimately as 'other', while in Ireland in the twenty-first century, this process of branding is not unlike what happens in the popular media where those who do not adhere to the code of sexiness dictated by Raunch are identified as 'prudish', 'naïve' or 'regressive'.

Given the discussion within this chapter on the repression of expression and pleasure in Ireland by the Catholic Church, the loosening of its grip on Irish sexuality can be seen as a progressive and positive step in that it has resulted in previously censored or silenced sexual information, facts and details being widely accessible. This has been a particularly important development for women who now, with the unrestricted availability of contraceptives (with the exception of abortion) and contraceptive advice can now enjoy more control over their fertility, sexual activity and sexual health. It has also given way to a more free and open sexuality in Ireland that can be accessed by all.

However, although this form of sexuality acts as a stark counterpoint to that of Catholicism within Irish history due to its fervent pro-sex and pro-pleasure manifesto, it operates within an unspoken set of guidelines that allow little scope for full sexual autonomy, particularly for women. So while Irish society's embrace of this newfound freedom can be viewed as a form of backlash to Catholic sexual repression, it could be argued that the country's fear of reverting to such a regime has resulted in, not only its *acceptance* of Raunch Culture but its palpable reluctance to challenge the sexual rules, norms and standards it has put in place.

However two peripheral, transgressive voices have emerged in Ireland that oppose, or seek to intervene in the sexualisation processes being instated by Raunch. The first adopts a moral argument against Raunch Culture concurrent with a traditional, Catholic values system that is largely conservative and wishes to limit the visibility of sex in Irish culture with a view to protecting the moral fabric of society. This stance focuses on censorship and is prolifically represented throughout the Irish popular media in the form of moral panic ('The Skimpy Clothes

that Sexualise Young Children' *Evening Herald* 28/09/2011, 'Playground Shagbands Spark Fear Over Early Sexualisation' *Irish Independent* 13/06/10) and social and moral decay.

The second voice, on the other hand, has only emerged within the last five years or so and despite being anti-Raunch is not anti-sex and does not oppose pleasure, expression of sexuality or the open dissemination of sexual information. Instead, this stance; maintained by feminist groups and resource organisations such as the Irish Family Planning Association, opposes the gendered stereotypes and the potentially dangerous messages put forward by Raunch that normalise one type of sexuality at the exclusion of any others.

The aim of this emerging voice is to provide alternative discourses on sexuality than those which are purported within a sexualised pop culture and, specifically to expose the inequalities and stereotypes that exist therein. This includes the fetishization, objectification and resultant commodification of female sexuality, a process in which standards of female sexiness are dictated by the male gaze (through the mainstreaming of heterosexual pornographic depictions of 'hotness'), signifying a prioritisation of 'hotness' (and the act of a woman *doing* 'hotness') above libidinal considerations such as desire and pleasure.

It is to this latter camp that this research project belongs and unlike the conservative argument that there is too much information about sex in the popular media that ultimately results in young people being sexualised too early, it seeks to expose the fact that the information available about sex in Raunch Culture is limited by the sexual standards it propagates and to highlight that the messages contained within Raunch are not 'too sexy' but rather that they limit the scope for what 'sexy' can mean. With this in mind, the thesis acknowledges the heterogeneity of audiences and consumers of Raunch and the potential within these audiences for women, as agentic beings, to derive pleasure, gratification and power from it. It is also, however, heavily concerned with the fact that dominant patriarchal discourses, such as those found within this phenomenon have the capacity to impede and influence agency where, for example, the element of choice is implied but the negative consequences associated with that choice are not explicitly stipulated. It is the central aim of this study, therefore to explore the impact of Raunch Culture and its sexual rulebook on the development of an autonomous female sexuality in Ireland and to open up debate on the extent and nature of the influence of media-

led sexualisation processes on the lived sexual experiences, attitudes and behaviours of young Irish women.

In order to establish this link between the culture in which an individual lives and has grown up in and the impact of that cultural context on the lived behaviours and attitudes of that individual, the work of two important theorists Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu are drawn upon within this thesis. Foucault's work on discourse, for example, and his writings on sexuality are particularly relevant to this discussion in that they analyse sex and sexuality in terms of the historic discourses that surround them and the contemporary discourses that they generate. It is the work of Bourdieu however and particularly his concepts of 'gender habitus' and 'symbolic violence' that frame and support the central argument within this thesis that suggests that 'certain gendered norms, values and dominant discourses come to be accepted as 'natural', 'normal' or 'the way things are' (Powell 2008, p173) and can therefore be instrumental in an individual's complicity in their own domination. These are concepts which will be expanded and elaborated upon in later chapters of this study and which will act as a theoretical framework for the development of its central research questions throughout.

Conclusion

This opening chapter has provided an historic framework for the study at hand and has placed its central research question within the context of Irish sexuality by outlining the historic milestones that have shaped it since the middle of the nineteenth century and continue to shape it to date. The following chapter, then, will build upon this by providing a thorough review of existing literature that is relevant to the thesis and its key research questions.

The study's third chapter, then, will discuss the existing theories, concepts and debates that exist within this literature and the ways in which they have informed this thesis and shaped its conceptual perspective and theoretical framework as a whole. A fourth chapter, then, will elaborate on this conceptual framework and debate the choices of feminism and social constructionism as the guiding methodologies of the thesis. It will also discuss the chosen use of

qualitative and quantitative research methods for the study, including their merits and limitations.

The two final chapters of the thesis, then, will provide a comprehensive report of the data collected through these methods. They will also include a thorough analysis and discussion of the themes, patterns and trends uncovered by their findings and will, ultimately explore the extent to which the recent expansion of Raunch Culture has impacted the development of an autonomous Irish female sexuality.

Chapter 2

Secret Diaries, ‘Kiss-and-Tell’s and How to Make Love like a Porn Star

The previous chapter charted a history of Irish sexuality from a culture of fear and silence to one in which sexiness is a highly prized commodity. This move *towards* and embrace *of* Raunch Culture has signalled a period of immense change in Ireland’s socio-sexual history, one which has inspired this study and its central research questions.

To fully understand the current and future implications of such a culture, it is important to place it within its social, political and historic contexts. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, the central research question of the study has been broken down into four distinct conceptual areas through which to review existing literature on the topic. These are ‘Female Sexualities’, ‘Sexualisation of Culture’, ‘Female Sexual Autonomy’ and ‘Irish Sexualities’.

The first of these is heavily concerned with the historic factors that have contributed to the ways in which we interpret, communicate and enact female sexuality in the twenty first century and includes literature on the subjects of patriarchal power structures, feminisms and gender theory. The second of these areas; ‘Sexualisation of Culture’ involves two key components; a review of literature that deals with the mainstreaming of sex since the 1990s and that analyses, discusses and debates sexualisation processes and; a case study of texts that have been produced by participants of Raunch Culture including a textual analysis of autobiographical accounts of prostitution and other facets of the sex industry. This second component is not part of the review of academic literature but contributes significantly to the overall integrity of the chapter by providing first hand accounts of women’s experiences of Raunch Culture.

For the purposes of this chapter, then, the third conceptual area; ‘Female Sexual Autonomy’, links the two preceding groups of literature and deals with concepts such as power, choice, coercion and pleasure as well as research that discusses the language of sexual consent and refusal.

The final area of literature examined within this chapter, then; ‘Irish Sexualities’ incorporates the above three bodies of literature and places them within an Irish-specific context. This literature review, then, aims to examine existing literature that deals with these conceptual

areas and to critically evaluate the texts therein. Through this method, this chapter will provide a comprehensive review of existing literature on the topic and will highlight the gaps that currently exist within this body of literature and the ways in which this study aims to fill those gaps.

In order to garner a deeper historic understanding of sexualities and the key discourses that surround them, it was necessary for the purposes of this research topic to look closely at the work of Michel Foucault, and particularly his volumes on *The History of Sexuality* which deal with the compulsion with Western societies since the beginning of the Victorian era to control, regulate and generate discourse on sex and sexuality. In the first of these volumes; *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault describes his quest to explore and expose these sexual discourses and; 'to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it (sex) and which store and distribute the things that are said' (Foucault 1980, p11).

In this historic look at sexual discourse, Foucault describes the 'veritable discursive explosion' (Foucault 1980, p17) that has occurred in relation to sex since the end of the eighteenth century and puts forward the notion that repression itself became an incitement to discourse i.e. that restricting the spaces in which sex could be spoken about actually brought about an institutional incitement to speak about it' (Foucault 1980, p18). He goes on to explain that even in contemporary societies in which sex is no longer being regulated and controlled in the same ways as it once was, there is something solemn in the way we speak about it that 'has the appearance of a deliberate transgression' (Foucault 1980, p6).

This is significant in terms of the rapid changes that have occurred in the Irish socio-sexual landscape since the 1960s and obvious parallels can be drawn between the 'discursive explosion' analysed by Foucault and the deluge of sexually explicit material that makes up Raunch Culture. In particular, links can be seen between his description of the optimism which is associated with sexual discourse; 'Something that smacks of revolt, of promised freedom, of the coming age of a different law, slips easily into this discourse on sexual oppression...Tomorrow sex will be good again' (Foucault 1980, p7) and the willingness, as outlined in the previous chapter, of Irish people in the twenty-first century to embrace Raunch and the discourses that

exist therein as a backlash to repression. Foucault's work on sexuality, therefore, is important to the overall situation of this thesis within existing sexual discourses and political economies and is also extremely valuable in terms of the study's placement within the historic context of Catholic Ireland.

In order to build on this historic discussion of sexuality, then, it was important for the purposes of this review to further explore the themes of gender, feminism and women in an historical, cultural, sociological and political context. These are the basic themes that form the backdrop to female sexuality and are rooted in the centuries-old debates on patriarchal power structures and political economy that have shaped its current form.

The Routledge History of Women since the 1700s is one text which engages heavily with these debates and discusses the key factors and pivotal moments that have impeded the political, social and sexual development of women for over three centuries. Predominantly retrospective and euro-centric in its focus, the anthology places heavy emphasis on the repressive and highly patriarchal attitudes to sex and sexuality that were imposed during the Victorian era and, in particular, the social and sexual double standards that dominated the period. As discussed in the previous chapter, this double standard pertained most specifically to women and, as Anna Clarke notes in her chapter on 'Female Sexuality', 'respectable women were expected to control their feelings (while) no culpability, responsibility or ownership of the act was expected of men' (Clarke 2006, p66). This is a point which recurs throughout the text and which highlights the historic acceptance of male sexuality as 'natural' and the simultaneous renunciation of female sexuality, at least historically in Western society, as unclean, unnatural and 'other' since the time of Eve. According to the text, female sexuality, therefore, has been traditionally regarded as an unpredictable and corruptible force that ultimately poses a chronic threat to moral decency, a fact that has resulted in the ritualistic and institutional demonization of the sexual woman throughout history.

The text goes on to explain, however, that alongside this notion of female sexuality as somehow 'wrong' or 'dangerous', are the dichotomous cultural representations of women that portray female sexuality as silent, forbidden, passive and reliant on that of their male counterparts, and simultaneously as untameable, insatiable, seductive and corrupting. As Clarke puts it; 'female

sexual desire has been both invisible and all too visible' (Clarke 2006, p54). This is a dichotomy which has been observed by academic researchers for several decades and is one which highlights the overexposure of one archetypal vision of female sexuality while noting the simultaneous rejection of open discourses on any other. Like Levy and Paul, whose works are discussed further within this chapter, Clarke expounds the notion that such archetypes have 'more to do with fantasies and anxieties that they do with women's experiences' (Simonton 2006, p54), a theory which forms the basis of this current argument on Raunch Culture. Though essentially historic in its focus *The Routledge History of Women* is also resonant in current theories of feminism, women and sexuality. Linking women's history with their present and future, the text is successful in describing the development of patriarchy and the arbitrary restrictions it places on women while simultaneously maintaining an objective, unemotional perspective. Chapters such as Clarke's also have clear implications for the development of a thesis on the topic of Raunch Culture and raise vital issues surrounding the one-dimensional lens through which female sexuality is currently viewed.

The historic phenomena explored within this anthology have also had enormous consequences for the ways in which we have traditionally viewed gender and the ways in which it continues to be constructed, adopted and enacted in the twenty first century. Judith Butler, for example, in her seminal work *Undoing Gender* explains that gender cannot be regarded or analysed in isolation but must be considered contextually. She states that 'One does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with, or for another, even if the other is only imaginary' (Butler 2004, p10).

Butler's allusion, here, to the 'imaginary' is particularly pertinent to the basis of this study and its aim to highlight the importance of non-physical forces that influence our social and sexual identities. Within this book, for example, Butler suggests that autonomy, even autonomy over our own bodies can never be fully realised. This, she explains is due to the fact that our bodies are social bodies and cannot, therefore, be considered in isolation from the gaze of society and from its influences; 'Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social

life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim to as my own....If I am struggling *for* autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in the community, impressed upon by others, impressing them as well' (Butler 2004, p21). Within this collection of essays, it is Butler's notion of this historic 'imprint' or legacy of social messages both on gender and on the achievement of autonomy, therefore, that is central to both the feminist and social constructionist focus of this thesis and its central research questions.

A similar approach to the subject of gender is also adopted by Michael Kimmel in his book *The Gendered Society*. Within this text, Kimmel, like Butler, asserts that gender is a product of social, cultural and historic context which has become intrinsically linked to the ways in which we construct and consider the related concepts of masculinity and femininity that are not constant but instead exist and evolve in a state of flux; 'If gender varies across cultures, over historical time, among men and women within any one culture, and over the life course, can we really speak of masculinity and femininity as though they were constant, universal essences, common to all women and to all men? If not, gender must be seen as an ever –changing fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviours' (Kimmel 2004, p10).

Kimmel elaborates on the ways in which these contexts have influenced existing views of gender to create standards and stereotypes of ideal masculinity and ideal femininity. He suggests that 'In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant , father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports...Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself- during moments at least- as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior' citing Erving Goffman *Stigma* 1963 (Kimmel 2004, p10). Similarly, he goes on to explain that 'Women contend with an equally exaggerated ideal of femininity, which Connell (*RW Connell- Gender and Power 1987*) calls "emphasized femininity". Emphasized femininity is organized around compliance with gender inequality, and is "oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" ...Emphasized femininity exaggerates gender difference as a strategy of "adaptation to men's power"' (Kimmel 2004, p11).

These concepts of idealised and stereotyped masculinities and femininities are helpful to the understanding within this study of what theorists such as Laura Kipnis call 'hypermaculinity' and 'hyperfemininity'. In her book *The Female Thing: Dirt, Sex, Envy Vulnerability*, she focuses on what it means to be female, the ways in which women construct their femaleness within the context of these gendered ideals, and the privileging of this hyperfemininity or 'ultrafemininity' within contemporary popular culture.

The text itself is neatly divided into the four sections; Envy, Sex, Dirt, and Vulnerability, and is essentially a critique of current states of 'femaleness', femininity and female sexuality. In it, Kipnis argues that it is modern woman's constant sense of inadequacy that prevents her from 'having it all'; and that the key contributing factor to this inadequacy is what she calls the 'vast psycho commercial conglomerate' (Kipnis 2007, p9). This is the multi-billion dollar industry that markets itself as a source of help and guidance for women in their quest to achieve perfection. Kipnis, however, aptly describes its primarily capitalist function, explaining that 'your self-loathing and neurosis are somebody else's quarterly profits' (Kipnis 2007, p10). *The Female Thing* renounces female sub-cultures generated and perpetuated by the mass media including what she calls 'professional girlfriends'. These 'girlfriends' disseminate advice aimed at the self improvement of all women and are frequently found between the pages of glossy magazines. While telling women that they can and should have it all, they simultaneously act as constant reminders that a woman will never achieve 'perfection', a point underlined in Kipnis' chapter on *Envy* which suggests that women always have and always will be left with a feeling of wanting more or that something is missing from their lives.

In the chapter on *Sex*, Kipnis renounces the legacy of Freudian theories of female sexuality such as the notion of distinguishing 'mature' (vaginally stimulated) from 'immature' (clitorally stimulated) orgasms. Despite the academic, psychological and medical evidence that has since contradicted Freud, Kipnis observes that women who cannot achieve the former (according to the Hite Report on Female Sexuality of 1976 this accounts for approximately 70% of women surveyed) admit to feelings of sexual inadequacy. In her chapter on *Dirt*, these sentiments of inadequacy recur once more, not only when discussing a woman's domain but also her own

body. Kipnis suggests that woman's desire for cleanliness is rooted in the way patriarchy has historically treated the female body as dirty in both the physical and the sexual sense.¹⁹

The issue of female identity and in turn, sexuality being moulded by the media and by the beauty and fashion industries is one which is particularly pertinent to research on the topic of Raunch Culture. In fact it is on this very premise that this culture has been built and been allowed to grow. Kipnis' arguments, though presented in an off-beat, deprecating and humorous way, are hugely applicable to this research topic and the society and sub-cultures that surround it. The text itself is important in the context of this study, therefore, essentially because it succeeds in linking traditional feminist theories and women's historic struggles with contemporary attitudes to sexuality, popular culture and as a result, Raunch Culture.

In a similar way, Natasha Walter, in her 2010 text *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* analyses and criticises these cultural influences on the ways in which we construct gender, and is particularly critical of the resurgence of popularity enjoyed by traditional, deterministic and essentialist definitions of gender, sex and sexuality. In it, Walter apologetically acknowledges her 1990 work *The New Feminism* in which she had suggested that the feminist battle had been won and states 'I am ready to admit I was entirely wrong' (Walter 2010, p8). In *Living Dolls*, she observes a return to traditional sexism and gender stereotypes which have been repackaged through media and other capitalist structures in such a way that encourages women to embrace them, to consume them and to thereby become supposedly 'empowered' by them. In fact, the entire second half of the text concerns itself with this 'new determinism' and the ways in which it constructs 'proper' girls as 'princesses' who were born to love all things pink, who are not as logical as their mathematically oriented male counterparts but who are, instead, 'emotional' and 'caring', destined for a life of homemaking as opposed to corporate domination.

The problem as Walter sees it is that this determinism, embraces rigid definitions of sex and gender which are packaged as scientific 'fact' while simultaneously ignoring the significant influences of social interaction, history and centuries of cultural messages. Like Kimmel who

¹⁹ to highlight this, Kipnis uses the example of the Kalahari Bushman who 'believes that if a man sits on the female side of his hut his virility will be weakened' (Kipnis 2007, p86).

asserts that 'Many of the differences between women and men that we observe in our everyday lives are actually not *gender* differences at all, but differences that are the result of being in different positions or in different arenas' (Kimmel 2004, p11), she believes that this new tendency towards determinism both within academic approaches to sexuality and within popular cultural texts is extremely limiting in terms of understanding gender and eliminating stereotypes 'What is fashionably called stereotype threat we might call social conditioning, or sexism, but whatever words we use to describe this phenomenon, it is time to become more alert to the impact the new fashion for biological determinism might have on strengthening stereotypes in everyday life and therefore on holding back the possibility of greater equality' (Walter 2010, p208).

These sentiments are also echoed by Myra Hird (2004), in her book *Sex, Gender and Science*, who also sees determinist and essentialist approaches to sex and gender as both restrictive and potentially blinding to possibilities that extend beyond the realm of biological fact; 'The invocation of biology limits the ways in which we are able to talk about social constructionism. Reliance upon a nebulous understanding of biology reifies a binary relationship between 'sex' and 'gender' such that explorations of gender are authorised upon the condition that 'sex' is left largely intact' (Hird 2004, p2).

She is also critical of the ways in which determinist analysis of the areas of sex and gender prioritise and privilege reproductive sex as 'natural', stating that: 'Sexual reproduction is not a reliable signifier of 'sex' or 'sex differences' for the following reasons. First, not all women sexually reproduce: up to 30 percent of the world's female population does not sexually reproduce. Second, reproduction does not have much to do with sex. Finally, kinship, the culturally ostensible "point" of sexual reproduction, is by no means assured; as Haraway (1989) argues, sexual reproduction in fact precludes kinship' (Hird 2004, p88). Hird's work is unapologetically rooted in feminist and social constructionist views of sex and gender and her opposition to a tendency towards biological categorisation, classification and definition within these areas has informed the chosen methodological framework of this study.

The work of Hird, therefore, and of the other writers discussed within this chapter highlight the ways in which traditional definitions of gender have informed and shaped how female sexuality

is considered, adopted and enacted in the twenty first century. Walter and Kipnis, in particular, draw their readers' attention to the ways in which standards of 'proper' maleness and femaleness are perpetrated, promoted and reinforced through the popular media and other cultural forms. This is an area of research that has been considered at length by academics and more specifically, *feminist* researchers since the middle of the twentieth century, often in terms of the two related categories of 'the body' and 'sex and sexuality'.

Given the vital role that representations of the female body play in the realm of Raunch, it was necessary, for the purposes of this review, to examine literature which deals explicitly with the body and more specifically the female body as a social construct. One writer who has produced seminal work in this area is Susan Bordo with her 1993 collection of essays *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. This work investigates contemporary social norms relating the body and the homogenisation of standards of beauty in Western (popular) culture asserting that 'culture's grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life' (Bordo 1993, p17) and that 'success comes only from playing by the cultural rules' (Bordo 1993, p31).

The notion of playing by social and cultural standards and rules is central to a study of Raunch Culture and particularly to the driving force behind consent and acquiescence to the unwanted socio-sexual experiences explored within this thesis. Nancy Friday's work on female sexual fantasy, therefore, acts as an extremely important reference point for female sexuality due to the fact that fantasy, by its very nature, allows the fantasist to enjoy full sexual freedom and to be whomever she wants to be. The book itself was written in 1973 as a compilation of sexual fantasies which were contributed voluntarily by women through letters and interviews. Despite the apparent freedom afforded to these women in their fantasy worlds, however, what emerges throughout their descriptions and through Friday's own contextual notes is that in their 'real' lives and their interactions with others and with their sexual partners, this is a freedom they cannot fully enjoy.

In fact, many of the accounts vehemently assert that under no circumstance could they share these imaginary scenarios with their male partners due to a fear that they may disgust or repel that partner or that they may upset him and make him feel that he is not enough for them 'I have led him to believe that I don't often think of sexual things. If anything he might have his

feelings hurt by such a revelation because he often expresses doubts about his sexual attractiveness to women' Maria (Friday 1973, p26). This supports traditional attitudes towards female sexuality which places the woman as the gatekeeper of male sexuality, often at the expense of her own enjoyment and highlight the fine line that women have to tread in relation to their sexual desires, pleasures and expression.

This notion that women must adhere to a set of sexual rules and guidelines is one which is further reinforced in Bordo's insistence that much of male domination and female subordination is 'reproduced voluntarily through our self normalisation of everyday habits of masculinity and femininity' (Bordo 1993, p262), i.e. that even in the absence of visible and overt inequality, men and women alike contribute to this cycle of subordination through the acceptance of gender norms.

Bordo's repetition of the idea that cultural standards and norms are ingrained in every day social life and dictate the 'habitus' of a society, is key to any discussion of the enormous capacity for control Raunch Culture has over Western society and its members. The fact is that such a culture does not wield physical or political power over these members; instead, it engrains itself so deeply within its collective psyche that it becomes normalised and homogenised within the habitus of that society.

It is this homogenisation that is elaborated upon by Naomi Wolf in her seminal text *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used Against Women*. In this work, Wolf echoes Bordo's assertion that these standardised versions of womanhood and femininity are having a profound effect on the way women view their bodies and their sexuality '...our culture...censors representations of women's bodies so that only official versions are visible. Rather than seeing images of female desire or that cater to female desire, we see mock-ups of living mannequins, made to contort and grimace, immobilised and uncomfortable under hot lights, professional set pieces that reveal little about female sexuality' (Wolf 1991, p135-6).

Like Walter she acknowledges the subversion of feminist agency within popular cultural representations of women and the female body that present a new form of consumable femininity as a form of empowerment, noting the 'relationships between female liberation and

female beauty' (Wolf 1991, p9). Similarly, she echoes Kipnis' views on the ways in which women, through these standards of beauty are encouraged within popular discourse to adhere to standards of physical and sexual attractiveness, and likens the achievement of this goal to the attainment of currency or capital 'Beauty is a currency system' (Wolf 1991, p12). This is central to any debate on Raunch Culture's impact on female sexuality and engages heavily with debates on the importance placed on 'hotness' therein, and will be discussed further in the second section of this chapter.

Hand-in-hand with these representations of the female body, then, are representations of female sex and sexuality. Within literature on this topic, female sexuality has been traditionally represented as passive, submissive and reliant on that of men. This is a phenomenon which is discussed and analysed in the text *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World* edited by Richard Parker and John Gagnon. The text documents the historic progression of this discourse and consists of a series of essays examining the various facets of sex research and how it has evolved. In her chapter on *La mise en discours and silences in research on the history of sexuality*, Kacrin Lutzen expands on Foucault's discussion of sexual discourse; on the silencing of sex, the overt discourse then generated on the silencing of sex and the resultant overt sexual discourse that exists in the form of Raunch Culture today. Lutzen, like Foucault, asserts that society has a habit of reading between the lines even when there is silence and always finding sex therein.

Particularly relevant to this study, too, is Loril Heise's chapter on *Violence, Sexuality and Women's Lives* which discusses the existence of sexual coercion even within consensual relationships. In it Heise, like Bordo, explores the notion that coercion can exist undetected within the institutionalisation of social norms and beliefs 'whether justified by biological arguments or socio-cultural determinism these beliefs can rationalise inaction' (Heise 1995, p124). She goes on to dissect accepted gender norms that portray men as aggressors and women as passive receptors, and the effect of these norms on contemporary sexual identities. This contribution is essential to any study of Raunch Culture and the hetero-normative machismo it propagates.

The Cultural Construction of Sexuality edited by Patricia Caplan is a similar collection of essays by writers such as Jeffrey Weeks, Margaret Jackson and Victor J. Seidler. Weeks' focus in his chapter *Questions of Identity* is based in social constructionist thinking and documents the development of sexology from Von Krafft Ebing through to Kinsey. He discusses the process of naming, labelling and categorisation in the study of sexuality and the way in which this process is connected to the formation of sexual identity for a society and for an individual.

Following on from this train of thought Jackson's chapter *Facts of Life, or the eroticisation of women's oppression? Sexology and the social construction of heterosexuality*, explores these identities from a feminist perspective which is heavily critical of the biologically determinist discourses and norms generated by sexology. She asserts, in much the same way as Segal in *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* (1994), that the sexual revolution, far from granting women sexual autonomy, simply acted as a means of legitimating and increasing male sexual access to women and that sexology, from Havelock Ellis and Kinsey to Masters and Johnson, has done the same. She considers this a hetero-normative approach to sexuality which is based on the premise that coitus is the ultimate 'natural' sexual act and portrays female resistance to men's aggressive sexual advances in the context of animal courtship i.e. that it is not genuine resistance but part of their urge to be conquered and men's urge to conquer, a process Jackson calls the eroticisation of oppression.

Jackson's arguments make a significant contribution to the basis of this study in that she rejects essentialist theories that place heavy emphasis on what is 'natural' thereby rejecting real female experiences of sexuality. It is this biological determinism upon which Raunch Culture has been built and on which patriarchal gender norms have been proliferated for centuries. According to Jackson it is this approach that can be blamed for the many barriers that have stood in the way of complete female sexual autonomy for centuries.

These arguments by Jackson regarding patriarchal normativity and what Segal calls the 'coital imperative' are supported empirically by the work of Shere Hite, most notably in *The Hite Report on Female Sexuality*, published in 1976. In an essay questionnaire of 50 questions, Hite accumulated the opinions of 3,500 women. The subsequent report documented how girls as young as fourteen and women as old as seventy eight felt about sexuality and in particular their

own. The findings documented the way in which female sexuality was regarded and addressed by society at the time and through the use of personal accounts of individual women, painted a clear picture of female sexuality in the wake of the sexual revolution.

According to the report, there are common trends and themes in the ways women view their own sexuality and in the way they believe it is viewed in a wider context. Among these common threads is the notion that the sexual revolution did very little for the emergence and development of female sexuality due to the fact that its primary focus was not on the development of pleasure as a concept but on what Hite called the 'glorification of intercourse'. Commented on in popular cultural texts of the period such as the James Bond films of the 1960s and 70s, the 'revolution' placed importance on the acquisition of as many partners in intercourse as possible. Essentially male-driven, this movement, according to the women surveyed by Hite, brought discourse even further away from the topic of female pleasure and instead prioritised intercourse (i.e. heterosexual coitus) as the ultimate sexual act, an act through which only 30% of women surveyed had ever reached orgasm.

This report by Hite, remains today one of the most extensive and relevant studies of female sexual attitudes and behaviour ever conducted. In the context of this particular thesis, it is vital in highlighting the disparities that exist between the ways in which society views heterosexual sexuality at any given period and the way it is viewed simultaneously by women. A prime example of this disparity is the widespread and highly publicised belief perpetuated by popular culture that women are now more sexually free than ever before, this starkly contrasts the current crisis among young women affecting the development of their sexual identities, which will be developed further within this thesis.

This message of sexual freedom is one which is propagated through what academics now call the sexualisation of culture. These sexualisation processes are both wide and varied and the term Raunch Culture is often used interchangeably with the term 'pornification'. For the purposes of this study, however, *pornification* can be used to describe the process by which pornography has been mainstreamed within popular culture and the popular media over the past 20 years including the proliferation of facets of the sex industry such as pole dancing, the changing in status of visual and audio visual material from soft-core pornography to mainstream

imaging and the greater acceptance of pornography as a fact of life rather than something relegated under that which is taboo or obscene. Raunch Culture or the 'sexualisation of culture' on the other hand is used to refer to types of discourses that surround these processes and the ways in which these messages are communicated, mainstreamed, received, interpreted and applied on a daily basis.

Among those who have engaged directly in such debate are writers such as Pamela Paul and Ariel Levy who's respective texts *Pornified: How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships and Our Families* and *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* act as pivotal works in this study of Raunch Culture, its development and its impact on the current status of female sexuality. Other texts such as Rodger Streitmatter's *Sex Sells: The Media's Journey from Repression to Obsession* and Imelda Whelehan's *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* act as commentaries on sexuality in the context of contemporary popular culture. Robert Jensen, similarly, focuses on current trends in sexuality in his text *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* and emphatically renounces the generation, distribution and consumption of pornography.

Whelehan's Brit-centric *Overloaded* is a critique of popular culture which places particular emphasis on the developments that occurred in the representation of women and of feminism in the United Kingdom during the 1990s. The book illustrates the impact postfeminism has had on these representations and the cultural phenomena that have developed as a result. Focusing on the emergence of the 'ladette', anti-feminist irony and the notion of "girly" culture (as well as its male equivalent; "laddism"), Whelehan launches an unapologetic strike against postfeminist rhetoric and the stereotypes it has generated, particularly those portrayed in British popular culture.

One such stereotype highlighted in the text is that of 'Bridget Jones', a character created by author Helen Fielding in her fictional journal *Bridget Jones' Diary*. In this first person account, Bridget considers herself a feminist, despite the fact that feminist ideologies conflict heavily with her chosen path of self-improvement in the name of 'getting a man'²⁰. This Victorian duality of

²⁰ For example, when Bridget claims to be reading Faludi's *Backlash* but is in fact concealing the 'self help' book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*

femininity (the strong independent thinker versus the helpless girly figure) is mirrored by Fielding's frequent references to Jane Austen and the naming of the primary male character after Austen's Mr. D'Arcy. This is a dichotomy that Whelehan renounces throughout the text, noting incredulously (and echoing the sentiments of Kipnis) the fact that women are encouraged by all facets of culture and the media to be independent, (financially, emotionally *and* socially) and yet, the subtext always exists that without a man, none of these achievements is of any value. This is expounded in the sentiments of Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine who famously stated that '...a woman without a man, even if she is successful professionally and in her other relationships- is a failure' (Streitmatter 2003, p75).

From the same period in popular culture as Bridget Jones came the ladette. Embodied by tabloid staples of the 1990s such as Radio DJs Sarah Cox and Zoe Ball, ladettes were 'glamorised tomboys' (Whelehan 2000, p51) who were encouraged to 'develop their own language for dealing with sexual inequality...a raunchy language of 'shagging, snogging and having a good time'' (Whelehan 2000, p80).

Heavily influenced by the writer's feminist leanings, *Overloaded* is a text which is aggressive in its assertion that these postfeminist ideologies are media-generated and are ultimately detrimental to the future of feminism. In Whelehan's view these postfeminists saw feminism as a dirty word used to describe sexless women who loathed men. Echoing June Hannam's (2007) description of the movement as an attack on feminism, the text, like many others in this particular genre including *Female Chauvinist Pigs* and *Pornified*, suggests that it is this thinking that has led to the development and phenomenal growth of what has since come to be called Raunch Culture. Though the text focuses almost exclusively on examples from 1990's Britain, the postfeminist media and the ladette phenomenon still have resonance in Raunch Culture as it currently stands. As a result, this text is as useful in the interpretation of, though perhaps not as relevant to, this particular research topic as the more recent works of Paul and Levy.

Similar to Whelehan's *Overloaded* in terms of its direct use of contemporary popular texts to illustrate the influence of such texts on sexuality is Rodger Streitmatter's 2004 book *Sex Sells*. In this book Streitmatter comments on the representation of sex and sexuality in American popular culture. Each chapter takes an example from this culture and uses it to chronologically highlight

the developments that have occurred in the selling of sex (as well as the use of sex for selling) and the ways in which it is consumed by American society. These chapters include references to the ever-increasing popularity of *Playboy* magazine particularly focussing on its introduction of soft core pornography to mainstream culture; the hairy chested virility portrayed in the James Bond films of the 1960s and 1970s and the revolutionary changes in attitudes to sex brought about by television shows such as *Sex and the City* and *Queer as Folk*.

Particularly pertinent to research on the topic of Raunch Culture in Streitmatter's text is the mainstreaming of pornography instigated almost single-handedly by the *Playboy* brand. Mirroring the 'dollybird' of the 1950s and '60s in Whelehan's work, Streitmatter discusses the marketing of *Playboy* models as the embodiment of naivety and girlishness. He describes, like Kate Millet before him, the use of the iconic bunny emblem, which equates the image of a woman with that of a docile plaything. This symbolism is extremely significant when discussing Raunch Culture due to the fact that this image of childlike, pliable sexuality has not only remained constant in the pages of *Playboy* but has also lasted as a staple throughout the pornography and adult entertainment industries. It is upon this ultra-femininity that contemporary standards of commercial sexuality such as those bolstered by pornography are based, and which can be found advertised in every facet of Raunch Culture today.

Also extremely relevant to the study of Raunch Culture, is Streitmatter's analysis of television show *Sex and the City*, in which women are shown to 'consume men like fast food' (Streitmatter 1003, p200) and which, despite going off-air in 2004, remains in Ireland's 'most wanted' box sets list in 2012²¹. This particular programme is one that revolutionised the way in which female sexuality is depicted in the media and which was instrumental in the propulsion of Raunch Culture out of the 1990s and into the twenty first century. Unlike the neurotic Bridget Jones characters of early 1990s fiction, who based her sexual choices on the marriage potential of her partners, the show's female characters provide *for themselves* the benefits for women traditionally associated with marriage. They have their friends for companionship and are financially independent, the only role men need to play in their lives, therefore, is that of sexual playmates. The show, as a result, famously extolled the virtues of no-strings sex and thereby

²¹ According to Irish movie store *Xtravision*'s website
http://www.xtravision.ie/moviescollection/most_wanted_boxsets

succeeded in replicating *for women*, the stereotypical male promiscuity advertised in the media since the 1980s.

Although valuable and concise in its references to popular texts and their influence on Western society's attitudes to sex and sexuality, this particular work is more successful in giving an overview of how sexuality is sold and consumed in American society than providing any clear conclusions as to the impact this commodification of sex has on that society and its consumers. It is largely US-centric in its focus, but the relevance of textual examples such as the globally renowned *Playboy* and *Sex and the City* are highly pertinent to the central theme of this research. Though unwaveringly objective throughout, the subtle focus of the text is on the impact that the marketing of sex has had on female sexuality in particular over the last sixty years. In the context of research on the topic of Raunch Culture, therefore, this book is successful in highlighting extremely influential examples of contrived sexualities in popular culture. Its lack of empirical research and heavy reliance on observation, however, make it more relevant as a starting point for investigation and discussion than a solid point of reference in terms of academic writing on the subject.

Works that have acted as both the basis for this research topic, and the driving force behind its development are those of Ariel Levy and Pamela Paul; Levy herself having coined the phrase 'Raunch Culture' in the title of her 2006 work *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. Both writers take very different approaches to their writing, with Levy preferring the method of observation favoured by both Streitmatter and Whelehan above and Paul conducting thorough investigations into attitudes towards and consumption of pornography in the US through her *Pornified*/ Harris Poll.

Levy's book, though lacking strong empirical findings such as those found in Paul's work, has proved valuable primarily because it labelled and classified a social and cultural phenomenon that had until then not been named. Like both Whelehan and Streitmatter before her she draws on obvious examples from popular culture such as the sexuality portrayed by the *Playboy* brand and by television shows like *Sex and the City* and *Girls Gone Wild*. The text does not aim to expose any secrets of sexual deviance or of underground sexualities, and the examples used by Levy are familiar to most consumers of Western popular culture. This is a device used to

illustrate the fact that Raunch is a phenomenon that has thoroughly infiltrated the mainstream and is so ingrained in popular culture that until *Female Chauvinist Pigs* gave it its title, had been dismissed as simply another example of the media's exploitation of sex and sexuality. The implications for a culture like this, as Levy points out, however, are far more wide-reaching and potentially detrimental to female sexuality than may commonly be believed. One example she uses to illustrate this point is of the impact that Raunch Culture has had on the sexuality of pre-teen girls. Like Paul, Levy draws upon documented incidents of girls as young as twelve creating pornographic videos of themselves for dissemination among their male contemporaries, often on the internet. Links are made within the text between the glamorisation of the sex industry, as seen in the example of Jenna Jameson (see Case Study within this chapter), and the fact that fame and fortune achieved at the cost of selling your sexuality, is seen as aspirational for women in the twenty first century (it is now possible, for example, to purchase vests for newborn infants bearing the slogan 'Porn Star in Training'). This is a notion that Levy explores throughout the text and one which is central to any discussion regarding Raunch Culture.

Levy's approach, though neither unique nor seminal in terms of its academic merit, is coherent and structured in the way it defines Raunch. Read in isolation, though interesting and resonant in the daily life of most Western adults, this text could be considered whimsical or even, from a postfeminist perspective, an overreaction to discourse on sexuality. In the context of *this* particular research topic however, and of the literature reviewed above, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, through its concise definition of Raunch Culture and a documentation of its manifestation in popular culture, is central to this study and to any discussion of Raunch Culture's potential implications for female sexuality.

Though more academic in its approach, Pamela Paul's *Pornified*, plays a similar role to *Female Chauvinist Pigs* in the context of this particular area of research. Though the title takes an apparent anti-porn stance, the text is written from a balanced and objective standpoint, rejecting emotional expression in favour of the use of empirical evidence to support the notion that pornography is negatively impacting twenty first century Western society. Having conducted the Pornified/ Harris Poll, Paul takes from it, both male and female case studies to illustrate current attitudes towards pornography and the way in which it is consumed in the United States. At its most damaging, Paul found that addiction to the use of pornography can

have the same devastating effects as any other form of addiction. Like other addictions, continuous use numbs the initial thrill felt by users, leading them to seek out 'harder' material (which, according to Paul's case studies, often involves violent images such as those depicting rape, and may even include animals and children).

Probably even more startling, however, are the findings relating to users who are not considered addicts but whose lives are still damaged by pornography, most significantly their romantic and sexual relationships. Included among these are men who experience sexual dysfunction from over-use and others who claim that if a future girlfriend insisted that they cease using pornography, they would either discontinue their relationship or lie to her regarding their usage²².

Using examples such as these, along with figures from the Pornified/ Harris Poll, Paul attempts to define what Levy termed Raunch Culture and she herself describes as a 'pornified' culture. She too focuses on the global acceptance of a one-dimensional female sexuality and describes women's involvement in that process as 'acting out some male construct of what sexual desire is supposed to look like' (Paul 2006, p110). While Jensen (2007) places the blame for pornography's detrimental impact on human sexuality upon those profiting from selling pornographic material as well as any man who consumes it, Paul takes a more rounded approach, observing the faults of the industry while simultaneously attempting to explain the reasoning behind contemporary attitudes to pornography and the majority's passive acceptance of the pornification of mainstream society and culture.

As a result, though both texts extol the benefits of a porn-free society, due to Jensen's emotionally charged subjectivity, it is *Pornified* that is most successful in encouraging debate and discussion on twenty first century consumption of pornography and whether or not there is a case for censorship. However, despite postfeminist depictions of anti-pornography feminists as 'anti-sex', it appears from her arguments that (like those surveyed by Hite) it is precisely *because* she is pro-sex and sexuality that Paul is so unapologetically anti-pornography in her writing of the text.

²² This suggests a prioritisation of pornographic sexuality over the experiences of *lived* sexualities and relationships within the lives of these men

This is a seminal text in the research of Raunch Culture's impact on sexuality. When juxtaposed with Levy's work, *Pornified* begs the question of whether it is the pornification of culture that has led to the development of a Raunch Culture or whether in fact as Levy suggests, pornography is simply a facet of Raunch Culture and that the mainstreaming of the former can be attributed primarily to the latter. For the purposes of this research topic it is necessary to consider the broader concept of Raunch Culture in relation to female sexuality but also to view pornography and the pornification of society as a significant contributing force to the development and endurance of Raunch.

These types of debates are also engaged in by academics such as MG Durham who is similarly critical of these media-led processes and, in her book *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualisation of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It*, she analyses the ways in which they are effecting the early sexualisation of pre-teen girls 'The media aimed at girls have been quick to capitalise on this ... they work hard to ensure that sexiness is central to girls' consciousness, and they target preadolescents as well as teenagers with sexually charged messages' (Durham 2009, p66). In the text she also highlights the importance placed by these media on 'hotness', a concept central to this thesis, and states 'Hot is the highest accolade a girl can get' (Durham 2009, p67). Her focus, however, is not on censoring Raunch Culture or on shielding girls and young women from discourse on sexuality. Instead she asserts that they do not need 'rescuing' from sex, 'rather they need our respect and attention as they explore what should be a healthy and natural part of their lives as they become adults' (Durham 2009, p13). The book itself is aimed at guardians of girls and young women and despite its criticism of media-led sexualities, is pro-sex and promotes honest and open discourse with young people about sex and sexuality.

Feona Attwood, on the other hand, engages with these 'sexualisation of culture' debates from a more academic standpoint. Her work on the subject is prolific and includes an analysis of recent trends in pornography and its consumption ('*Reading Porn: The Paradigm Shift in Pornography Research*', '*No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography and New Sex Taste Cultures*') as well as a direct engagement with processes of sexualisation and the ways in which it is dealt with and discussed as a concept within academic literature ('*Sexualisation, Sex and Manners*', '*Sexed Up: Theorizing the Sexualisation of Culture*'). Her writings provide a thorough academic observation of sexualisation processes and demonstrate an interest in its effects on social interaction. Unlike

the work of writers such as Levy, Paul, Whelehan and Walter, however, Attwood's is less overt in its criticism of these sexualisation processes and instead focuses on the need for a greater level of discourse on the topic.

Similar in its observational approach to the subject is the work of Rosalind Gill whose critical analysis of representations of sexuality within advertising has exposed the extent to which sexual and gender stereotypes have seen resurgence within this medium with the sexualisation of culture. In her paper *Beyond the 'Sexualization of Culture' Thesis: An Intersectional Analysis of 'Sixpacks', 'Midriffs' and 'Hot Lesbians' in Advertising* she argues, as the title suggests that academic discourse should move beyond the 'sexualisation of culture' thesis due to the fact that she perceives sexualisation as 'far from being a singular or homogenous process, that different people are 'sexualized' in different ways and with different meanings – and indeed that many remain excluded from what has been called the "democratization of desire' operating in visual culture' (Gill 2009, p137).

Gill further expands on this notion of the 'democratization of desire' in a further article on advertising and uses the conventions of the 'sixpack', the 'midriff' and the 'hot lesbian' to demonstrate the ways in which media representations of sexuality continue to perpetrate one dimensional stereotypes. The midriff in particular is pertinent to this study as it represents the 'ideal' woman as she is portrayed in advertising. She asserts that 'midriff advertising involves a shift in the way that power operates: it entails a move from an external male-judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic one (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). In this sense, it represents a more 'advanced' or pernicious form of exploitation than the earlier generation of objectifying images to which second-wave feminists objected – because the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime. '.. Not only are women objectified (as they were before), but through sexual subjectification in midriff advertising *they must also now understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen....* In contemporary midriff advertising... (some) women are endowed with the status of active subjecthood so that they can 'choose' to become sex objects. One of the implications of this shift is that it renders critique much more difficult, for the mode of power is not external oppression but regulation and discipline that take up residency in the psyche by, quite literally, producing new subjectivities' (Gill 2008, p45-6).

This is an argument that is closely linked to Durham's observation of the importance of 'hotness' within Raunch Culture and its implications for female self-regulation and a shift of power towards an internal discipline. These concepts are central to the key research questions of this thesis and, in particular, the related concepts of female sexual empowerment, choice and autonomy.

Case Study: Raunch Culture in Context

A number of non-academic texts also lend themselves to an analysis of Raunch Culture and provide textual examples of first person accounts of women directly involved in its development. These include documented experiences of 'exotic dancers', prostitutes and 'porn stars' which are predominately autobiographical, or taken in some way from the real sexual experiences of the author. Among these writers are women who work, or have worked, in the sex industry including prostitutes (Belle du Jour, 2005), strippers (Egan, Frank and Johnson eds 2006) and so called 'porn stars' (Jameson, 2005). Recently, however, this category of literature has also come to include diary style confessions written as a form of literary kiss-and-tell which graphically depict the sexual attitudes, desires and behaviours of women who, unlike the authors mentioned above, have no direct link to the sex industry (Townsend, 2007 and Lee, 2006). Though authors are not always female²³ they are in a vast majority in this genre of literature (in similar proportion to the number of women there are to men working in the sex industry).

If these texts share a common thread it is that they each adopt the one-dimensional model of female sexuality mentioned above in the discussion on Clarke, and in most cases, serve to glamorise the brand of sexuality contrived by the famously patriarchal sex industry. Mimicking Bridget Jones' style of pseudo-feminism (outlined in Whelehan's *Overloaded*) these female writers often brand themselves as feminists, or at least as postfeminists. In many cases, though not all, the authors are well educated and are eloquent both in the portrayal of their own sexuality and their assertion that Raunch Culture is a phenomenon which should be unequivocally embraced by any woman claiming to be 'sex positive'. The overriding view adopted by texts generated by this culture is that second wave notions such as the 'personal

²³ Jones, P. (2008) *The True Confessions of a London Spank Daddy* (Xcite Books, London) is one example of such a text being produced by a man

being political' and the power of solidarity are outdated and that sexuality as depicted in pornography and other facets of the sex industry is an empowering ideal to be aspired to.

Belle du Jour: Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl, is one such text. In it, 'Belle' the protagonist and author gives a polished account of her life as a prostitute in London, where descriptions of the exploits and demands of her clients are juxtaposed with stories of her personal relationships and the vicissitudes of her personal life. Details of her work, though sexually explicit, are emotionally equivocal and while allusions are made to the benefits of sex work such as keeping casual hours and the capacity to earn large amounts of money in a short space of time, few are made to any of the pitfalls traditionally synonymous with the sex industry such as the threat of violence, feelings of degradation and the obvious submission to male clients. In fact, the prostitute in this text is depicted as an empowered woman taking control of her own sexual destiny.

Jenna Jameson takes a similar approach in her autobiography *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star: A Cautionary Tale*. Arguably the most celebrated female in the pornography industry, Jameson uses the device of flashing forward and back from various periods of her life to illustrate her turbulent rise to fame as a so-called 'porn star'. Unlike Belle's educated, middle-class background, Jameson's life lacked the stability of either education or a strong family unit and her story includes descriptions of her decline into drug addiction and her violent relationships with men containing harrowing references to at least three instances of rape, including the loss of her virginity while she was unconscious, and a brutal gang rape when she was badly beaten and left for dead by her attackers. In the text she, like Belle, refers to her work-related sexual encounters in graphic detail without attaching the same level of detail to the personal emotion involved. Jameson ultimately depicts herself as sexually free despite the fact that her sexuality has been moulded from an early age by male aggression and that ever since she has made both life and career choices that perfectly fit that mould. She also refutes the notion that her sexual present could have been shaped by her violent past stating that she had "seen enough shrinks to know that".

Slightly different from the texts discussed above are those of Abbey Lee and Catherine Townsend. These are women who have chosen to make their sexual life and seemingly

voracious sexual appetites public by having their sexual memoirs published. Abbey Lee's alter ego the 'girl with a one track mind' began in her anonymous internet blog of the same name girlwithaonetrackmind.blogspot.com. Her identity was eventually discovered, however, shortly before the text of her blog was published as a book. Though emotionally more three dimensional, Lee's attitude towards men and sex could be read as indistinguishable from that of the character of Samantha Jones in the influential television programme *Sex and the City*, who pioneered the concept of 'having sex like a man'. Indeed, Lee's sexual life virtually apes that of stereotypical 'male' sexuality (referenced in Whelehan's *Overloaded*) in her acquisition of multiple partners and constant desire to explore sex acts which are traditionally associated with pornography. Typical of a text generated by Raunch Culture, *Girl with a One Track Mind* emphasises the importance of sexual desire, sexual empowerment and sexual freedom, while simultaneously mimicking the contrived sexuality advertised in pornography.

Catherine Townsend's *Sleeping Around* is a similar autobiographical account of sexuality. Like Lee she exhibits an insatiable desire for sex and sexual encounters whether with friends, acquaintances or strangers. She is unapologetic, even in the title of her book, for this desire and again, like both Lee and Belle du Jour, extols the virtues of separating emotion from sex. This is a notion central to the development of Raunch Culture, and one that contributes to the endurance of all facets of the sex industry by advertising sexuality as emotionless and therefore something that can be more easily commodified.

Though *Flesh for Fantasy, Producing and Consuming Exotic Dance* is similar to the above texts in that it is a product of Raunch Culture and contains autobiographical accounts of the experiences of workers within the sex industry, it differs dramatically in the fact that these writers are also academics. The text, consequently, has been edited to reflect this fact and places the experiences documented by the contributing authors in the broader contexts of feminism and female sexuality. This is a text, which is difficult to define in terms of its feminist stance. It is the only text within this body of research that encompasses work by writers who are both active purveyors and academic observers of Raunch Culture.

The authors of the essays that make up *Flesh for Fantasy* are self-professed ‘third wave strippers’, who describe their coming of age as being heavily influenced by the ‘riot grrl’ era²⁴, a period when the backlash of postfeminism had been embraced by the media and almost all facets of popular culture. Attempting to marry feminist rhetoric with what bell hooks called ‘lived theory’, the editors readily acknowledge the ‘paradoxes of simultaneously being subject to and subversive toward existing systems of power’ (Egan, Frank & Johnson eds 2006, introduction: pxv). Despite these attempts, however, readers of this text could be forgiven for assuming that its aim primarily is not to place sex work within a feminist context but to promote the sex worker as equal to workers in any other field and as deserving of equal working conditions. Though successful in portraying this and in its attempts to deconstruct traditional stereotypes of sex workers, *Flesh for Fantasy* avoids discussion on the stereotypes which are, in turn, perpetuated by these workers themselves. For example, while the text rejects the image of the promiscuous stripper whose future is destined to be dominated by the industry, it does nothing to renounce the continued one-dimensional sexuality routinely sold by the sex industry.

This is a text that is extremely valuable to a study on Raunch Culture, providing an academic perspective on the ‘lived theory’ of sex workers. It also raises (like the texts discussed above) important questions regarding the common depiction of the sex industry as glamorous and socially acceptable while the sex worker still remains on the periphery of mainstream society (highlighted in the anonymity sought by both Belle du Jour and Abbey Lee). This directly corresponds to the dichotomy within cultural depictions of female sexuality, as illustrated by Tolson (1994) that simultaneously celebrates and castigates women for expressing sexual desire ‘When their bodies take on women’s contours, girls begin to be seen as sexual, and sexuality becomes an aspect of adolescent girl’s lives. Yet ‘nice’ girls and ‘good’ women are not supposed to be sexual outside of heterosexual monogamous marriage’ Tolson (1994, p324).

Though the disparities between the backgrounds, circumstances and experiences of each of the above authors are great, their public image is almost identical. While Jameson’s emotionally and financially deprived upbringing contrasts starkly with the middle-class beginnings of Belle du Jour or Abbey Lee, in their guise as purveyors of Raunch, they are of equal status in that they all

²⁴ ‘Riot grrrl’ is a term used to describe a movement during the 1990s that saw an upsurge in popularity for female-led punk, rock and indie music bands that were frequently associated with aspects of both second and third wave feminisms

embody the glamorised sexuality advocated by this sub-culture. This notion of Raunch being a level playing field upon which women, regardless of class, race or financial status, can create a niche for themselves is one which needs to be explored by looking further at non-literary texts such as reality television, internet blogs, kiss-and-tell culture and the WaG phenomenon²⁵. It is a concept that encourages the exploitation of Raunch Culture as an open market where female sexuality can be traded easily for revenue and renown and which has begun to inspire debate at an academic level.

Female Sexual Autonomy

The literature reviewed so far has formed the basis of the theoretical framework of this thesis, which is rooted in feminist and social constructionist theories of sexuality. It has also contributed significantly to the painting of a chronological picture of female sexuality over the past century and the patriarchal power structures that have influenced it. In order to examine the possibility that Raunch Culture, and the male normative and heteronormative tradition it promotes, involves an element of socio-sexual coercion, it was also necessary to explore research that exists on the subject of sexual behaviour, language and activity that is consented to, but ultimately unwanted. This body of research comprises of, for the most part, journal articles and other short pieces of literature. While there are little or no weighty tomes to be found on the subject, those who have carried out the strands of research reviewed within this chapter, have contributed significantly to an otherwise under-researched field within the study of sexuality.

This body of literature, then, can be further separated into two distinct areas of research. The first of these is rooted in the field of psychology and analyses the behavioural, linguistic and psycho-social factors that *contribute* to the sources of sexual coercion and *influence* those who acquiesce to it. The second area is primarily concerned with first-hand experiences of unwanted sexual encounters such as these, the social reasons for them and the possible social implications that this phenomenon might have for female sexuality.

²⁵ WaG- used initially to describe the wives and girlfriends of the English football team during the 2006 World Cup, the term now denotes a woman whose lavish lifestyle is financed by their male partner

Among these texts is the empirical research of Livingston et al (2004)²⁶ on the role of sexual precedence in sexual coercion, a study which emphasises the notion that this type of coercion does not necessarily involve rape or physical force but a desire on the part of those who acquiesce to it to avoid unpleasant consequences such as feelings of rejection, disapproval, ridicule or the end of a relationship, should they refuse sex. The article affirms that this type of coercion is more likely than not to take place within established relationships and other situations where there has already been an investment of time and emotion. It also asserts that sexual precedence within those relationships can 'involve a sense of obligation to have sex, even when unwanted, reducing the perpetrator's need to use physical force' (Livingston et al 2004, p288) an assertion that is further reinforced by the perpetrator's sense of entitlement to sex where such precedence exists.

Among the 'gaining access strategies' listed in the article, are 'verbal persuasion, persistence, physical persuasion' (Livingston et al 2004, p290), threats to leave the relationship, hints that they could go elsewhere for sex and 'expressions of dissatisfaction with the woman' (Livingston et al 2004, p290). Those who consent to unwanted sexual encounters, cite feelings of guilt, obligation, fear and often that it is 'better to give in' (Livingston et al 2004, p291) as key contributing factors in their acquiescence.

Similar findings can be seen in Moira Carmody's (2005) critique of anti-rape education, Kitzinger and Frith's (1999) discussion on the use of conversation analysis to develop a feminist perspective on sexual refusal and O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen's (2006) article on young men's understanding of such refusals. All of these studies specifically focus on the power of language in refusing unwanted sex and the inadequacy of the 'just say no' approach advocated by mainstream rape-prevention rhetoric.

Carmody, for example, argues 'that many programmes referred to as rape prevention are in fact risk avoidance programmes' (Carmody 2005, p468) in that they focus on the teaching of refusal skills (saying 'no') to women, thereby placing the responsibility for being raped in the hands of the potential victim rather than the potential perpetrator. According to Carmody, this approach is heavily flawed from a feminist perspective for two major reasons. The first of these is the

²⁶ In Livingston et al's study, qualitative and descriptive statistics were used to examine the experiences of a community sample of 114 women of verbal sexual coercion and the role that sexual precedence had to play in those experiences

essentialist angle it adopts which assumes that women are 'naturally' passive and that men are 'natural' aggressors who cannot control their own urges. This also places women as agents within the process of rape and assumes that they can avoid such a violation by using prescribed language and techniques. Secondly, Carmody highlights that this approach also overlooks those numerous instances of rape and sexual coercion that occur within existing relationships, thereby ignoring the power of internal pressures within *couples*, such as precedence and non-verbal threats.

The rejection of the 'Just Say No' approach to avoidance of sexual coercion is further expanded upon in both O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen's (2006) and Kitzinger and Frith's (1999) articles. In the first of these *You Couldn't Just Say No, Could You?*, O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen deal with the contradictory views often held by young men when it comes to the language of sexual refusal. The piece supports the criticisms put forward by Carmody above of prescribed models of this type of refusal in order to avoid potential situations of rape or coercion 'Such thinking...suggests not only that women unconsciously emit invitations to (coerced) sex, but also that men are, simply 'hardwired' to rape' (*referencing Thornhill and Palmer 2000, O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen (2006, p134).*

The suggestion of its authors is to replace 'risk avoidance' strategies with a program that brings about change in 'societal beliefs about rape (myths) as well as beliefs about men and women' (*referencing Easteal 1992, O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen 2006, p134*). They argue that anti-rape sentiment is predominantly aimed at women and not at the male perpetrators of the crime. This is a sentiment which focuses on the 'miscommunication model' and affirms the need for a frank and open 'just say no' approach to sexual refusal. This article, however, rejects this notion by highlighting the fact that in almost all other aspects of social life, body language and socio-linguistic cues are considered sufficient responses to social advances, requests or suggestions and that 'the word 'no' is not even necessary to accomplish a refusal' (O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen 2006, p139).

When given the example of an everyday refusal such as turning down a friend's invitation to the pub, all of the men participating in this study, even those who initially advocated a 'direct approach' feel the need to elaborate on the reasons for their refusals or to accompany them with excuses or 'softening' language. Similarly, when asked how they would deal with refusing

sexual advances, all of the men advocated the use of hints or cues. 'John' for example suggested using clichés like "'I don't think this is a good idea...they know what you're trying to say because it's used all the time'" (O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen 2006, p140). Equally all of the men agree that they would not use the word 'no' in their refusals "'I'd (.)don't think I'd ever just say 'no'" (James), "You couldn't say 'no', could you" (George), "You don't wanna say 'no'" (John)' (O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen 2006, p140).

This replacement by the men of the word 'no' with such cues, and their collective inclination to 'soften' their hypothetical refusals with excuses, clichés or non-verbal signals is further supported by their belief that, in a situation where they would be at the receiving end of sexual refusal, these socially acquired techniques are a "'pretty good sign you're not on the same level'" (O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen 2006, p147). This unanimous acceptance on the part of the men who took part in the study that these cues are easily understood communications of refusal is in complete contention with the importance of saying 'no', purported by most rape prevention programs.

Kitzinger and Frith's (1999) article analysing the language of sexual refusal echoes these sentiments in its discussion of the use of conversation analysis (CA) to explore this contention. Again, they reiterate the failings of the essentialist approach to rape prevention and the way it is directed disproportionately at women. Using CA techniques, they report that, like the men in O'Byrne, Rapley and Hansen's study, the women questioned acknowledge the fact that 'refusals are *dispreferred* conversational actions' (Kitzinger and Frith 1999, p303) and that 'people usually hear refusals without the word 'no' necessarily being uttered' (Kitzinger and Frith 1999, p307). This piece also echoes the trend found abundantly in the previous article of 'softening' refusals through excuses, hints, body language etc. So common was this approach to refusal, in fact, that the authors draw the conclusion that 'saying immediate clear and direct 'no's (to anything) is not a normal conversational activity' (Kitzinger and Frith 1999, p310) and that 'For men to claim that they do not 'understand' such refusals to be refusals (because, for example they do not include the word 'no') is to lay claim to an astounding and implausible ignorance of normative conversational patterns' (Kitzinger and Frith 1999, p310).

Within this area of research there is a further body of literature that, unlike the works reviewed above which tackle the issue of society's prescribed models in relation to sexual coercion,

focuses on the *first hand* knowledge of those who have experienced unwanted sexual encounters, and the social conditions which have contributed to them. Among these examples are Anastasia Powell's (2008) use of Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and symbolic violence in her discussion of young people's negotiation of consent, Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras's (2008) study of *The Making of Unwanted Sex* and explorations by authors such as Jackson, Cram and Seymore (2000), Sionéan et al (2000) and Kathleen Basile (1999) of the instances of unwanted consensual encounters within existing relationships.

Powell's article investigates the relatively recent explosion of a sexual culture derived from pornography that has consumed the mass media and popular culture over the past three decades in Western society. The impact of this Raunch Culture is such that there is increased pressure on men and women alike not only to be sexually attractive and available, but to be seen as sexually adventurous, to be 'good' at having sex and despite these pressures, to always enjoy it. Such is the extent of the strength of this compulsion to attain and enjoy sex that Powell asserts that '63% of women...are experiencing sex 'not because they want to but because the felt it would be inappropriate to refuse'²⁷ (Powell 2008, p169).

These pressures, combined with the gender norms it promotes, are by-products of Raunch Culture which reduce the capacity of young women in particular to 'choose a different mode of sexual practice based on mutual and reciprocal and consensual sex' (Powell 2008, p170) and their level of agency in controlling (hetero) sexual encounters. This is seen by Powell as resulting from what Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence' a type of violence or coercion which 'is exercised upon an agent with his or her complicity' (Powell 2008, p173) and occurs at a pre-conscious level. It is a phenomenon that exists within all patriarchal systems and one which is compounded by Raunch 'limiting young women's ability to negotiate their love/ sex relationships on the basis of their own needs and desires' (Powell 2008, p176).

Powell's observations are also significant in the context of this study because they make a clear link between the culture we are born into and the impact that that culture can have on our lived attitudes and behaviours, even at a pre-conscious level. Using Bourdieu's concept of gender habitus she explains that 'certain gendered norms, values and dominant discourses come to be accepted as 'natural', 'normal' or 'the way things are' (Powell, 2008,

²⁷ Referencing Petretic-Jackson's 1987 study

p173) and although she acknowledges that 'social agents do indeed possess a 'margin of freedom'' (Powell, 2008, p172), she asserts that the power of symbolic violence is 'such, that while an individual may say 'I consented', the gendered rules of the game or structure of the field of heterosexual encounters, actually precludes assertive sexual refusal in many instances' (Powell, 2008, p173).

It is this loss of female sexual autonomy as a result of the male normative nature of this culture that is seen within this article as a major contributing factor to female acquiescence to unwanted sexual encounters. Overall, Powell's work has been important in the direction that this thesis has taken and her insight into the implications that a *pornified* culture can have for everyday female sexual autonomy, as a result of the stereotyped patriarchal gender norms it propagates, has made a significant contribution to the primary motivation of this study.

Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras (2006) also focus on the sexual pressures imposed by dominant neo-liberal rhetoric within societies on individuals and renounce categorically the presumption that consensual sexual encounters are necessarily *wanted* ones. They discuss 'how heteronormative expectations that women be visually and behaviourally pleasing to men, that women be devoid of independent sexual interests and motives and that men be perpetually and unquestioningly interested in sex interlock to disadvantage women and privilege men in negotiating terms of sexual and romantic engagement' (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras 2006, p387) and view the advertisement and promotion of female sexual freedom in the media and popular cultural texts as 'pseudo-empowerment' due to the strict confines within which that freedom is allowed to operate. These messages are regarded throughout the piece as being replete with double standards both in terms of gender norms and the expectations placed upon women within their own sexuality. Within the neo-liberal discourse of Raunch Culture, for example women are said to be sexually free but are simultaneously expected to be pleasing, permanently sexually available and all the while meeting the physical standards of *pornified* sexiness. According to textual examples of Raunch (e.g. Kipnis' 'professional girlfriends' found in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*) this is best achieved, not through liberated self-expression, but through prescribed, rigorous and perpetual consumption and self-improvement.

The authors of this piece also implicate the gender norms proliferated by this culture, as significant factors both in the occurrences of unwanted sexual encounters and the feelings of

responsibility experienced by those who acquiesce to them after they have occurred. Within the discussion, two coding categories were identified to distinguish the potential reasons for this acquiescence; 'Good Girlfriends Say Yes' which illustrates the sexual expectations placed upon women by society and 'Once Yes, Always Yes' which echoes the findings of Livingston et al in their study of the part precedence has to play in sexual coercion. These factors are further exacerbated by the verbal pressure that occurs 'in the moment' and culminate in full responsibility (endorsed by neo-liberal rhetoric) being assumed by the women involved after the fact.

This article is critical of this rhetoric as a force that alienates young women from 'the intellectual and activist tools, such as feminist critique...that are necessary to combat the conventional gender norms that leave them vulnerable to unwanted sex in the first place' (Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras 2006, p395). It rejects the 'laddism' and ironic sexism of Raunch Culture and thereby enhances and contributes largely to a study of female sexual autonomy such as the one at hand.

Articles by Kathleen Basile (1999), Sionéan et al (2002) and Jackson, Cram and Seymore (2000) delve further still into the exploration of these themes and focus their analysis of neo-liberal discourse, its promotion of symbolic violence and its destructive influence on everyday female sexual habitus, the sexual double standard and the development of an autonomous female sexuality. In her work on rape by acquiescence, Basile provides criticism of the 'centuries old legal ideal that excluded wives in definitions of rape' (Basile 1999, p1037), one which was endorsed in Ireland until very recently by Catholic teachings that a woman was obliged to have sex with her husband and that to deny him was a sin. She asserts, as have Livingston et al (2004) above, that where unwanted sex takes place within an established relationship, and where there is no physical force, the term 'rape' does not qualify so the experience often remains unnamed and 'those who give in have no shared language with which to describe the incidents' (Basile 1999, p1053).

In the interviews carried out by Basile to support her study, she identifies five situations of varying degrees in which unwanted sexual encounters tend to take place, ranging from the mild (which can even prove to be pleasurable) to those in which there exists a threat of real physical force. These degrees are identified by respondents to the study as follows: 'Unwanted Turns to

Wanted', where the woman may have shown resistance initially but begins to enjoy it once the sex has begun; 'It's My Duty' where an obligation is felt by the female partner to 'give in' (as detailed in Livingston et al 2004); 'Easier Not to Argue', where the consequences of refusal (e.g. guilt trip, verbal abuse, unkindness, withholding of affection etc) are more difficult to deal with than enduring the unwanted encounter; 'Don't Know What Might Happen if I Don't', where there is a fear of strong negative reaction by a partner (verbal threats, rough sex, adultery etc) if she does not acquiesce; and finally, in its most extreme form 'Know What Will Happen if I Don't', where prior experiences of physical force from a partner makes the woman fear actual violence or rape if she refuses. These fears, combined with past experiences of negative reactions by partners to refusals, often lead to the woman's acquiescence without any form of coercion being necessary.

In her conclusion, Basile asserts that common to all of these degrees of coercion and acquiescence, 'is the societal notion that women should sexually service their partners' (Basile 1999, p1054). This, along with the rhetoric endorsed by Raunch Culture that women are permanently sexually available to men, has left female sexual autonomy vulnerable to powerful inhibitive social restrictions, an idea which is central to the formation of this thesis and its focus.

The work of Jackson, Cram and Seymour (2000) and that of Sionéan et al (2002) also make significant contributions to this research through their investigation into this culture's reproduction of gender norms and sexual inequalities that are thus produced within young people's relationships.

Sionéan et al focus specifically on the refusal of unwanted sex among African-American female adolescents. They discuss refusal as a skill which is essential in negotiating and asserting one's own sexual autonomy and one which should be taught by society, not one which is rejected and ridiculed by popular social phenomena such as Raunch Culture. Jackson, Cram and Seymour echo this sentiment focusing on High School dating relationships in New Zealand. Like Basile, they found that no language or forum exists in which young women can openly discuss their experiences of unwanted consensual sex. They also highlight the relationship between gender and experiences of violence. Both of these texts reaffirm the motivation and outcomes of the research reviewed above.

The literature available on the subject of unwanted but consensual experiences, though not prolific, and certainly not as prevalent in sociological research as that of rape, is well structured and is important in the instigation of discourse in an area which has been silenced by Raunch Culture's neo-liberal, anti-victim rhetoric. It is an area that has broken new ground in the study of female sexual autonomy and which plays a central role in the development of this course of research, particularly in terms of women's negotiation of their sexual desires, pleasures, consent and refusals.

Irish Sexuality

At the beginning of this chapter, a review of literature was carried out that explored the implications of patriarchal power structures for female sexuality. With these implications in mind, it is important, for the purposes of this study, to place these discussions within an Irish context and to explore textual analysis of Irish 'femaleness' and, particularly, Irish female sexuality. Within Irish literature of this kind, academics have tended towards an historic focus on the topic that includes analyses of the legacy of the Catholic Church's lengthy grip on Irish society and the impact of the republican struggle on women's rights and female sexual autonomy.

Often, given the overlap of historical, cultural, sociological and gender theory within this broad area, these texts tend to be anthological in layout and comprise of collections of essays from a variety of disciplines. Among these are three texts, which have made a significant contribution to this area of research, *Irish Women's Voices Past and Present* edited by Joan Hoff and Moureen Coulter, *Gender and Sexuality in Ireland* edited by Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and *The Irish Women's Studies Reader* edited by Ailbhe Smyth.

All three anthologies are comprised of essays by a variety of academics discussing themes of gender, identity, nationality and sexuality and are primarily centred on two major themes that have recurred for women throughout the history of the Irish Free State. The first of these involves the discrepancy between the idealised notion of womanhood in Irish history defined by what Condon calls 'the self-sacrificing republican tradition' (Hoff and Coulter eds 1995, p160) and the real experience of Irish women.

Geraldine Meaney, for example, in her chapter in the *Irish Women's Studies Reader* (Smyth 1993) on *Sex and Nation* discusses how, in Ireland, sexual identity and national identity are often seen as mutually dependent, culminating in a portrayal of suffering 'Mother Ireland' that traditionally mirrored that of the self-sacrificing Irish mother. This is a point which is illustrated by Maryann Gialenetta Valiulis in her chapter on *Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State* (Hoff and Coulter 1995) who alludes to Eamonn deValera's (1932) portrayal of Margaret Pearse upon her death as an 'Irish Pieta' who instilled in her sons the values of republicanism and a love of Irish language and heritage and who was willing, ultimately, to sacrifice her life and her sons for Ireland. This idealised image is one which has done more to hinder than to aid the growth and development of Irish women and which has, in effect, served to relegate them to martyrdom and confine them to the realms of motherhood and domesticity by denying them direct access to a public or political identity. Instead, as Meaney asserts, their contribution to political life has been restricted to the teaching of republican rhetoric and Catholic doctrine within the sphere of their family home.

The second theme, which is common to all three texts, then, examines the practice in Ireland of State intervention into the rights, responsibilities and liberties of women, particularly in relation to issues of divorce, abortion, employment and contraception. During the first half of the twentieth century, for example, it was assumed that not only had women no real interest in public, political and economic issues but that they feared the public realm and anything that occurred outside of the domestic realm. This reinforced what Bradley and Valiulis (1997) call 'a nationalistic ideology in which women suffer and men are politically active' (Bradley & Valiulis eds. 1997, p3). In fact, those who wished to take an active role outside of the home were not considered normal either by the State or by the Church at that time. The Irish female during this period was depicted as dependent, childlike, incapable and passive and the Irish male assumed the responsibility of deciding what was best for her. She was exempted from serving on juries and was discouraged from participating in paid employment and 'with the exception of national school teachers, Irish married women only worked outside the home in cases of extreme necessity' (Hoff & Coulter eds 1995, p102).

The topics of contraception, divorce and abortion are dealt with in a similar vein by these anthologies, with both Smyth's and Hoff and Coulter's works heavily critical of the excessive

intervention of the State into these issues and the resulting restrictions imposed upon Irish women's rights. Both examine and are critical of the outlawing of literature that explicitly mentioned or discussed contraceptive methods other than those prescribed by the Church, the enormous controversy generated by the divorce referendum in the 1990s and the ongoing contentions surrounding the ban on abortion in Ireland.

These texts take a similarly critical approach to the ways in which Irish women and Irish womanhood have been regarded, restricted and regulated since the birth of the Irish Free State. They expand on and develop the historical aspects of Irish female sexuality introduced within Chapter 1 of this study and have each made enormous contributions to the body of existing literature on the topic.

It should be noted, however, for the purposes of this review, that despite the existence of a body of literature that analyses and is critical of the ways in which Irish women have been treated historically, in terms of the continued implications of this legacy for contemporary female sexual identity, behaviour and autonomy in Ireland, a much narrower and limited body of research exists. Among those authors who *have* contributed to this area of knowledge, however, are Chrystel Hug and Tom Inglis. Their respective works *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (1999) and *Lessons in Irish Sexuality* (1998) were both published at the end of the 1990s and, though over a decade has since passed, no significant attempts have been made by other authors to either challenge or develop the ideas put forward within these texts.

In her book, Hug looks at Irish sexuality from a primarily legal and constitutional standpoint and discusses, like Meaney and Valiulis, the detrimental impact that state intervention into private issues like divorce, contraception and abortion had on the rights and autonomy of Irish women. She documents the shifts in social thinking that took place from the foundation of the Irish Free State to present and the repercussions of amalgamating Catholic morality with national law; 'From its early days, the government of the Irish Free State showed a willingness to use the powers of the State to protect Catholic moral values. It is difficult not to notice, even at this early stage, the contradiction inherent in the clerical campaigns. The clergy were hostile to the intervention of the state in the area of morality and social support for families, considering

these were the domain of the Church, but nonetheless they wanted the government to legislate precisely these areas' (Hug 1999, p78).

Hug explains that this legislation, as discussed in the previous chapter, included the banning of literature *about* and the sale *of* artificial contraception and birth control methods. Hug describes this ban as a success, 'in that it criminalised deviation from a Catholic middle-class 'norm'' (Hug, 1999, p83).

This denial of women's rights to control their own bodies and lives is one that has recurred throughout Irish history. It has been reinforced by the fact that educational preparation for motherhood, including instruction in regard to sex relations, chastity and marriage was confined to the teachings of the Church. The rigidity of this morality-based education has led to an Irish sexuality that lingers today, rooted in guilt, fear and a silencing of open discourse on the topic. This is an issue that is expanded upon at length by Inglis in his *Lessons in Irish Sexuality*. In this work, he describes the ignorance of Irish people as a result of Church intervention in sexual education, including stories of mothers who had never been made aware of the connection between intercourse and pregnancy, even following the birth of their own children. Other examples cited in this work include the far more tragic cases of *infanticide*, including the case of the Kerry babies. In this book, Inglis blames the fear and secrecy that has historically surrounded Irish sexuality for these tragedies and describes the recent reforms in sex and sexuality education that have taken place in their wake. He also goes on to explain the attempts of the Church, schools and parents to impede the implementation of this curriculum and any other instruction that was considered to be outside the 'context of Catholic moral teaching' (Inglis1998, p4). This, of course, included the omission of teachings on safe sex and any sexuality that exists outside of the heterosexual, married couple.

Given the vast changes in information, media, technology and globalisation which were discussed in the previous chapter, and given the resultant acceptance within Irish society that non-reproductive sex is a much more common activity than that which takes place solely for procreation, it is evident that these teachings by the Church in Ireland are at extreme odds with the lived sexual experiences of the Irish people. This is an issue which is carefully dissected by Inglis in his examination of the *Relationships and Sexuality Education* (RSE) curriculum

introduced into schools during the 1990s in response to the recurring tragedy of infanticide and an increasing awareness of young people's ignorance on the subject of their own sexuality.

As explained within the opening chapter of this study, this was a programme which aimed to focus on young people's experiences, changes in their base of knowledge and their own sense of right and wrong. As Inglis explains, however, the idea of an open forum for discussion on sexuality without moral or spiritual instruction was an overwhelming shift that many believed Ireland was not ready for. Among these were priests, teachers and parents groups, all of whom feared a challenge to their authority, the prospect of a sexually permissive youth culture and the possibility that a sexually educated younger generation would possibly be more informed and comfortable with their sexuality than they themselves were

The last two decades have seen the growing liberal influence of the media in Irish society and the large scale move from accepted codes and dictated morals to freedom of speech and expression. Inglis asserts, however, that 'operating within a liberal discourse does not necessarily increase freedom. In some respects it means that instead of being dominated and colonised by the Catholic Church, young people are dominated by a viewpoint which insists on fulfilling desires by being attractive, competitive, adventurous and sexually active' (Inglis 1998, p161). This assertion serves to highlight the bearing that Raunch Culture has on Irish sexuality and its capacity as an oppressive as well as liberating influence.

Although these commentaries by Hug and Inglis provide keen observations of Irish sexuality from its catholically led past to its media led present however, they lack comprehensive empirical data on lived sexualities in Ireland. In fact only an extremely small number of researchers have chosen to undertake comprehensive empirical research on this topic; and as a result many of the data that exist in relation to current sexual attitudes and behaviours in Ireland has been generated by interest groups such as the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and the Irish Family Planning Association.

One academic who *has* successfully carried out research of this kind, however, is Betty Hilliard whose findings are based on a study of the sexuality of married women in Ireland which she undertook first in 1975 and then again in 2000. Echoing the observations of both Hug and Inglis,

the participants described the state of fear and ignorance imposed upon them by the Catholic Church with regard to their own sexuality. The study itself, examines the ways in which this culture of fear inhibited Irish women from pursuing an autonomous sexuality and kept them in a state of ignorance about their own bodies and fertility.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this interference by the Church in such private matters is still resented by the participants of the study, many of whom remain angry at their mistreatment by priests who would insist that they adhere to Catholically sanctioned sexuality (that denounced the use of artificial contraceptives and the denial of a husband's 'conjugal rights' as sinful), even in the case of ill health or extreme poverty. Hilliard's investigation, therefore, is particularly pertinent to this study because it provides a body of information that highlights the ways in which the Catholic Church controlled and repressed female sexuality in the nineteenth and the continued impact of that repression for women and for Irish female sexuality in the twenty first century.

Of the literature reviewed within the context of 'Irish Sexualities', Hilliard's is perhaps the text that provides the most concise picture of the way Irish women, and indeed female sexuality have been considered and controlled historically in Ireland. Over the last fifteen years, however, several academics have sought to reconcile the ways in which we have traditionally regarded sex and sexuality in this country with the processes of modernisation, globalisation and sexualisation that have brought about momentous change in this area. Among this body of research is the continued work by academics such as Tom Inglis and Debbie Ging.

Inglis, for example, in his two articles, *Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality* and *Sexual Transgression and Scapegoats: A Case Study from Modern Ireland* discusses modern (and late modern) processes of sexualisation which have instigated a period of rapid and transformative change in Irish sexuality. The first of these texts deals with key issues that have arisen historically in the field of Irish sexuality and places them in the context of the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. Within this text Inglis draws on Foucault's theories of sexuality asserting that his approach focuses on sexuality as one of 'the most subtle, penetrating and productive forms of power' (Inglis 1997, p7) but is critical of the absence within this

perspective of discourse on 'the habitus and practice of sexuality as a social interactive process' (Inglis 1997, p7), for which Inglis turns to the writings of Bourdieu.

Although Bourdieu famously never explored sexuality as an autonomous field, his concepts of habitus are hugely applicable to not only Inglis' article but to any study of sexuality in contemporary society, and are particularly relevant to this research on the social impact of Raunch Culture. Referencing Bourdieu (1977 p72) Inglis defines habitus as 'the unconscious, almost automatic, deeply embedded structuring mechanism which enables people operating in a field such as sexuality, to classify, interpret and respond to particular contexts and actions as they evolve' (Inglis 1997, p20). It is in his analysis of this concept as it relates specifically to Irish sexuality that Inglis's argument contributes most to the basis of this thesis. Within his analysis, he adopts a social constructionist approach to the field of sexuality and highlights not only the unfixed nature of this field but the continuous changes in the ways in which sexual success is achieved in a society at any given period in time.

In the second of these articles, then, Inglis uses the specific example of the demonization of women (and particularly of Joanne Hayes in the case of the Kerry Babies) to illustrate the fate of those in Ireland who have challenged 'the traditional Catholic habitus' by committing sexually 'deviant' acts. The piece is a commentary on the balances of power within Irish sexual habitus and the notion that those who disrupt it are ostracised as 'other'. This is a concept which is easily translatable to the way in which current forms of power in this area (e.g. the media/popular culture etc) are dismissive of sexualities which transgress the 'liberal' parameters of Raunch Culture.

In a third article *Origins and Legacy of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland* Inglis continues to explore the history, or lack thereof, of transgressive voices in the area of Irish sexuality. In particular, he focuses on the absence of resistant discourses and subaltern voices and the 'general lack of interest in sexuality in Irish academia' (Inglis 2005, p10). Though the article acknowledges the significant influence of the Catholic Church on this 'legacy of prudery' it equally marvels at the silence of the Irish people on the issue. Inglis remarks that 'There was no systematic disorder or reversal of rules, no transgression of regulations and no plunge into anomie' (Inglis 2005, p23). In fact, it could be argued that although seismic changes

occurred within Irish sexual attitudes from the post-famine era to the twenty first century, no space for discourse existed between the decades of sexual oppression and the explosion of Raunch Culture. The implication of this theory for a study such as this, is that in the interim between a dominant 'antisexual regime' (Inglis 2005, p23) and one which is overtly sexualized, there was no forum in which to openly discuss sex and sexuality and no room for the formation of a national sexual identity.

This is an area which is elaborated upon by Ging, who is one of very few Irish academics currently engaging with the impact of media-led sexualisation processes on Irish interpretations of gender, sex and sexuality. In her work, *A 'Manual on Masculinity'? The consumption and use of mediated images of masculinity among teenage boys in Ireland*, for example, she discusses the influence of popular cultural texts and entertainment media on Irish boys' perceptions of masculinity and maleness. It surveys male transition year students in order to gauge their attitudes to these media and the gender stereotypes they propagate. Among the findings was the 'participants' widespread acceptance of the gendering of media as 'normal', as well as in their lack of awareness of the persistence of a dominant male gaze in popular culture' (Ging 2005, p37). Their attitudes were consistent with those found in postfeminist 'lad' cultures which are synonymous with a stance of 'ironic sexism' (discussed at length by Whelehan, Streitmatter and Jensen) and which regard feminism 'in almost exclusively negative terms' (Ging 2005, p37). The study succeeds, therefore, in articulating real examples of the ways in which Raunch Culture, through the popular media, has influenced the formation of gendered identities and the proliferation of sexual stereotypes.

Ging further explores these concepts in her article *All-consuming images: new gender formations in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland* (Ging, 2009). Like Whelehan, for example, she states that postfeminism, rather than empowering women, acts as a powerful tool in promoting female consumer culture by reducing feminism to its most trivial form: 'girl power'; 'Within this new rhetoric, freedom is understood less as the legacy of second-wave feminism and increasingly as something given to us by an open, liberal market, which celebrates female empowerment in the form of 'girl power', is inclusive of sexual diversity and ironicalises the antiquated sexism of a bygone era' (Ging, 2009, p 53).

Further to this, she explores the current resurgence of popularity for essentialist approaches to gender and explains why gender determinism, consumerism and postfeminism sit so well together, particularly within twenty-first century media structures. In order to highlight this point she asserts that; 'In Ireland, as in Britain and the United States, the shift towards neoliberal government and its concurrent commercialisation of the media-scape have been key drivers in facilitating the discursive and representational repolarisation of gender. The trajectory from a public-service broadcasting model to one whose core objective is to sell audiences to advertisers sets up an entirely new dynamic between the broadcast media and their audiences. As well as marginalising those demographic groups that are of little interest to advertisers, this model addresses consumers in increasingly gender-reductive ways' (Ging, 2009, p56).

Ging is among a very small pool of Irish academics currently engaging with and creating clear linkages between the issues of postfeminism, consumerism and gender determinism and their central role in the proliferation of a sexualised culture. As a result, her work and its placement within an Irish context provide an important theoretical foundation for a study such as this.

Conclusion

Despite the wealth of literature available which explores in detail the history of women, the vicissitudes of feminism, the vast and multifarious area of human sexuality and even the rise of Raunch Culture, there remains, on academic library shelves in particular, an absence of research which marries these areas and places them in the context of the current status of female sexuality. Fewer texts still can be found which explicitly discuss Irish sexuality, female or otherwise, that are not directly linked to the censorship of literature, the repression of the Catholic Church, or the infamous abuse scandals that form part of the history of the state.

Though the writings of feminists and feminist theorists are key to placing contemporary female sexuality within its historical and sociological contexts, their work tends to focus on the enduring struggles that women have confronted *traditionally* within patriarchal power structures and less so on current states of femaleness, femininity and womanhood. Similar criticism could also be made in relation to the writings on sexuality reviewed above. Although existing research in this area contributes infinitely to a discussion on Raunch Culture and encompasses a wealth of information regarding sexual attitudes and behaviours, as of yet, few examples exist within this

genre that confront the culture itself and the possible repercussions it may have on the future of sexuality.

Those texts that do examine Raunch explicitly, whether in its defence (such as those of Jameson and Lee) or actively renouncing its effects (such as those of Paul and Jensen) are successful in their provision of a full definition and rounded discourse on the topic. None of them to date, however, have engaged fully with the theories of feminism and sexuality that preceded them. Nor have they engaged comprehensively, even in the cases of Levy, Paul and Jensen, with the impact of Raunch on women's perceptions of their own sexuality.

The purpose of *this* research, therefore, is to bridge existing academic theories and observations of popular culture with the sexual attitudes and experiences, not only of the active participants of Raunch but also, through empirical research, the lived sexual experiences of Irish women in order to determine the extent to which the male-normative, *pornified* influence of Raunch Culture has affected the development of an autonomous female sexuality in Ireland.

This link is grossly underrepresented in popular texts and virtually non-existent in contemporary academic research; despite the phenomenal influence Raunch Culture has had on all aspects of Irish society in the last twenty years. As a result, it is the aim of this thesis to draw upon the experiences and findings of the authors reviewed above, in order to document the rise of Raunch within everyday life and ultimately to explore the impact of Raunch Culture on female sexual autonomy in Ireland.

Chapter 3

Patriarchy, Pleasure and the Pseudo-empowerment of Postfeminism

As discussed in Chapter 2, numerous bodies of work and fields of academic research have informed the conceptual framework of this study including psychology, gender studies, sexuality studies, legal studies, feminism and sociology to name but some. In order to frame the theoretical background of its thesis, therefore, it was first necessary to break its central research question down into a number of key conceptual areas. The first of these is rooted in theories of masculinities, patriarchal power, femininities and feminisms as well as psychological models of conditioning, sociological concepts such as habitus and cultural theories that have shaped the way female sexuality has been regarded historically.

The second is concerned with current debates on the 'sexualisation of culture' and involves an in-depth look at discussions of sexualisation processes in late modernity including the mainstreaming of pornography, the elevated status of hyperfeminine 'hotness' and the legitimisation of new 'ironic' sexism. It also looks at the postfeminist rhetoric of empowerment fostered within a 'sexualised' or *Raunch Culture* and the perceived implications of these processes on cultural audiences and women in particular.

The third area of theoretical importance to this thesis, then, is the concept of 'female sexual autonomy'. This is integral to the core research question of this study and is an amalgam of elements of the first and second categories above. It engages with social constructionist and determinist debates on female sexuality, normative models of (hetero)sexuality, social and cultural pressures, and the endurance (and enduring influence) of the double standard.

With these three theoretical areas in mind, the second half of this chapter explores Irish female sexuality and its relationship to *Raunch Culture* within contemporary debates on the ways in which Irish people communicate (and have historically communicated) sexual messages, the legacy of a heavily Catholic regime, the powerful influence of culture and habitus, and the historic reluctance of Irish people to be openly transgressive or subversive in the face of sexual repression and authority.

3.1 Female Sexualities in History: Power, Tradition and Patriarchy

Female Sexuality until the end of the end of Victorianism

Within debates on female sexuality there exists a plethora of discourses and many conflicting schools of thought. Among these are the determinist, 'natural' concepts of female sexuality that adopt a 'biological' approach to its analysis and constructionist approaches that extol the fluidity of sexuality and the notion that there is no 'natural' sexuality that is constant and positive but rather that it exists as a concept which is perpetually influenced, shaped and moulded by the social and cultural forces that surround it.

Traditionally the former approach was relied upon to explain and reinforce gender difference. In historically patriarchal and male normative societies, men, maleness and by extension, masculinity were understood in terms of physical prowess, aggression, dominance and action while women, womanhood and femininity were synonymous with physical weakness, subordination, submissiveness and passivity. Throughout history, then, these 'natural' differences which stemmed from the primitive biological disparities between the sexes took on enormous social, cultural and sexual significance, upon which our fundamental beliefs about human identity and human sexuality have been based ever since.

In certain cases these beliefs and systems of belief have become so normalised and institutionalised that sexual ideals and ideal standards of womanhood and manhood have arisen from them. Among these is the notion that femininity and more importantly its physical embodiment, is paramount to being a woman and within traditional Victorian society in particular, women who did not conform to this feminine standard were seen to be acting 'above' their sex. During the Victorian period this 'ideal' femininity was reinforced through discourse and literature. Textual examples include Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, both of which include the juxtaposition of a female character who meets the criteria of the 'proper' woman with another female character who does not.

These texts highlight the ultra-feminine features that came to be glorified as ideal during the period which included being fair of complexion, petite with delicate features and possessing personality traits and characteristics such as timidity, pliability and a natural ability and affinity

with the domestic realm. Her less than perfect counterpart then, like Eliot's Maggie Tulliver, was untameable and outspoken and was represented as swarthy and with less refined proportions. Taking an interest in intellectual or current affairs was also seen as a masculine pursuit and as a result women who were well-read or frequently verbalised their opinions were seen as manly and unfeminine.

In her analysis of gender myths and stereotypes, Hilary Lips asserts that 'An implication of the stereotyping of two groups as polar opposites is that any movement away from the stereotype of one group is, by definition, a movement toward that of another group'. (Lips 1993, p2) Therefore to accompany this ideal female character was her antithesis, the ideal *male* whose success at such relied heavily on his status as a sort of 'anti-woman' i.e. the opposite of (and completely free of tendency towards) women.

These gender stereotypes proved themselves to be extremely resilient, hence the term 'opposite sex', and hand in hand with what it meant to be a 'proper' (passive) woman and a 'proper' (aggressive) man, came a matching set of standards of sexuality. As Jackson and Scott put it in their introduction to *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, 'Within dominant cultural discourses, men are cast as the active initiators of sexual activity and women as passive recipients of male advances; men's desires are seen as uncontrollable urges which women are expected to both satisfy and to restrain' (Jackson and Scott 1996, p17-18). This references two main aspects of this 'normal' female sexuality; its perceived passivity and the responsibility of women traditionally to bend to the whims of male sexuality while simultaneously acting as the gatekeepers of sexual morality, decency and propriety.

While male sexuality, as the dominant sexuality in heterosexual discourse, is seen as active, aggressive and driven by desire and a quest for pleasure, traditional discourses on female sexuality are highly contradictory and are laden with duality, duplicity and dichotomy. Women have historically always been analysed in two distinct and opposing categories; the virgin and the whore, and as men have always been assumed to desire both, equally and simultaneously, so too have women been expected to fulfil both descriptions of womanhood simultaneously. This double standard has led to the glorification of male sexuality and the phallus as the epicentre of heterosexual relations and the belief that female sexuality is secondary and

involves 'long arousal and slow satisfaction, inferior sex drive, susceptibility to field dependence and romantic idealism rather than lustful reality' (Oakley 1996, p. 36).

As a result of these sexual stereotypes and the traditional assumptions that categorise female sexuality as one which is *reactive* to that of their male counterparts, the desiring, sexual woman in history is seen as problematic and dangerous. For centuries, 'Women who admitted to having sexual longings were punished, usually by degrading them as abominably indecent' (Wouters 2010, p730). Those who were seen to transgress or subvert sexual 'norms', therefore, incurred heavy penalties including a form of social branding that labels women as 'dirty', as 'whores', as 'immoral' and even as 'evil'. The stigma of sexual labels is difficult to erase from people's memories and as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's seminal work, it is often borne by the sexual woman as a 'scarlet letter' for the duration of her life. Men, on the other hand, do not experience this (or at least not to the same extent) and as Jackson and Scott put it 'Women's sexuality has been policed and regulated in a way which men's has not: it is the woman prostitute who is stigmatized not her male clients' (Jackson and Scott 1996, p3).

However, the problem with these deterministic ideals that foster stereotypes and normalise standards of sexuality is not simply that they represent the sexuality of women as less important than that of men but that 'it rests on something unknowable, a hypothesized 'natural' sexuality somehow uncontaminated by cultural influences' (Jackson & Scott 1996, p11), a fact that makes it very difficult to question, to challenge or to argue against what comes to be accepted as 'scientific fact'. This thesis rejects traditional essentialist approaches to gender, sex and sexuality that insist that the inequalities and disparities that exist between the sexes and within sexuality all stem from biological and evolutionary differences between the male and female bodies. It proposes instead that while certain elements of our sexuality and sexual differences can be attributed exclusively to anatomical and biological dissimilarities (including the fact that women are child bearers etc.), the roles, standards, stereotypes and ideals that have come to be accepted as 'normal' in the areas of gender, sex and sexuality were not created 'naturally' but through social interaction and the ascribing of significance to certain attributes over others through social collaboration and discourse.

This constructionist approach is one which has been adopted by feminist theorists over the past sixty years in order to negotiate a basis for a clearer understanding of gender and sexuality and to demonstrate that 'what we deem as 'sexual' is as much a product of language and culture as of 'nature'' (Weeks 1995, p31). Among the constructionist thinkers who have contributed to the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this thesis are Imelda Whelehan, Stevi Jackson, Natasha Walter and Shere Hite to name but some. In their respective writings on gender, sex and sexuality, they refute essentialist rhetoric that prioritises biology over thousands of years of social and cultural influence and believe, as Jackson puts it, that 'sexual behaviour is not just the consummation of some biological drive' (Jackson and Scott eds. 1996, p62).

This study is based on similar reasoning and proposes that justification for refuting determinism is not just that it ignores the significance of history, culture, human action and dominance, but that society's general acceptance of its presumptions as 'normal' perpetuates inequality and subjugates female sexuality by labelling it inferior. Natasha Walter, in her 2010 work *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* dedicates a significant portion of the book to this belief and the fact that 'The constant threat posed by the promotion of biological determinism...blinds us to the true variability among men and women' (Walter 2010, p199). She asserts that 'when readers are exposed to biological narratives, they become more inclined themselves to endorse stereotypes about how men and women should behave' (Walter 2010, p208) and proposes that we should arm ourselves against the acceptance of gender norms based on 'nature' and biology; 'it is time to become more alert to the impact the new fashion for biological determinism might have on strengthening stereotypes in everyday life and therefore on holding back the possibility of greater equality' (Walter 2010, p208).

Her work provides a critical stance against this 'taken for granted' knowledge and in it, she challenges the writings of 'new' essentialist thinkers such as Steven Pinker and Simon Baron-Cohen, author of *The Essential Difference*, who have recently succeeded in repackaging and remarketing determinism as a brand new way of thinking that breaks the 'taboos' of gender difference. Walter herself states that it is 'odd to see theories of biological determinism being promoted as the freshest thing on the block, given that these theories have such a long, and not very illustrious history' (Walter 2010, p202). Within the context of this thesis, this resurgence of

interest in and renewed popularity of determinism, can be seen as influential in the promotion and perpetuation of myths about female sexuality and of archaic double standards.

Professors Paul Abrahamson and Steven Pinkerton (scholars of psychology and psychiatry respectively) also promote determinism as the clearest way to understand issues such as gender, sexuality and our relationship to pornography. In their 2002 book *With Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Human Sexuality*, they assert that 'Overall men are bigger, stronger and more aggressive than women. We believe that this simple observation leads to a more parsimonious hypothesis of why men are prone to, and better able to establish proprietary rights over valued entities' (Abrahamson & Pinkerton 2002, p64). According to the book, valued entities include women's bodies and female sexuality.

They also demonstrate a clear acceptance of male dominance over women as a fact of life: 'there were- and always will be- men who used force against women in the pursuit of sexual pleasure' (Abrahamson & Pinkerton 2002, p69). There are, however, contradictions within their work that undermine their determinist assertions such as their statement that 'What's attractive depends on the times, the culture and the circumstances' (Abrahamson & Pinkerton 2002, p115), a statement that suggests that standards of attraction are reliant on social and cultural change i.e. that they are constructed, at least in part, 'from a complicated set of layered symbolic meanings' (Gagnon 1974, p23) and therefore not explicitly derived from innate biological drive.

This thesis proposes that this approach is problematic in that it selectively ignores the power of society and social control over the individual, the importance of historical and cultural context and the notion that knowledge is sustained by social processes. Judith Butler framed this concept in her 2004 work *Undoing Gender* by asserting (as quoted in the opening chapter) that 'One does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other only imaginary' (Butler 2004, p1), thereby underlining the fact that although we may be born 'male' or 'female', we are not born knowing *how to be or 'do'* proper maleness and proper femaleness but rather that it is taught through social messages. She goes on to say that 'the social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual

personhood. This matter is made more complex by the fact that the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms' (Butler 2004, p2).

This is a point which is extremely pertinent to the central concept of female sexual autonomy in this thesis, within which it is suggested that these 'desires' mentioned by Butler, for example a woman's desire for sex, her desire not to be negatively labelled and her desire to be accepted (or not to be rejected), are powerful 'invisible' forces in the shaping of her sexual identity and behaviour. In a society where it is no longer conventionally (or at least legally) accepted for men to use physical force to dominate women, these social norms act as a pervasive form of gender regulation and sexual coercion that maintain gender stereotypes, dominant ideals and standards of sexuality that have endured since the Victorian era. Nayak and Kehily support this position that inherited knowledge and social action go together in their investigation of *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young Masculinities and Femininities*, stating that 'gender relations are embedded within the social fabric of human subjects' and that 'gender is connected to power...it operates as an 'organizing principle' in many Western and non-Western societies' (Nayak & Kehily 2008, p17).

Along with determinism's unquestioning acceptance of gender inequality as 'natural', so too it commonly accepts the sexual standards and double standards dictated by the biological 'fact' that female sexuality is inferior to that of its male counterpart. In *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*, David Gauntlett notes that 'With sexuality and sexual identity being regarded in modern societies as so central to self-identity, issues in this area take on a profound level of importance...To have a 'problem' in the sexual department can lead people to declare that they no longer feel like a complete man or woman' (Gauntlett 2008, p110). Given the fact that female sexuality has been problematized and stigmatized as 'other' for centuries, it is little wonder that not only men, but women themselves, view their own sexuality as such.

This includes a subconscious adherence *to* and belief *in* the sexual double standard which is described by Jackson and Cram as follows 'within the sexual double standard, young women are positioned as passive objects of male sexual desire, want and need. Female sexuality is subjugated to and defined by a hegemonic male sexuality that requires proof of masculinity through (hetero) sexual performance' (Jackson & Cram 2003, p114). According to this standard,

men are allowed and are in fact *expected* to be actively, aggressively and insatiably sexual beings while women should not openly demonstrate their sexual desires or engage in sexual activity outside of a 'legitimate' and/or loving relationship. This is accompanied by the commonly held perception that men want their female sexual partners to possess certain sexual attributes and abilities, a dichotomy best phrased by John Gagnon in his book *Sexual Conduct*: 'men have only to fear sexual failure, women have to fear failure and success simultaneously' (Gagnon 1974, p59).

As a result of this undoubtedly contradictory paradigm, there is little discussion within socially and culturally transmitted messages about sex and sexuality of female choice, pleasure or desire. As Gagnon puts it 'women receive little training in sexual activity that is not prohibitory, while at the same time being positively trained in docility' (Gagnon 1974, p60). In this dissertation, it is proposed that this enduring standard impedes the development of autonomous female sexuality and agrees with Bancroft et al, who suggest that 'One of the consequences of the long-term neglect of women's sexuality has been a lack of serious attempts to conceptualize women's sexual problems in ways which are relevant to women' (Bancroft et al 2003, p194). These problems and the ways they have been dealt with by theorists in contemporary discourses of sex and sexuality will be discussed further within this chapter suggesting, like MG Durham, that girls and young women are 'bright, thoughtful and crucial participants in this discussion. They don't need 'rescuing' from sex. Rather they need our respect and attention as they explore what should be a healthy and natural part of their lives as they become adults' (Durham 2009, p13).

Post-Victorian Female Sexualities

The fact is that until the middle of the twentieth century, female sexuality was tied up in what Michel Foucault called the 'hystericisation of women's bodies: a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analysed- qualified and disqualified as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality' (Foucault 1998, p104). It remained a scientific category under the scrutiny of (male) scientists and academics rather than the lived experience of over half the world's population (women), whose input into this process was not seen as necessary. Although several challenges were posed to this classification and categorisation by feminists and activists prior to and during the Victorian era, it wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that technological advances made

real changes in female sexuality a possibility, perhaps the most significant of which was the introduction of contraceptive devices such as the birth-control pill. For the first time in history, this pill gave women the opportunity to take control over their reproductive destinies.

As a result of this new found freedom, the 1960s saw the dawn of the 'sexual revolution', which loudly extolled the virtues of 'free love', a concept that promoted casual heterosexual sex without the fear of pregnancy and stigma that had dominated throughout the previous century. For women, however, although a facade of sexual freedom was being put forward by popular culture, and particularly through popular music, the reality was that female sexuality was still being measured and scrutinized as pertaining only to male sexuality, the male libido and the phallus. Margaret Jackson summarises this phenomenon as follows: '...heterosexual practice which defines and institutionalizes male domination and female subordination as natural and inevitable, cannot but have adverse implications for feminism and for female sexual autonomy, especially when presented in the guise of sexual liberation' (Jackson 1995, p71).

In fact, many feminists have since argued that the apparent 'freedom' that the sexual revolution claimed to give to women was a complete fallacy that legitimated male access to the female body and proceeded to promote coitus as 'real sex' without giving women any further choice or autonomy when it came to their own pleasure. In Shere Hite's seminal reports on female sexuality, for example, one female participant angrily said 'If the Sexual Revolution implies the attitude that now women are 'free' too, and they can fuck strangers and fuck over the opposite sex, just the way men can, I think it's revolting. Women don't want to be free to adopt the male model of sexuality; they want to be free to find their own' (Hite 1993, p89).

In her 1994 book, *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*, Lynn Segal also reiterated this notion, asserting that 'the underground's portrayal of sexual liberation was most often arrogantly male: women were chicks' (Segal 1994, p22). She also notes that the message of the revolution promoted the male norm and encouraged women to go along with what men wanted, ensuring them they would grow to like it 'learn to give yourselves a bit more...even if you don't enjoy it at first' (Segal 1994, p25).

This 'revolution' also coincided with what came to be known as second wave feminism, a movement in which the personal became political and during which time, female sexuality and, in particular, issues such as pornography and abortion, proved extremely divisive topics that segregated feminists into two distinct categories; pro-sex and anti-sex. Those who were seen to be pro-sex, such as Camille Paglia, openly celebrated the revolution, including the casual sex and the embracing of pornography that went with it. So-called anti-sex feminists, on the other hand, like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, were highly sceptical of the supposed 'freedom' offered by the revolution to women and put forward the notion that 'pornography is the theory, rape is the practice'. The problem with these two camps, however, is that they exclude a vast middle ground. The former for example, is portrayed as the epitome of sexual choice, freedom and autonomy but its male-normativity and coitus centric focus excludes a vast majority of women from making choices that reflect their own desires. Similarly, the latter is synonymous with either, censorship and morality, or with the potential dangers, violence and inequality of heterosexual interaction and without any reference to pleasure or desire, which in its own right also becomes exclusionary and creates a barrier to autonomous sexual decisions and choice.

This study adopts a stance of a pro-sex feminism, in that it endorses sexual pleasure, adventure, desire and exploration, but most important to me as the researcher, and to the driving force behind this study is the presence of sexual choice and autonomy. Therefore, although I do not feel that pornography is akin to rape, I do view it as problematic in that it portrays sex almost entirely from the point of view of male fantasy, focuses almost exclusively on male pleasure, the penis and the male orgasm and exhibits images of the degradation and sexual subjugation of the women portrayed therein. Abrahamson and Pinkerton suggest that 'Pornography is much maligned, and even feared, because it is a highly visible correlate of masturbation' (Abrahamson and Pinkerton 2002, p171). Within my analysis of female sexuality, freedom of masturbation and exploration of the self is seen as intrinsic to developing an autonomous sexuality and making informed choices driven by pleasure and desire free from coercion, particularly for women who have lived within a male normative bubble that is often heavily coitus-focussed and phallogentric. For the purposes of this thesis therefore, I will not engage heavily with the much-debated problem of the direct exploitation of women who work in the pornography industry. Instead, the study is concerned (as will be explored further within this chapter) with the current

pervasiveness and normalising of porn and the ways in which it has influenced both male and female sexual behaviours, identities and attitudes.

The debates on sex positive versus anti-sex feminisms have been silenced in recent years with the dawn of what has come to be known as 'postfeminism'. This is a phenomenon which occurs within the context of what Anthony Giddens calls 'late modernity' and rejects second wave sisterhood in favour of individualism and a culture of competition among women. The origins of postfeminism could arguably be traced to what Susan Faludi called the backlash to feminism in her seminal 1992 book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. In it, she documents the ways in which the popular media turned on working women at a time when a renegotiation of gender roles in the workplace meant that more women than ever were in employment. This included demonizing single working women as anti-family and claiming that mothers who engaged in paid work outside the home were simply abandoning their children. She writes 'The truth is the last decade has seen a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of the small, hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women' (Faludi 1992, p12).

According to Faludi this media backlash began at very beginning of second wave feminism with the coverage of the alleged bra burning by feminists at the 1968 Miss America Pageant. She notes that 'media and advertisers settled on a line that served to neutralize and commercialize feminism at the same time' (Faludi 1992, p100) by focusing on young, single women who were now financially independent as savvy and sassy consumers who could be empowered and whose lives could be enriched by shopping and consumption. A new, glossy postfeminist woman began to appear in popular culture whose glamorous lifestyle was a million miles away from the bra burning, supposedly man-hating feminists of the second wave. In fact, as Whelehan observes, 'The oldest argument used against feminism (is) that equality is incompatible with femininity and more particularly with womanhood' (Whelehan 2000, p17). She goes on to assert that 'In today's cultural climate, feminism is at one and the same time credited with furthering women's independence and dismissed as irrelevant to a new generation of women who no longer need to be liberated from the shackles of patriarchy because they have already arrived' (Whelehan 2000, p3).

In their 2008 study of young women's discussions of feminism, Annadis Rudolfsdottir and Rachel Joliffe examined the way feminism is regarded by young women in the twenty first century. They note that many young women interviewed on the topic were 'reluctant to label themselves as feminists' (Rudolfsdottir & Joliffe 2008, p269) and that this 'reluctance to identify with the term 'feminist' may be related to concerns over their embodied femininity' Rich (2005) cited in Rudolfsdottir & Joliffe (2008, p269). The word 'feminist' clearly has a plethora of negative connotations and, as they assert, 'This positioning of feminism and femininity as almost antithetical shows how...young women have bought into the heterosexism of contemporary society. The kind of femininity a woman embraces has to fit in with the dominant culture's definition of what is 'right' and 'proper', and the feminist who challenges that system forfeits her right to be seen as having an 'attractive' femininity' (Rudolfsdottir & Joliffe 2008, p272).

This femininity is therefore highly prized in contemporary society and, within popular culture in particular, a hyperfeminine image is represented as depicting 'ideal' womanhood and 'ideal' sexiness. Rosalind Gill explores this notion and echoes Durham's theory that 'hot is the highest accolade a girl can get' (Durham 2009, p67) in her assertion that 'Today, the body is portrayed in advertising and many other parts of the media as the primary source of women's capital. Indeed, there seems to have been a profound shift in the very definition of femininity such that it is defined as a bodily property rather than a social structural or psychological one. Instead of caring or nurturing or motherhood (all of course highly problematic and exclusionary), it is now possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key source of identity' (Gill 2008, p42).

However, as Michael Kimmel puts it, 'Emphasized femininity is organized around compliance with gender inequality, and is 'oriented to accommodating the interests of men'. One sees emphasized femininity in 'the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labor-market discrimination against women. Emphasized femininity exaggerates gender difference as a strategy of 'adaptation to men's power' (Kimmel, ed. 2004, p11). This is a point which is reiterated by Laura Kipnis in her book *The Female Thing*, that this 'femininity...hinges on sustaining an underlying sense of female inadequacy' (Kipnis 2007, p7)

I, like Gill, Whelehan, Walter, Faludi and Kipnis, have embarked on the unpopular and uncool journey of feminism. Like Walter, for example, I believe that what is portrayed as fun, empowering and liberating, 'looks too uncannily like the old sexism to convince many of us that this is the freedom we have sought' (Walter 2010, p34). This thesis, therefore, is unequivocally feminist and is highly critical of popular discourses which, under the friendly guise of postfeminism, promote, reinforce and perpetuate the notion that 'female power is anathema to our health, happiness and above all, our 'femininity' (Whelehan 2000, p4).

The emergence and development of this postfeminist culture has coincided with a period of enormous change in the area of sexuality that has seen the public image of female sexuality transformed through mass media and popular cultural texts from a repressed, passive sexuality laden with guilt and double-standard, reliant almost exclusively on the male libido, to one which is actively desiring, non-emotional, and in a state of permanent arousal. It is a phenomenon which has been much debated over the last decade and has been analysed and investigated under a number of different guises including 'striptease culture' (McNair, 2002), 'Raunch Culture' (Levy, 2005), 'pornification of culture' (Paul,2005), the 'sexualisation of culture' (Gill, 2009) and the 'mainstreaming of sex' (Attwood, 2009).

'For two centuries now the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied' (Foucault 1998, p53) and since the 1990s, this process has seen an enormous decline in the popularity of moral discourses on sexuality which have been replaced instead by a neo-liberal individualism that focuses on the self, on personal pleasure and most importantly on an open and free approach to sex and sexuality. By embracing the virtues of postfeminism extolled in the media, this movement rejects the idea that morality should have any place in debates on sexuality and instead encourages freedom of sexual empowerment and expression. Stephanie Genz (2010), in her analysis of postfeminist rhetoric, describes the women who embrace this culture as 'do me' feminists: 'The do-me feminist rejects the concept of group oppression and subjugation and instead, she favours and valorises individual effort and choice' (Genz 2010, p107).

This promotion of choice, empowerment and liberation, however, is channelled through what Whelehan (2000) calls 'girlie culture' which, in line with the trends identified in the previous section, places a heavy emphasis and importance on femininity and the ways in which it

manifests itself through the female body. 'Mainstream girly culture, needless to say, sets great store by the visual and its stars are young, slim and conventionally attractive. And come under different scrutiny in the press from their male counterparts, especially in their relationship with men and each other' (Whelehan 2000, p41). One critic of this 'girly culture' that she herself refers to as '*ultra-femininity*' is Laura Kipnis. Kipnis sees this move towards a conventional standardised and generic form of femininity and attractiveness as part of 'the feminine industrial complex' (Kipnis 2007, p8) which includes media representations of women, female targeted advertising and popular cultural texts which promote the ultra-feminine ideal, through the endorsement of cosmetics and other tools of physical self-improvement.

Like other feminists, Kipnis criticises this 'conglomerate', and in particular women's glossy magazines due to their constant reinforcement of the message that its female readers are in need of 'making-over' and that from their body shape, hair and face to their relationships and sex lives, they are intrinsically flawed. Women's magazines and other media aimed primarily at girls and women generate vast amounts of revenue each month giving women 'advice' on 'How to find love', 'How to get a better body', 'How to satisfy your man' and 'Ten steps to a hotter sex life'. As Kipnis puts it, 'your self-loathing and neurosis are somebody else's quarterly profits' (Kipnis 2007, P10).

It is through consumption, therefore, and the exhibition of a woman's 'hotness' that she is expected, within Raunch Culture, to become sexually empowered. As Rosalind Gill puts it, 'Acts as trivial as purchasing a pair of shoes or eating a particular brand of cereal bar are now recognized as gestures of female empowerment just as surely as participating in a demonstration of pushing for a stronger voice in politics' (Gill 2008, p26) and the social importance of conforming to this 'hot', 'empowered' ideal is highlighted by Walter who observes that 'Many young women now believe that sexual confidence is the only confidence worth having' (Walter 2010, p37).

This hotness, however, does not focus solely on women's physical appearance but also on the extent to which they present themselves as sexual. It is a phenomenon which has become central to female sexual success and which manifests itself through, not just the mainstreaming of sex, but the mainstreaming of the sex industry within contemporary popular culture. As a

result, where 'hotness' and by extension, female sexuality are seen as valuable commodities, their sale and consumption becomes normalised and conventional. As Walter puts it, 'The mainstreaming of the sex industry has coincided with a point in history when there is much less social mobility than in previous generations...status can be won by any woman if she is prepared to flaunt her body' (Walter 2010, p36).

It has also coincided with a time when heterosexual pornography, its conventions, its images, its ideals and its representations of sex and sexuality are becoming ever more mainstreamed and integrated within contemporary popular culture. Despite the pro-sex manifesto traditionally associated with this pornography however, and the recent emergence of a niche industry of erotica and pornography marketed specifically at women, the vast majority of porn remains aimed at a male audience²⁸ and as a result is driven by predominantly male fantasy and male pleasure. Its focus tends to be on the phallus and the male climax (more specifically the 'money shot'), often at the expense of representations of female pleasure.

This pornography, and particularly online hardcore videos, is abundant, extremely prevalent, easily accessible, and, in many cases, free. As a result, for many curious young people, and young men in particular, the heterosexual pornographic images and videos that they can download from the internet may constitute a site of sexual exploration and learning even before they engage in sexual activity 'all of my first sexual experiences were with pornographic movies' (Paul quoting participant 'Rajiv' 2007 p73). The potential problem that this might pose for female sexuality is that, as Paul puts it 'the more pornography men use the more likely they are to describe women in sexualised and stereotypically feminine terms...(and)... also more likely to approve of women in traditionally female occupations and to value women who are more submissive and subordinate to men' (Paul 2007, p91). The combination of this pornification and the emphasis on overt sexual expression and 'do-me feminism' promoted through popular culture, results in the glorification of women who are publicly seen to enjoy and engage with pornified culture as 'empowered' while simultaneously vilifying those who are not as 'prudish', 'judgemental' and 'anti-sex'.

²⁸ 2006 statistics collated by <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>, for example, showed that a majority of 96% of those who searched the internet for the word 'porn' were male

Furthermore, it is predominantly heterosexist and is careful to stay away from portrayals of male homosexuality lest it undermine the *hypermasculinity* prized within Raunch Culture. It does, however, represent lesbianism, but only in the context of the 'girl-on-girl' 'hot lesbian' (Gill, 2009) scenario that is a product of pornographic fantasy that Gill describes as follows 'The packaging of 'lesbians' within conventional norms of heterosexual feminine attractiveness is one way in which the figure appears to be constructed primarily for a straight male gaze' (Gill 2009, p151). She also alludes to the fact that this 'commodity lesbian' is not universal in that it excludes a large number of women 'Commodity lesbians (Clarke 1993), as we have seen, are always young, always beautiful and always seductively entwined with another sexually appealing young woman. They do not reject men as sexual partners so much as beckon to them, offering a heady mix of the coolness of queer, alongside the sexual objectification of women's bodies, and the soft-porn sexiness of seeing two attractive women engaging in intimate sexual conduct' (Gill 2008, p53). Therefore, while some theorists suggest that this is a positive step towards heteroflexibility and an acceptance of experimentation, it is governed by a set of social and cultural rules that make it acceptable *only* when carried out in front of a male audience and within the context of heterosexuality.

Within the vast and encompassing area of Raunch Culture, or more broadly, the sexualisation of culture, a large number of contemporary theorists have contributed to the conceptual framework of this thesis. Among them are those who are sympathetic with it and view sexualisation processes as progressive and liberal (albeit with some reservations and criticisms), those who outwardly condemn it for its attack on feminism and female sexuality and those who regard the 'openness' of sexuality that comes with 'sexualisation' as positive but problematise the impact of Raunch Culture on female sexual autonomy.

The first of these groups includes writers such as Feona Attwood and Cas Wouters who both call for a move away from a tendency within anti-sexualisation debates to moralize and contribute to a sense of moral panic in relation to neo-liberal sexual practices. Attwood, for example, criticises the way sexualisation is categorised and classified within academia and public debate. Prolific in her writings on representations of sex and sexuality in the media and contemporary popular culture, she describes 'sexualized culture' as 'a rather clumsy phrase used to indicate a number 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; our fondness for scandals, controversies and panic around sex' (Attwood 2006 p78-79).

Her work takes a documentary approach and looks at the pornographication of culture (Attwood ed., 2002), the mainstreaming of pole dancing (Attwood, 2009), postfeminism and the concept of female empowerment (Attwood, 2005) and the postmodern notion of 'public intimacy' (Attwood, 2002). Within this work, she does not overtly disapprove of or oppose Raunch Culture or its processes. Instead, her criticisms of it tend to focus on a renegotiation of the terms of academic and public debates on the topic, suggesting a 'need to be more precise about the terms of the debates inspired by sexualisation' (Attwood 2006, p91).

However, while her work is not expressly feminist or driven by feminist agenda, it does question and challenge the normativity (of gender, sexuality etc) of Raunch Culture and references the potential barriers to sexual equality and autonomy that are generated within this culture, suggesting a 'need to think very carefully about the possibilities of how the very real tensions between rights and responsibilities, autonomy and belonging, freedom and love can be negotiated, not just in theory and in policy, but in the everyday practice of our sexual lives' (Attwood 2006, p92).

Wouters, on the other hand, is less sympathetic to these possibilities and in his analysis and subsequent criticism of a report by the American Psychological Association in 2007 entitled *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*, maligns its definition of sexualisation as one which occurs only within *negative* parameters. He also asserts that there is too much emphasis within debates on the topic on the commercialisation of sexuality stating that it is 'an aspect or a part of the process of sexualization, but it is rather a catalyst of sexualization processes, not its motor. Another popular fallacy is to write about sexualization as if it were some outside force, quite often presented as operative only upon others, not upon oneself. However, like such processes as individualization and informalization, sexualization is one encompassing social and psychic process, not some outside social force invading the individual's body and soul' (Wouters 2010, p726).

Wouters rejects anti-sexualization debates as being 'morally loaded' (Wouters 2010, p723) and laden with conservative and puritanical agenda (Wouters 2010, p735). His own stance focuses on the 'emancipation and integration of sexuality into everyday life' (Wouters 2010, p727) and sees the ambivalence generated by sexualisation processes towards, for example, casual sex and one night stands 'together with an increasingly conscious (reflexive) and calculating (flexible) self-regulation as a source of power, respect and self-respect, is characteristic of the social processes of decreasing segregation and increasing integration of women and men' (Wouters 2010, p731).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that Wouters' views on these processes are remarkably different from those of writers on the topic such as Pamela Paul, Ariel Levy and Imelda Whelehan who focus heavily, in their respective analyses of the sexualisation of culture, on its potential problems, pitfalls and challenges. Paul, for example, in her 2006 book *Pornified: How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*, analyses what she calls the 'pornification' of society which she outlines as follows: 'Today pornography is so seamlessly integrated into popular culture...The all-pornography, all-the-time mentality is everywhere in today's pornified culture- not just in cybersex and *Playboy* magazine. It's on *Maxim* magazine covers where even women who ostensibly want to be taken seriously as actresses pose like *Penthouse* pin ups. It's in women's magazines where readers are urged to model themselves on strippers...or...to rent pornographic films with their lovers in order to 'enliven' their sex lives' (Paul 2005, p5).

In the book, she links this incessant exposure to pornography and pornified images through popular culture to an increased acceptance of gender stereotypes including unequal distributions of power that involve the subordination of women to men (Paul 2005, p91). As well as this, however, she also examines the very real influence these messages are having on lived sexuality and real life experiences of sex, a point illustrated through the words of 'Luis', one of the men she interviewed as part of her investigation; 'I live sex the way it's shown in porno...I've broken up with women who wouldn't perform certain things I've seen in adult films...I learned to live my life by pornography; it gave me my first impression of what sex is. For me, sex was all about the fucking' (Paul 2005, p93).

Paul outlines the potential damage this mainstreaming of porn, and normalising of pornographic acts, attitudes and behaviours could have on heterosexual relationships, and not least of all, the women in those relationships. She highlights the fact that, in the main, heterosexual pornography portrays women as tools for male sexual pleasure but not necessarily as having pleasure of their own. Sex acts such as oral sex (woman performing on man), anal sex (man performing on woman) and vaginal penetration are glorified and where female pleasure *is* portrayed, it is usually in the form of an energetic and noisy orgasmic performance.

It is this element of 'performance' that strikes a chord with Ariel Levy whose scathing 2005 investigation of Raunch Culture, portrayed the 'do-me feminists' of the phenomenon as 'female chauvinist pigs' who, far from empowering women, were in fact reinforcing sexist ideals through 'a cartoonlike version of female sexuality' (Levy 2005, p5) that compounded the notion that 'everyone who is sexually liberated, ought to be imitating strippers and porn stars' (Levy 2005, p27). Within the book, Levy is scathing of this pseudo-empowerment, believing its interests to lie 'in the appearance of sexiness, not the existence of sexual pleasure' (Levy 2005, p30), thereby creating pressure for girls and women to conform to a standard of sexiness rather than pursuing any form of actual sexual empowerment.

Echoing these sentiments is Imelda Whelehan, who asserts that the postfeminist rhetoric channelled through the popular guises of 'girl power' and 'girlie culture' does not in fact grant its followers sexual power as its manifesto suggests, but instead legitimates sexual subordination. She situates her argument in opposition to the 'ironic sexism' of lad/ ladette culture which she exposes as one which is inherently linked to conservatism and Victorian patriarchal models of sexual order. The difference, she argues, between traditional sexism and this new 'ironic' sexism, however, is that where once the threat of violence ensured female sexual subservience to men, women are now being encouraged to participate in their own subordination; 'The ladette offers the most shallow model of gender equality; it suggests that women could or should adopt the most anti-social and pointless of 'male' behaviour as a sign of empowerment' (Whelehan 2000, p9)... 'Where physical coercion is no longer feasible, women are being emotionally blackmailed by the new/ old patriarchs and the backlashers to return to their role as moral guardians of society and the family to the point of utter self-effacement' (Whelehan 2000, p173-4).

Like Whelehan, Rosalind Gill and M. Gigi Durham adopt feminist approaches to the topic of sexualisation. Their arguments, however, can be read as an amalgam of all of the theories and concepts of sexualisation listed above including those of Wouters and Attwood. Both of these writers are academics within the broad area of 'media and communications' and view the sexualisation of culture as a positive step in the movement away from sexual repression and the silencing of sex while simultaneously calling for a need to open up discussions and debate regarding female agency and to be critical of the ways in which the media and pop culture can manipulate these processes to their own end.

Durham's book, *The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualisation of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It*, reads almost like an instruction manual for adults who are in charge of or care for (parents/ teachers/ guardians of) young girls, that endorses open communication about sex and the placement of that adult as a mediator of the messages about gender and sex that are communicated to young girls through a pornified media and popular culture. She too, outlines the potential barriers that these messages pose to female sexual satisfaction and autonomy and suggests a need for further discourse that challenges their content in a way that gives girls 'a sexual voice' (Durham 2009) and reinforces the notion that 'True rebellion lies in challenging, dissecting and thinking through (mass circulated images)...and then living your life according to your own values and ideas, not those of the corporate media' (Durham 2009, p190-1).

Gill, on the other hand, frames her arguments about the sexualisation of culture through her analysis of contemporary trends in advertising. Like the feminist thinkers above, she identifies the postfeminist agenda (which she, quoting Michelle Lazar calls 'power-femininity'), not as empowering, but as intrinsically linked to 'commodity feminism' (Gill 2009, p149). Like Wouters she acknowledges that 'sexualisation is far from being a singular or homogenous process' and asserts that, 'In some respects, this shift is a positive one, offering modernized representations of femininity that allow women power and agency' (Gill 2008, p52). Her discussion of 'Sixpack, Midriffs and Hot Lesbians in Advertising', however, highlights the tendency of this culture to reinforce rather than subvert traditional gender stereotypes, sexual norms and heterosexism in the area of sexuality.

This thesis acknowledges the merits of the work of each of these theorists but is most closely linked to the feminist work of Whelehan and the pro-sex, pro-autonomy agendas of Gill and Durham. Its aim is to present an approach to the sexualisation of culture (or Raunch Culture) which is pro-sex, pro-pleasure and pro-information but that is also situated within a feminist framework that interrogates the ways in which media messages about sex have the potential to undermine female sexual autonomy. Arguably, Wouters' interpretation of sexualisation processes as 'a collective emancipation of sexuality – that is, a collective diminution in the fear of sexuality and its expression within increasingly less rigidly curtailed relationships' (Wouters 2010, p732) is short sighted and ignores the possibility that through instituting any sexuality that is 'collective', a new set of exclusions are thus created through a new set of standards, pressures and controls.

It is through these controls, instituted through Raunch Culture and through an inherited knowledge that a potential threat is posed to the development of an autonomous female sexuality. This issue of female sexual autonomy is integral to the conceptual framework of this study and for those purposes is situated within the context of the 'female sexualities' discourses and 'sexualisation of culture' debates already discussed in this chapter. Within these debates, we have encountered concepts such as the pseudo-empowerment proposed by postfeminism, the ways in which gender stereotypes are repackaged and sold to women as new 'ironic' sexism, the importance of 'hotness' in contemporary Western culture and the male-normativity and phallogentric nature of a pornified culture. Each of these concepts has a significant bearing on contemporary female sexuality and the potential for autonomous choice, action and behaviour and it is therefore important to examine how they have been dealt with theoretically in the context of Raunch Culture.

The notion of the pseudo-empowerment of women is particularly pertinent to these debates. It is a social and cultural phenomenon that views the overt sexualities of sex workers and performers such as porn stars and pole dancers as a paragon of 'hotness' which, according to MG Durham 'girls are being conned to aspire to...by popular culture' (Durham 2009, p71). This standardization of what is sexy, combined with the importance placed upon that sexiness in Raunch Culture, generates an intense cultural pressure that insists women conform in body and in behaviour to its standards and ideals. The irony of this so called 'empowerment', therefore, is

that in imposing pressure upon women it is by nature disempowering. It is also a model based 'ironically' on the male gaze and is as a result, is shamelessly heterocentric and male-normative. Durham, for example, asserts that 'men are arbiters of women's hotness' (Durham 2009, p72) and in response asks the question: 'How then are women sexually empowered when the only path to empowerment lies in attracting male lust by conforming to the convention of striptease?' (Durham 2009, p72).

This challenge to Raunch Culture's portrayal of what female sexual empowerment should look like is echoed by Halliwell et al whose study of contemporary images of female empowerment showed links between exposure to these images and a poorer body image and greater weight dissatisfaction among women: 'The empowerment displayed in contemporary images remains rooted in women's appearance and their conformity to cultural ideas of beauty and sexuality. Therefore, the sexual agency implied in these images represents a form of pseudo empowerment and does not, in fact, have an empowering impact on young women; rather it seems to be more damaging than passively objectifying representations. In sum, what on the face of it appears to be a positive step forward toward empowering women, consumers of sexualized advertising actually appears to be taking a step backward' (Halliwell et al 2011, p43). Due to the fact, however, that this pressure is not applied through violence or a threat thereof, it can be difficult to argue its presence and the barriers it might cause to female sexual autonomy. Hilary Lips, in her discussion of 'social desirability cues' and their influence, goes some way to explaining the ways in which this pressure is generated and disseminated: 'the strength of the social desirability cues is provided by the situation in which the interaction takes place, whether the situation is public or private, the target person's concern with looking good and/ or with being true to herself or himself, the strength and certainty of the perceiver's expectancy, the power of the perceiver over the target' (Lips 1999, p25). This is a concept which is at the heart of social constructionist thinking that asserts not only the importance of social, historical and cultural 'cues' or knowledge, but also the fact that this knowledge is then sustained by social processes.

This notion of unspoken 'cues', in fact, is also explored by Durham who proposes that the popular media, through their creation of a series of sexual and gendered 'myths' about sexuality and sexiness 'slyly suggest that conforming to the myths is edgy, hip and rebellious. They

suggest that criticizing or rejecting the myths is old-fashioned, dull or censorious' (Durham 2009, p190). It is therefore by moving subtly 'from an external male-judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic one' (Gill 2008, p45) that Raunch Culture convinces women that their adherence to what is essentially a caricature of female sexuality created through a patriarchal pornographic lens, is ultimately a signifier of sexual empowerment.

This pornographic or *pornified* lens, however, has not just created a set of ideals and standards that pertain to the way women look, or the extent to which they publicly embrace Raunch. It has also infiltrated the ways in which women construct their sexual identities and the ways in which they approach and engage in sexual activity. The mainstreaming of pornography, as illustrated in the previous section, has normalised sexual behaviour that is both male normative and phallogentric and has, most significantly, reinforced the traditional model of 'heterosexual intercourse' or 'coitus' as the primary focus and ultimate goal of every heterosexual encounter. In her discussion of 'The Glorification of Intercourse', Shere Hite explains this model as 'the idea that since nature gave us a 'sex drive' and the capacity for pleasure in order to insure reproduction, therefore coitus is 'the real thing' and all other forms of sexual gratification are substitutions for, or the perversion of, this 'natural' activity' (Hite 1993, p37).

This 'naturalisation' of intercourse and its subsequent status within Western society and culture as the centre of heterosex gave way to what Lynn Segal dubbed 'the coital imperative' (Segal 1994, Chapter 8). Within Hite's seminal study on *female sexuality* (Hite, 1993), only 30% of female participants in the study said that they could orgasm through coitus alone. The overwhelming feeling that emerged therein, however, was that this was not the 'norm'. One female participant, for example, verbalised the belief that within a sexualized society, 'Women are made to feel sexy women don't require' (Hite 1993, p60) anything other than penetration to experience sexual pleasure, satisfaction and orgasm. This is a sentiment purported by Raunch Culture once again through the image of the 'hot', 'empowered' woman who is seen to embrace intercourse as the ultimate pleasurable sex act.

In spite of this 'norm', however, the results of Hite's study would imply that 'Not only were women tired of the old mechanical pattern of 'foreplay', penetration, intercourse and

ejaculation, but many also found that *always* having to have intercourse, *knowing* you will have intercourse as a foregone conclusion, is mechanical and boring' (Hite 1993, p102). Similarly, through this culture, other pornified messages about female sexuality have infiltrated the mainstream and become normalised therein. Among these is the message that, like an actress in a pornographic video, all women are 'gagging for sex 24/7 and would drop their clothes and submit to rough, anonymous sex at the slightest invitation' (quoting Janice Turner, Gill 2008, p45). There is an expectancy too that their sexuality be enacted as a sort of performance that involves appreciative noises, a willingness to submit (to the man/ the phallus/ the act of coitus) and to be permanently 'up for it'. This notion of being 'up for it' is discussed by many theorists on the topic including Streitmatter (2004), and Levy (2005) who links it to the portrayal, within Raunch Culture of the 'virgin' as a figure of fun, and often ridicule within popular cultural texts (including Hollywood movies such as *Road Trip*, *American Pie*, *Clueless* etc) which further emphasizes the importance within this culture of sex, being sexual and having sex.

Women are encouraged to conform to this model through a number of coercive messages that includes an anxiety, reinforced through Raunch Culture, that they will be labelled prudish or anti-sex if they do not 'For a woman to judge pornography as anything but positive is considered a condemnation of her man, or at the very least, his sexual life. Discomfort with pornography also becomes a woman's discomfort with her own sexuality' (Paul 2005, p145). In other words, female discomfort with pornography or with carrying out certain acts portrayed therein is seen as sexual dysfunction on her part. Similarly, there is a very real worry that, like 'Luis' (in Paul, 2005) who admitted to breaking up with girlfriends if they did not perform acts that he had viewed in pornography, their own partners will punish or reject them.

Feona Attwood believes that this marks 'the replacement of 'healthy' sex with an obsessiveness about appearance and performance' (Attwood 2010, p743) and in its dismissal of a woman's right to refuse to perform certain acts by labelling her as 'prudish' or 'repressed', poses a serious barrier, not only to the achievement of that woman's pleasure but of any chance that Raunch Culture can coexist with a culture of female sexual autonomy.

Within this school of thought there is also an area of research that looks more closely at the implications of this culture on the notion of 'consent' in relation to the 'wantedness' of sex

amongst women. Researchers within this area found that in the majority of cases, sex was conceptualised as consensual (wanted) or non-consensual (unwanted) when it should actually be seen to encompass other possibilities such as unwanted consensual sex and wanted sex that is not consented to. Peterson & Muehlenhard, for example, in their 2007 exploration of this topic, outline possible reasons for women to consent to unwanted sex such as 'satisfying a partner's needs, promoting intimacy...avoiding relationship tension...avoiding hurting a partner's feelings, feeling obligated because of something a partner did for them, and enhancing their sexual experience or image' (Peterson & Muehlenhard 2007, p74). While the reasons they found for women refusing *wanted* sex were heavily linked to the potential consequences that enjoying sex has for women, including pregnancy.

Similarly, Claire Maxwell's study of young people's experiences of sex in the United Kingdom concurs with these findings and makes reference to these potential consequences of sex identified by women prior to consenting or not consenting. One reason for a women consenting to unwanted sex defined by Maxwell, for example, is a renewed belief among young women in old determinist models of male sexuality as unrelenting and aggressive that assert that once a man has become aroused he is unable to tame his urges. This is evident in Maxwell's description of one participant's experience of unwanted sex: 'Sarah had not wanted to have penetrative sex but had felt she had 'led [the man] on' (Lees, 1986: 20) by agreeing to go back to his house, or because she had started to become physically intimate with him: '[sex] had started and I couldn't say stop because it had already started . . . [so] you just lie there . . . you don't say anything'...she said she had set out to have 'sex for my own needs' but during these encounters, the experiences she described seemed on the whole out of her control and unwanted' (Maxwell 2007, p550). Equally, Anastasia Powell's study of young people's negotiations of consent supports these finding, asserting that many women 'do not refuse unwanted sex because they feel that it would be inappropriate or they believe that they are responsible for men's sexuality' (Powell 2008, p173).

This newly conceptualised area of 'unwanted consensual sex' is very important to the concept of female sexual autonomy within the context of Raunch Culture. The empirical evidence that exposes women's experiences of consenting to sex that isn't wanted highlights the notion that

within this culture, being *seen* to enjoy ‘fun’ and ‘empowered’ casual sexual encounters takes priority over the young women’s own desires, quest for pleasure or levels of comfort.

This too can be said, equally, for the instances within these studies of women who refuse *wanted sex*. Maxwell identifies the unrelenting presence of the double standard²⁹ as a key factor in young women’s fear and/or rejection of sexual encounters, even when they are wanted. It seems that the socio-cultural consequences of labelling and being judged for her sexual behaviour is regarded as fearfully in the ‘empowered’ context of Raunch as it was in Ireland in the nineteenth hundreds.

Within debates and theories of female sexual autonomy there are many schools of thought. In Margaret Jackson’s Chapter in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* for example, she describes female sexual autonomy as ‘the right to define and control our own sexuality free from male sexual exploitation and coercion’ (Jackson 1995, p55). Lips echoes this sentiment and adds that it should include ‘The freedom to be or behave in a particular way without worrying about whether or not one is being ‘appropriately masculine’ or ‘feminine enough’” (Lips 1993, p34), while Jeffrey Weeks suggests that ‘Autonomy implies several things simultaneously: freedom to evaluate and justify conflicting values and obligations; the right to make personal decisions; and a goal for personal development’ (Weeks 1995, p66).

Within this study, female sexual autonomy is seen as an abstract concept that, at least within Western history, has never been realised. In theory it should encompass each of the definitions above and include a woman’s freedom to define her own sexual pleasure, to seek out that pleasure and to engage in whatever activities are most likely to give her that pleasure, including a freedom to enjoy and engage in facets of Raunch Culture.

For the purposes of this study, however, this culture is seen as one which directly contradicts the notion of autonomy by instituting an ethos that regulates and controls female sexuality by insisting that a woman must fit the ‘hot’ mould in order to be sexual, that she must be willing to perform and engage in sexual acts that prioritize male pleasure over her own and must ultimately tread the line of double standard by appearing ‘up for it’ at all times while

²⁹ ‘women fell into two categories; ‘slags’... or ‘decent girls’” (Maxwell 2007, p545)

simultaneously protecting her reputation from 'slut' labels by engaging in sex that she doesn't want in certain situations and by *not* engaging in sex that she *does* want in others.

3.2 Female Sexuality in Ireland

Traditional perspectives on Irish female sexuality

It is this compromising of female autonomous choice, desire and pleasure that lies at the heart of this thesis and which is central to its discussion on Irish female sexuality, a topic which has historically been analysed and investigated theoretically in terms of guilt, fear, repression, abuse and silence and in the context of population, famine, colonialism and religion. A significant level of detail has already been given in the opening chapter of this thesis regarding post-famine Ireland and the sexualities that existed therein. For the purposes of this chapter and the study's theoretical framework, therefore, it is important to interrogate the ways in which the theoretical areas discussed above have arisen conceptually within this historical context.

This includes an investigation of the restrictive Catholic regime that was strictly adhered to in Ireland until the late twentieth century, Irish female sexuality which, like that of British Victorian counterparts, was separated into two very distinct categories, the 'Madonna' and the 'whore', whereby, as discussed already within this chapter, certain women, such as wives and mothers, were desexualized and considered 'decent' while the single woman and in particular, the sexual woman, was demonized and was seen to pose a considerable threat to the moral (Catholic) fabric of Irish society. 'The bad woman was not merely responsible for her own moral downfall and for the ruin of men but threatened the moral degeneration of the entire nation' (O'Connor 2008, p56).

Ironically, while sex outside of marriage was seen as a sin, women were also considered sinners if they *abstained* from having sex with their husbands 'I felt it was a sin to refuse him his rights' (Hilliard 2003 p37). This sex, under Catholic teachings, pertained strictly to heterosexual reproductive intercourse, which ignored female sexual pleasure and fostered among many Irish women an 'alienation from and lack of ease with their bodies' (Hilliard 2003, p37). This alienation, coupled with a lack of education about their bodies and the reinforcement, through the Church, that sex was inherently wrong, distanced Irish women from their sexuality which

was seen as something to facilitate childbearing and male pleasure 'once he was happy that was it, you didn't think of yourself' (Hilliard 2003, p37).

In her exploration of heterosexual discourses on *Irish Popular Dance 1920-1960*, Barbara O'Connor explains the state of Irish female sexuality during the period as follows: 'Sex was portrayed as a disease which lurked deep within the recesses of women's bodies. Unless it was controlled, it would awaken the most grotesque animal passions. It was only when it was controlled that that the refined, delicate nature of women could be revealed. Since women's bodies were the locus of sexuality, one had to be careful about how women appeared and acted. The twin goals of modesty and chastity became *de rigueur* for respectable women. Two of the principal elements within this regimen were (a) the display of women's bodies activating the 'male gaze' and (b) the movement of the body, especially the amount and nature of the physical contact permitted with the opposite sex' (O'Connor 2008, p54). This quote by O'Connor provides a concise summation of the ways in which female sexuality has been treated in Ireland and supports the central feminist framework of this study in its depiction of patriarchy's relentless attempts to contain, control and subdue this sexuality historically.

While being denied a sexual identity separate from their roles as wives, mothers and Catholics, Irish women were also denied the right to inform themselves and protect themselves against its physical and emotional consequences. Any attempt at exploring their own sexuality was condemned by the Church and women who subverted or transgressed these Catholically instituted social and cultural rules were rejected from society through the stigma of negative labelling, public disgrace and humiliation and even through being outcast from their community, for example those who were sent to Magdalene Laundries. O'Connor describes Ireland at the time as 'a society where the Catholic Church had such enormous power and where it formed such an integral part of the everyday lives of the majority of the population. This would have been particularly the case for women who were severely punished for sexual misconduct' (O'Connor 2008, p58). For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, it is very important to note the historic punishment and containment of sexual women and the obvious repercussions of that regulation for contemporary Irish female sexualities as they manifest themselves within the context of Raunch Culture.

This severely restrictive vision of Irish sexuality and in particular female sexuality has had enormous implications for the ways in which the sexualisation of Western culture has been interpreted, consumed and internalised by the Irish imagination. It could be argued, for example, that Ireland's embrace of Raunch and unquestioning acceptance of its ideals over the past two decades can be viewed as a form of backlash to a legacy of Catholic sexual repression and a fear of returning to a culture of sexual fear, silence and guilt has resulted in the rejection by Irish society of one dogmatic set of sexual rules and its subsequent replacement by another.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, these rules and regulations are currently maintained in Irish society by the popular media in much the same way as they were upheld traditionally by the Catholic Church; through the implementation of strict social controls. While it can be assumed, as explained in the opening chapter of this thesis, that Raunch Culture as a social phenomenon, is extremely unlikely to physically excommunicate those who do not conform to its ideal sexuality, the threat of social exclusion that it encourages, including being labelled as 'prudish', 'puritanical' and 'regressive', which have obvious links to our repressive past, can be equally as inhibitive to potential transgressors.

This is a concept which is explored further by Tom Inglis in his 1997 investigation of *Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality* in which he asserts that 'The hiding, denying and silencing of sex are castigated and there is a rush to blame the Catholic Church for everything that is wrong with our sexuality. Sexuality and the requirement to be sexy is preached in the media and consumer society and operates within individuals as a positive pursuit of an ethical, healthy, pleasurable lifestyle' (Inglis, 1997, p9). He goes on, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of social capital, to suggest that a form of 'sexual' capital has been generated within this newly sexualized Irish culture: 'If there is a form of sexual capital it is being sexually attractive and engaging. Sexual capital comes from looking and being sexy. It comes from a knowledge and feel for the specific way the fame of sexuality is being played in Ireland' (Inglis, 1997, p18). This concept of explaining the cultural institution of sexual norms using Bourdieu's theory of 'capital' is also echoed in the writings of Thompson (2007), Storey (2006) and Green (2008) and is extremely useful when attempting, as in this study, to explain how seemingly 'autonomous' and agentic beings are influenced, persuaded and compelled by the intangible forces that exist within society and culture through *habitus*.

This concept of habitus, and in particular, 'gender habitus' have been mentioned within the previous chapters and have made an extremely important contribution to this thesis and its theoretical framework. For Bourdieu, habitus refers to an individual's way of being in the world (Bourdieu 1990); 'a set of bodily dispositions and mental structures through which we interpret and respond to the social world, based on our past experiences (Bourdieu 1990)' (Powell 2008, p172) and within his work is referred to as a largely unconscious process through which the rules and structures of the social world are internalised (see Powell 2008, p172).

This concept, then, is useful in the context of this thesis in that it provides a basis for the argument that; 'Certain gendered norms, values and dominant discourses come to be accepted as 'natural', 'normal' or 'the way things are'' (Powell 2008, p173) and are therefore by their very nature more difficult to challenge or transgress. Within this study, then, 'gender habitus' is seen to play a central role in the ways in which young Irish women construct their sexualities and sexual identities and also in their capacity (even where agency is perceived) to accept, reject and negotiate their own position within a sexual situation.

In order to develop this notion of agency, or lack thereof, then, the study also relies heavily on Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence'. This is a concept which has driven the approach that the study has taken and supports the connection it seeks to make between a woman's experience of living within a particular culture and the potential impact that that culture can have on her level of social and sexual agency. Bourdieu defines this notion of 'symbolic violence' as violence 'which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu 1982, p167)

This concept, then, is extremely applicable to this study's central argument that the impact of cultural norms and messages can have a profound impact on the level of autonomy experienced by seemingly agentic social beings. Powell uses these concepts in her analysis of young people's consent to unwanted sex and asserts that women's pre-conscious acceptance of these sexual norms can lead to instances of symbolic violence; 'Gendered social norms or expectations as to what men and women are 'supposed' to do in a relationship (Emmers-Sommer and Allen 1999), are embodied through habitus such that young women may 'choose' to participate in unwanted

sex without necessarily viewing the encounter as 'pressured' much less coerced' (Powell 2008, p177).

Bourdieu's work and in particular his development of these two key concepts has been carefully considered throughout this study and has succeeded in shaping its overall research design, its framework for analysis and the basis for its overall thesis.

Irish female sexuality and Raunch Culture

As has been outlined in the Chapter 1, however, the ways in which sexuality is lived, interpreted, represented and consumed in Ireland has changed dramatically since the 1970s and our reaction to this change, as a nation over that period, has been to completely reject all things associated with our repressive sexual history and to instead embrace its antithesis; Raunch Culture, which embodies all that is not traditionally Irish, parochial, insular and controlled.

This reaction, at a superficial level can be viewed as a natural and welcome response to Irish society's emergence from a regime which repressed and demonised sexuality (particularly female sexuality) since Ireland's Great Famine. In fact, if Raunch Culture's message of sexual freedom and empowerment is to be unequivocally accepted and trusted, it would appear that by embracing it, Irish women have taken control over their sexuality and have the freedom to express it in any way they please. What this study aims to highlight, however, is that this culture, far from empowering female sexuality, is simply a shiny, glamorous and globalised mechanism through which less formal, but equally oppressive patriarchal power structures are generated and sustained. As Jackson and Scott put it in their contemporary analysis of feminism and sexuality, 'What counts itself as erotic is itself socially constructed in terms of relations of dominance, to the extent that it is difficult even to think of sex outside of the patriarchal language and culture which shape our thoughts, desires and fantasies' (Jackson and Scott 1996, p17).

The expansive and multifarious nature of Raunch and its symbiotic relationship with popular culture, the popular media and systems of mass communication, make defining and analysing these power structures more difficult than older, more formal patriarchal structures that have resulted in the legal, political and social repression of Irish women by male dominated

institutions throughout history. It is therefore more useful within the context of this study, to identify key features of patriarchy as they manifest themselves and are evident within Raunch Culture and to explore their relationship to contemporary female sexuality and female sexual autonomy in the twenty first century. These features, for example are most evident in key elements of Raunch Culture such as its celebration and mainstreaming of pornography, its media-driven obsession with sex, celebrity and female physical appearance, its mainstreaming of misogynistic language and its portrayal of the sex industry as a glamorous, empowered and legitimate career choice for women.

In Ireland, pornography has never been so visible and although no definitive figures exist which explicitly state the usage of pornography in Ireland, there is evidence that indicates that pornography and the mainstreaming thereof is extremely prevalent in Irish society (in 2006³⁰, for example, online pornography statistics were collated that showed Ireland as the second highest country to search the word 'porn' online). It is not, however, the proliferation of pornographic material that is of central concern to this study but rather the potentially damaging gendered stereotypes that it proliferates. Despite the fact, for example, that the Raunch Culture has rebranded pornography as empowering for women, it still retains heavy links to the patriarchal, male-dominated and often violent representations of sexuality that led feminists such as Andrea Dworkin throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s to renounce its production and consumption as equivalent to rape. However, although Raunch Culture's assertion that pornography has evolved and developed over the past twenty years to encompass the needs and desires of both men and women, the fact is that the majority of images and audio visual representations of sexuality found within mainstream pornography are laden with commercial agendas, gendered assumptions and sexual stereotypes. One need only log-on to free internet sites such as *YouPorn* or *RedTube* to access thousands of videos showcasing visual representations of how patriarchal power structures are reproduced and normalised through pornographic material. This is achieved using a standard template for heterosexual pornography that includes three key elements; a hypermasculine male, an ultra-feminine female and a dominant phallogentric, male-normative and coitus-centric vision of sexuality.

³⁰ http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html

This 'hypermasculine' or macho model of masculinity has been referred to throughout the previous chapters of this study and is embodied by Gill (2009), in her discussion of the use of the 'Sixpack' image in mainstream advertising. Within Raunch Culture, this male is heterosexual, has an insatiable libido and engages in sexual activity with women at any given opportunity. His sexual success can be measured by the number of women he has had sex with, as well as an ability to separate emotion or social-connection from the physical elements of sex. In her 2006 book *Pornified*, Pamela Paul asserts that within this model, '...men tend to find themselves placed in the role of playboy or gigolo, the superficial stud whose status is attained according to the quantity and quality of women he beds' (Paul 2006, p81) and in Ireland, acceptance of this model is evidenced in the increasingly popular annual 'Toys 4 Big Boys' exhibition where 'scantly clad women drape themselves over cars ...in the style of 1970s soft-core pornography' (Ging 2009, p58).

Pornography not only exhibits this image as a contemporary ideal for masculinity through the sexual acts and roles portrayed by its male performers, but also reinforces it as a model to be aspired to by its predominantly male audiences. As Jackson and Scott put it 'Pornography draws on wider cultural narratives through which masculinity and male sexuality are constructed and itself contributes to their construction and reconstruction. It helps to circulate and perpetuate particular versions of these narratives such as the mythology of women as sexually available, deriving pleasure from being dominated and possessed and a model of masculinity validated through sexual mastery over women' (Jackson and Scott 1996, p23).

Within a substantial amount of pornographic material, the male performer is seen as dominant and his pleasure is central to the structure of most pornographic videos, which almost always end in what the industry has termed 'The Money Shot' (Attwood, 2007) due to the fact that these shots, which show the male performer ejaculating (often on the face/ breasts/ anus of the female performer(s)) is the pivotal shot upon which the commercial success of a particular video hinges. The pleasure of the female performer, however, is less integral to the success of pornographic videos and although realistic female pleasure is sometimes present in such videos, more often than not, the female orgasm takes the form of either a histrionic pantomime of screams and affirmations of the male performer's sexual prowess, or is exhibited as 'other' or fetishistically, for example where female ejaculation is recorded.

Where this hypermasculine male is not physically present in porn, his presence can be felt through that of the male viewer. It is, after all, this male-gaze that dictates the market and therefore what is represented in the majority of heterosexual porn. This is evident in videos, for example, where the female performer is engaged in masturbatory acts or where two or more women are shown engaging in lesbian activity ('girl-on-girl' see Gill 2009) and within heterosexual pornography these videos have been made with the expected preferences of that male viewer in mind. As has been mentioned in Chapter 1, this model has also been adopted in contemporary Irish advertising (e.g. Hunky Dory's) as a mainstream image with which to sell non-pornographic products or services.

The counterbalance to this hypermasculinity is 'ultrafemininity' (Kipnis 2007) which is a passive, playful and girly femininity that is frequently reinforced by Raunch Culture through popular culture. This model of femininity has emerged from the patriarchal stereotypes of female sexuality portrayed in mainstream heterosexual pornography. However, the development of Raunch Culture has led to further dissemination, mainstreaming and eventual normalising of this model as the 'ideal' femininity of the twenty-first century society. In Ireland this can be seen in the types of clothes sold in high street stores to pre-adolescent girls including thongs and padded bras and baby clothes bearing slogans such as 'WAG Wannabe' and 'Future Porn Star' that introduce young Irish girls to the notion that first and foremost they are sexual objects.

Within pornography this stereotypical model is firmly upheld and its female performers are portrayed as passive actors in the sexual acts it showcases. They are often depicted as empty receptacles of male sexual pleasure and usually described by pornographers as having sex acts *done to* them as opposed to being active participants in the sexual act. Evidence of this can be seen in the short taglines that accompany many of the top rated videos on free porn website *YouPorn* which include descriptions of woman being 'nailed', 'pounded' or 'fucked'. When a video *does* show a woman initiating a sexual act, even when the sole purpose of the act is to pleasure a man, she is often described within these taglines as a 'whore', 'horny bitch', 'slut' etc. This rigid, one-dimensional view of female sexuality has contributed to the normalisation of an extremely narrow version of this sexuality being disseminated pervasively through channels of popular culture and the media under Raunch, '(this) constraining, exploitative and

commercially motivated construction of sex seems to be our only way of defining female sexuality' (Durham 2009, p131-2).

This reinforcement of such narrowly defined parameters of modern masculinity, femininity and sexuality has led to the establishment of a 'sexual rulebook' within twenty-first century Western society which has, over the past two decades been implemented steadily and pervasively by Raunch Culture through popular cultural texts. This is a rulebook that is driven by phallogentric and coitus-centric sexual standards and which, using a model of sex based in pornography, is blatantly patriarchal not only in its origins but also in its divisive and isolating treatment of women.

Rule #1 Reject Feminism

As investigated in the studies of researchers such as Rudolfsdottir & Joliffe (2008) there has been a palpable shift in the young female imagination away from feminism. This distancing involves, not only a rejection of the term and from the image of the feminist as old fashioned, dogmatic and man-hating but also a move towards a neo liberal individualism that, through the media encourages a culture of competition among woman and an embrace of 'ironic', 'naughty', 'one-of-the-lads' sexism. Within Raunch Culture, this shift has not only been *encouraged*, but any divergence from it is seen as an automatic *convergence* with feminism which is regarded as 'the preserve of only the unstable, mannish, unattractive woman who has a naturally difficult relationship with her own femininity' (Whelehan 2000, p18). Within this phenomenon, femininity is embodied and women are scrutinised *for* and judged *by* their looks and within popular cultural texts are pitted against one another as competition or as enemies. An example of this is the way in which female cast members of popular television shows such as *Desperate Housewives* and *Sex and the City* are constantly portrayed as actively disliking one another and competing for publicity. They are also regularly compared in terms of their physical appearances, and particularly their weight and age. Their male counterparts in male-led television programmes such as *Entourage*, *Lost* or *The Sopranos*, for example, do not experience the same level of scrutiny.

Although televisual representations of women such as these are highly influential, however, among the *strongest* advocates of this anti-feminist sentiment are the media which are aimed

exclusively at women. These include glossy magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* which generate enormous revenue each month by highlighting female bodily imperfections and areas of physical and sexual improvement that women would otherwise overlook. Laura Kipnis, in her feminist analysis of this trend, acknowledges the presence within this media of the 'professional girlfriend'. This makes up a substantial section of these magazines which, under the guise of dispatching friendly advice (e.g. 10 Ways to be Better in Bed/ Look Younger in One Week) are, in fact communicating the message that the female reader is not good enough, attractive enough, sexual enough etc. As Durham asserts 'The media teach us to find pleasure in approximating the unreachable ideal, but because the Barbie body is a myth, we can never fully acquire it and the anxieties remain with us. The pleasure of pursuing a beauty regime is always linked with self-doubt' (Durham 2009, p104). The reinforcement of these messages not only in magazines but in film, television and online media aimed at women is constant, and is a successful tool used, ultimately, to make money by making women feel flawed; 'your self-loathing and neurosis are somebody else's quarterly profits' (Kipnis 2006, p10).

Similarly, these media encourage women to be constantly aware of men's preferences and to adapt to those preferences when making choices about their look, behaviour and sexuality. In fact, in her comprehensive study of the messages, aimed at young female readers, in *Seventeen* magazine, Durham remarks that 'Girls would be well advised to plan their activities, clothes and behaviours with boys' tastes in mind' (Durham 2009, p158). This idea is prevalent in Raunch Culture 'It's like those rowdy women you see at a male strip club- it's almost like they're acting out some male construct of what sexual desire is supposed to look like' (Paul 2006, p111).

This postfeminist or 'do me' feminist message of empowerment through consumption, however, has also been accompanied by a new form of misogyny which has seen an upsurge in popularity within mainstream popular culture over the past three decades. In Ireland, for example, this is frequently seen in the advertisement of social events for young people (e.g. the Alchemy Nightclub posters included in Chapter 1) and University College Cork came under scrutiny recently for their promotion of a 'Tramps Ball'.

Nowhere, however, is this misogyny more evident than in the language used to describe women in popular music where they are often referred to as 'bitches', 'sluts', 'hos' (whores) etcetera.

The following lyrics, for example, are from the song '*Sexy Bitch*' by David Guetta and Akon which reached number two in the Irish music charts; "She's nothing like the girls you've ever seen before/ Nothing you can compare to your neighbourhood ho.....Damn yous a sexy bitch".

Popular song lyrics and, particularly those within the rap genre, also contain explicit references to violence against women. Examples of this include the music of Eminem who in one particular song fantasizes about raping his own mother, or songs such as '*Move Bitch*' by Ludacris whose lyrics include: "Move bitch, get out the way/ OH NO! The fight's out/ I'm about to punch yo...lights out/...I've been drankin' and bustin' too/ and I been thankin' of bustin' you/ Upside ya motherfuckin' forehead".

This trend towards misogyny is aided by the eroticisation of power and violence through pornography, and by extension, through Raunch Culture. It is not a backlash to Raunch's promotion of ultrafemininity, however, but one which works alongside it to contribute to a cultural representation of women and of female sexuality as ultimately submissive, pliable and controllable by patriarchal power structures. This is also supported significantly by the contribution of female-targeted media which, as outlined above, encourage the recognition by women of their flaws, imperfections and inadequacies.

These instruments of patriarchal power combine to promote a divisive, anti-feminist culture of fear, anxiety and competition amongst women. Like the so-called 'Sexual Revolution' in the 1960s, Raunch Culture is marketed as being the ultimate in sexual liberation and freedom. In reality, however, it is an exercise in patriarchy and simply acts to legitimise 'greater access for men to women's bodies and the removal of their right to say 'no' to sex, lest they be damned as 'unliberated'" (Jackson and Scott 1996, p4-5).

Rule #2 Be Hot

This scrutiny of women within popular culture is often based on a scale of measurement that gauges how 'hot' a woman is and the importance of this 'hotness' as a social status or form of social capital has already been discussed within this chapter. This notion of 'hotness' has set in motion some of the most revolutionary socio-cultural changes of the last ten years. Most significantly, for example, the social networking site *Facebook* (a site which as of July 2011 has over 750 million users worldwide) was reportedly first established when founder Mark

Zuckerberg became angry at his girlfriend for breaking up with him and decided to set up a website where men could compare and rate the 'hotness' of every female student at Harvard where he himself was studying at the time.

This process of rating women according to their physical appearance has leaked into Irish culture and society and in 2010 male employees of Price Waterhouse Coopers accounting firm were discovered to have been collating a chart of the best looking female employees including 13 junior or apprentice staff members. However, even when Irish women occupy positions of power, they are found to be subject to similar scrutiny and in 2011, a conversation was recorded between TDs Mick Wallace and Shane Ross within which they called their female colleague Mary Mitchell O'Connor 'Miss Piggy' saying 'They'd want to ban her from wearing pink' (Wallace) and 'She's nothing sensational' (Ross)³¹.

'Hotness', however, is not objective but relies heavily on a woman's ability to meet a set of physical standards and criteria (e.g. slim, large breasts, long hair, tanned etc). This list is an integral part of being 'hot'. To be 'hot', as discussed by academics such as Rosalind Gill and MG Durham, for example, is synonymous with the image of the young slender woman who is, most often, white and blonde. This is evident, for example, in 'lad's mag' *FHM*'s annual 100 Sexist Women in the World List that differs only marginally from year to year and almost never deviates from the proscribed list of 'hot' attributes. In 2011, for example, over 90% of the women listed were white and a further 65% were blonde, all were slimmer than the average Irish woman (the average Irish woman's dress size being between 14-16) and all but one were under the age of forty.

Further to this, drawing on the promotion of the ultra feminine, this ideal also works cleverly in tandem with the tendency of the popular media to infantilise female sexuality. This includes the fetishization of young girls and their bodies, not only in pornography but through popular cultural avenues such as TV shows and pop music (e.g. Britney Spears' video for *Hit Me Baby One More Time* in which she appeared dressed in school uniform). It also, however, involves the

³¹These comments compounded those made by then Taoiseach Brian Cowen in 2010 to Labour leader Eamonn Gilmore about his party deputy Joan Bruton suggesting he 'rein her in'.

process of infantilising representations of adult female sexuality, an obvious example of which is the way in which the original three central female characters have been portrayed in the E! reality series *Girls of the Playboy Mansion*. These women live a girlish, almost Barbie-esque lifestyle filled with dressing up and parties. They speak in childlike tones often using pet names, dress in girlish outfits and pigtails, do as they are told (including abiding by a curfew set by their octogenarian 'boyfriend' Hugh Hefner) and frequently appear to 'dumb themselves down' despite the presence of obvious intellect on their parts (Bridget Marquardt, for example, has a masters degree in communications).

Durham explores this element of Raunch Culture in vivid detail and provides a possible reasoning for this trend 'Little girls fit more easily into a conventional mould of female sexuality, a perspective in which she lacks authority over her own body and is therefore less threatening than any adult woman today. Because of this, little girls epitomize a patriarchal society's ideal of compliant, docile sexuality' (Durham 2009, p129).

As with traditional dichotomous models of female sexuality, however, within Raunch Culture's standards of female 'hotness', there exists a duality of femininities and sexualities. As a result, alongside the docile 'girly' playmate sexuality is one which is seen to be actively desiring, strong and sexually empowered. In popular culture, this woman is represented by fictional characters such as Angelina Jolie's Lara Croft in the action movie *Tomb Raider* and Megan Fox's character 'Michaela' in the *Transformers* movie franchise. These women are shown to be actively sexual and desiring. It should be noted, however, that their adherence to the ultrafeminine ideal is not diminished by their placement in the role of a sexual being but is rather more excessively emphasised in its juxtaposition with the hypermasculine construct of the action movie. Similarly, although they are portrayed as being sexually empowered, their sexuality can only be considered powerful within the context of the male gaze and of *being* desired. These characters, therefore, still meet the hyperfeminine physical standards outlined above (through cosmetics, clothing etc), and their level of sexual power or agency has therefore not increased, but rather their sexuality has simply been strategically placed within a different context for a different male audience.

Rule #3 Embrace 'Sex'

This context is central to the ways in which female sexuality has been manipulated by Raunch Culture through the mainstream media and highlights the rule within that culture that encourages women to embrace sex. The image of the sexually active, aggressive and desiring female as a figure of aspiration has emerged and, in popular culture, 'hot' women are portrayed as sexual initiators. However, although this may appear to be a positive step away from the traditional portrayal of female sexuality as passive and receptive, the definition of 'sex' within Raunch Culture, as explained in previous chapters, remains heavily tied to the male gaze, male sexuality and the commodification of female sexuality for male pleasure. Nowhere is this more obvious than within the pornification of mainstream popular culture that has taken place within Raunch Culture which promotes the notion that a woman's level of sexual attractiveness is her greatest asset, that male pleasure should be prioritised in heterosexual, that coitus is the ultimate (hetero)sexual act and that the male orgasm is a natural end to sex.

The importance of 'embracing' this narrow definition of sex and sexuality is represented in popular culture through texts that ridicule virginity and chastity as outdated, uncool and stigmatic including the movies *40 Year Old Virgin*, *Clueless* and *American Pie* and reinforced by texts that promote embracing and engaging in this type of sex as a form of empowerment and inclusion such as television series *Sex and the City*. Further texts, then, such as the memoirs of prostitution and exotic dance explored within Chapter 2 (books such as Jenna Jameson's *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star* for example), glamorise the sex industry and the sexualities that exist therein as fun, exciting and empowering. In Ireland, for example, this model of sex and the 'fun' associated with embracing it is evident in social events such as 'strippers' nights at universities (e.g. the 'Strippers Playboy Party' at UCC rag week 2011) and through the proliferation of pole dancing as a 'sport' (as examined in Chapter 1).

As Paul puts it 'Popular culture promotes the wild fun and whimsy of the girl who loves pornography. She is Carmen Electra...she sells exercise videos based on strip club routines. She is Pamela Anderson, *Playboy* centrefold, who has her own column in the teenage bible *Jane* magazine. The porn girl is every celebrity who accompanies her boyfriend to a strip club, playing along and plying a few bills to get lap dances herself' (Paul 2006, p109). This model and its reinforcement through popular culture has proved an immensely successful exercise in

patriarchy due to its ability to seduce women into consumption while simultaneously communicating messages to them that ultimately encourage their submission. These messages are based on three key principles: that women exist as objects of male desire, that women are imperfect but should seek perfection through consumption, and that female sexuality exists primarily for men's pleasure. The success of these messages, then, and their penetration into the female sexual habitus is reliant on the fact that they are packaged and sold to women as a form of 'empowerment'.

Rule #4 Be Empowered

This empowerment, however, occurs within a set of criteria that are directly related to standards of 'hotness' upheld by Raunch Culture as well as its heteronormativity and prioritisation of the male gaze as an ideal lens through which to view sexuality. Within this train of thought, the empowered woman is seen as being (and always *enjoying* being) sexually available to men within the parameters of male sexuality and sexual fantasy, while the woman who does not prominently parade herself as both sexually desirable *to* and sexually desiring *of* men is deemed sexually 'disempowered'. In order to be seen as sexual or as 'sexy', therefore, a woman should be seen to possess and to exhibit a level of 'hotness' or be ultimately desexualised (this is evident in make-over movies such as *Clueless*, *Miss Congeniality* and *She's All That*).

Therefore, although Raunch Culture claims to be a paragon of liberation and sexual freedom, in practice it promotes a restrictive and narrow version of female sexuality that does not necessarily match the lived sexual experiences of women in reality. Even pop culture's 'strongest' and most 'sexually empowered' female characters of the past decade have conformed to traditional patriarchal values. One prime example of this is Samantha Jones, an icon of Raunch Culture who was created for HBO series *Sex and the City*, and who was famous for her promotion of 'anything goes', 'no-strings', emotionless sex. Despite the sexual and emotional independence exhibited by her character throughout the programme's six series, however, producers saw it fitting that she, along with the show's other three female characters end up in the arms of a good man when the show concluded in 2004. This reliance on men for a happy ending is present in even the most 'sexually free' female characters within this culture

and perpetuates a patriarchal Victorian ideal that penetrates even the most overtly sexual of popular cultural texts.

In fact, the character of Samantha can be viewed as the archetypal 'empowered' woman as defined by Raunch Culture, due to the fact that she is portrayed as sexually aggressive, as a woman who loves sex with many partners and is ultimately sexually 'free'. This is a 'freedom' however that she describes as 'having sex like a man', i.e. without emotion or a desire for further relations. It can be understood, therefore that in order for a woman to be sexually empowered within the parameters of this culture, she must become 'like a man' rather than being empowered by her own womanhood and her own definition of sexual agency and power.

Within the relationships in *Sex and the City*, women are portrayed as being equally as wealthy, independent and powerful as their male counterparts and as a result, the presence of inequality and the possibility of a sexual double standard is not in evidence within the text. This standard, in fact, is ignored within most popular cultural texts that showcase 'hotness' in spite of the fact that they constantly perpetuate messages of sexual inequality through, as mentioned before, Raunch Culture's popularisation of sexually derogatory terms used against women and its propagation of texts, such as reality television shows (e.g. *Extreme Makeover*, *What Not to Wear*) that legitimise our criticism of other women. Within this culture, women, their level of hotness and their sexuality are scrutinised, criticised and measured against an archaic double standard that, rather than diminishing with the dawn of Raunch Culture, has simply been normalised and legitimised therein.

Ironically, it is only the 'reality' programming associated with Raunch Culture that does showcase real example of this double standard and these texts act as extremely revealing case studies of how the above rules have been absorbed into the everyday lives of young men and women by showcasing the ways in which young women are expected to be hypersexual beings who are sexually desiring and available while simultaneously and unapologetically reviling them as 'sluts' for having sex. One Irish example of this is within the relationships at work in television 'reality' show *Tallafornia*, in which the male cast members are celebrated and congratulated for scoring or 'banging' 'birds' while the women are expected to be 'up for it' (e.g. giving the men lapdances etc) but are simultaneously castigated for actually having sex. In the penultimate

episode, for example, 'Philly' and 19 year old Nikita have intercourse after he made a bet with the other men in the house that he could 'bang' her. When Nikita finds out she says 'to be honest I still wanted to...bang him' but then begins to cry and is branded a 'slut' by her other housemates while Philly avoids any negative repercussions or negative labelling by his peers.

Within this chapter several important trends, themes and phenomena have been identified within Raunch Culture that concern female sexual autonomy and as a result, the central research question of this study. This includes, for example, the identification of the ways in which pornography has been mainstreamed within Irish popular culture and the influence that has, in turn, had on the normalisation of pornographic sex and sexuality that is both heterocentric and phallogentric. Similarly, it has highlighted the current acceptance within this culture of blatant misogyny and portrayals of violence against Irish women through language and discourse and most significantly has identified Raunch Culture's sexual rulebook and its enforcement, through popular culture, that includes a rejection of feminism, a pressure to be 'hot' by meeting a set of criteria dictated by popular culture, a compulsion to embrace this culture's definition of 'sex' and, ultimately, to become 'sexually empowered' by embracing these three rules.

In order to explain how this rulebook is implemented and to further analyse the reasons that women comply to these rules, this thesis draws upon Bourdieu's theories of habitus and 'symbolic violence' which have already been discussed within this chapter. As Bourdieu says; 'the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, (these) often take the form of *bodily emotions*- shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt...' (Bourdieu 2001, p38). Therefore, it can be inferred that although adherence to Raunch Culture's sexual rulebook is not enforced through blatantly coercive means; compliance (even when unwanted) is often regarded as more desirable than transgression due to the presence of these negative emotions and anxieties.

The use of these theories to make explicit the link between cultural and media messages and the lived sexualities and sexual identities of young Irish women will be expanded upon in the final two chapter of the thesis.

Conclusion

The conceptual areas outlined within this chapter are integral to this investigation and to developing an overall understanding of contemporary Irish female sexuality and the social and cultural forces that inform it and contribute not only to its formation, but also the ways in which it is communicated to and interpreted by Irish women. Among the principal issues discussed above are the enduring sexual double standard, the pseudo-empowerment of postfeminist rhetoric and the current freedom bestowed *upon* and barriers posed *to* the development of an Irish female sexual autonomy by Raunch Culture. The exploration of these categories and issues within this chapter, places the central research question of this investigation within the context of existing theory, debate and discussion on the sexualisation of culture and in doing so clarifies its stance as both feminist and social constructionist in its approach to the topic.

Chapter 4

Research Methodologies

This feminist and social constructionist position has heavily influenced the development of this thesis and it is through these two complimentary methodological lenses that its central research questions have been approached. This is an approach which will be further debated within this chapter along with a discussion of the key motivating factors that have inspired this thesis and a detailed overview of the research design of the study.

Background to the Study

I was eight in 1992 at the height of what Susan Faludi (1992) called the feminist backlash, and at the beginning of what would soon become known as laddism (Whelehan 2000), with its associated ladette culture. Despite the fact that women had spent the previous thirty years enjoying greater freedoms of access to education and the workplace, it was a time during which the voices of the first and second wave feminists who fought for those very freedoms began to be drowned out by a disparaging popular culture and an overwhelming pressure to discard what were now portrayed as outdated and unnecessary feminist ideals. I was a product of this culture and, ignorant to the plight that preceded it, I embraced this 'postfeminist' rhetoric in exactly the fashion it was marketed to be embraced; as a glitzy, colourful whirlwind of 'girl power'.

This 'girl power' was a form of pseudo-feminism which was disseminated most notably through the pop group the *Spice Girls* and proved to be a stroke of marketing ingenuity that was more successful in generating vast quantities of revenue for the businesses behind the group than for the empowerment of the girls and women of the time. It was a rhetoric that promoted girlishness and frivolity, pigtails and push up bras; a far cry from the mythical underwear-burning feminists of the 1960s. Combined with the coinciding 'ladette' phenomenon that encouraged women to drink as much as men, to have sex 'like men' and to be as sexist as men; the nineteen nineties was a seemingly carefree decade during which everyone appeared equal, empowered and strong.

The end of the millennium then brought with it further reinforcement of this rhetoric and in 1998, the airing of HBO series *Sex and the City* marked the dawn of a new female sexuality. I was fourteen years old and my peers and I idolised the show's characters and aspired, like them, to wear designer shoes and clothes, to be sexy and confident, and perhaps most significantly, to adopt the new millennium's insistence that sex and emotion be completely separated from one another. As we embarked on a transition to adult social activities, such as going to bars and nightclubs, we began to realise these aspirations, to engage as much as possible in activities with the opposite sex and most poignantly, to dismiss and make fun of those men who suggested the existence of any emotional attachment or a possibility that the experience transcended the physical.

It was only at the age of twenty three when undertaking my M.A. thesis on *Neo-Burlesque: The Art of Burlesque in the Twenty First Century* that I began reflecting on the notion of female sexuality and the ways in which it was represented in cultural texts. During this time I became aware that the cultural embodiment of the socio-sexual norms I had witnessed growing up, could be classified under what academics and social commentators were calling 'Raunch Culture'. This period of reflection allowed me, for the first time in my life to question the sexual choices I had made throughout my adolescence and to question whether I had ever felt I had a choice to begin with. This element of sexual choice and by extension, sexual autonomy, has been key in the motivation *behind* and the formation *of* this thesis.

The methodologies that support this study and that have driven it to date, stem from both feminist and social constructionist approaches to sexuality. Using these, the project's aim is to explore Raunch Culture as a phenomenon firmly located within postfeminist and determinist rhetoric, to link this phenomenon to female sexuality in Ireland and to determine its potential to erode the element of choice and autonomy from sexuality as it is lived by Irish women.

4.1 Background to Methodologies

According to Bryman's definition of the term; 'Constructionism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision' (Bryman 2001, p18) and its

methodologies encourage research methods that allow the researcher to collect and analyse data about the social construction of reality. In terms of sexuality research, social constructionist theory is bound up in the belief that sexuality, as a concept, is neither independent nor fixed, but is instead extremely fluid and highly responsive to social and cultural contexts.

It is an approach which is regarded as being antithetical to positivism and biological determinism and examines sexuality as a socially constructed field which is not only constructed but constantly *reconstructed* by its social surroundings. This social constructionist approach rejects essentialist theories that assume that the origins and evolution of sexuality are rooted in 'nature' or 'taken for granted' biological 'facts'. According to John Gagnon, for example, in his work *Sexual Conduct*, the sexual is a device constructed 'from (a) complicated set of layered symbolic meanings' (Gagnon 1974, p23) and 'the doing of sex (even when alone) requires elaborated and sequential learning that is largely taken from other domains of life' (Gagnon 1974, p9). He goes on to explain that this learning is dictated by socio-sexual scripts; interpersonal conventions which are shared and understood within a particular society. For Gagnon these scripts are unconsciously adopted and adapted to everyday life and everyday sexuality. Jeffrey Weeks echoes this social constructionist approach expounding that 'what we deem as 'sexual' is as much a product of language and culture as of 'nature'' Weeks (1995, p31).

The mention of 'nature' here hints at the tensions that exist between this constructionist approach and the essentialist or biologically determinist approach. It is this notion of a 'natural' sexuality, in fact, that this study finds problematic due to the fact that it tends to legitimize one sexuality over another and often prioritises heterosexual and reproductive sex as that which is 'normal' or 'natural'. It is central to the development of this discussion on female sexual autonomy, however, that autonomous sexuality include innumerable sexualities, sexual choices, sexual behaviours and sexual identities, taking into account, for example, that pleasure can be sought and enjoyed through different means and interpreted in different ways by different people. Social constructionist research, therefore, tends to view gender and sexuality as social constructs, formed through language, history, social interaction and the cultural messages that are communicated to people from birth within a given society.

As a result, research methods used by social constructionists will often take a qualitative approach, are usually inductive and focus on a generation of theory as opposed to a testing of existing theory. While it can be argued that no singular set of methods can be identified as exclusively pertaining to social constructionist research, the focus of this methodological approach is on the importance of language and discourse in the shaping of our selves, and in the case of this study, our sexual selves 'Language is not a transparent medium for conveying thought, but actually constructs the world and the self through the course of its use' (Wetherell & Maybin 1996, p. 220)³².

This focus on language, both compliments and supports the second methodological lens through which this study has been approached; feminism. This is a broad methodological standpoint that comprises a combination of social, cultural and political movements whose primary concerns involve obtaining and maintaining equal rights, agency, status and representation for all women. Feminist methodologies tend to reject quantitative research methods as incompatible with feminism and are largely based on the belief that knowledge which is produced by empirical methods is never completely value free and is instead laden with preconceptions.

The rationale for adopting feminist methodologies for the purpose of this study is based on three key factors. The first centres on the fact that the thesis itself is based on recognition of the influence of patriarchal power structures on female sexuality both historically and currently in Ireland. The second, then, focuses on the critical nature of this thesis in which the censure of a patriarchal and androcentric phenomenon such as Raunch Culture can be seen as being essentially feminist. The third basis for using feminist methodologies within this study then, is the project's ambition of drawing attention to a need for social reform in the area of Raunch Culture if the goal of female sexual autonomy is to ever be achieved in Ireland.

The joint methodological approach of feminism and social constructionism that drives this thesis is not unusual in the field of social research and its consideration of human sexuality. In recent decades, for example, feminist researchers such as Shere Hite, Sue Jackson and MG Durham

³² Wetherell, M & Maybin, J (1996) 'The distributed self.' In Stevens, R (Ed.) *Understanding the Self*. London: Sage/OUP.

have noted the compatibility of these lenses and their corresponding research methods in their studies of female sexuality and sexualisation processes.

Research Methods

In her essay entitled 'Is there a Feminist Method' Sandra Harding suggests that there is a lack of certainty in social research when trying to identify or define a 'distinctive feminist research method' (Harding 1989, p2) She suggests that feminist methods themselves do not differ greatly from those of traditional androcentric researchers but rather it is the way they are approached and carried out that makes them distinctively feminist. Feminist researchers, she explains, 'listen carefully to how women informants think about their lives and men's lives, and critically to how traditional social scientists conceptualise women's and men's lives. They observe behaviours of women and men that traditional social scientists have not thought significant. They seek examples of newly recognized patterns in historical data' (Harding 1989, p2).

Feminist methods, then, seek to overcome androcentricism in research (this study, for example, attempts to highlight the male normativity and phallogentrism of Raunch Culture) and attempt, in some way, to instigate social change. The methods are self-aware and recognize the positionality of the researcher and the potential impact of their pre-existing knowledge or assumptions on the research. This acknowledgement of the researcher's 'positionality' is a critical reflection on his or her part that explores the 'politics of position' Susan Smith (1993) cited by Hopkins (2007, p386) within empirical research and has recently become accepted practice by feminist scholars who 'rather than despairing the possibility of making any kind of "truth" claims'...'have sought to develop alternative epistemologies emphasizing "situated knowledges," arguing that knowledge is produced positionally, and hence, always partial' Haraway (1988); Harding (1991); Krieger (1990) cited by Maynes and Pierce (2005, p1) .

Given the centrality of language and qualitative data within both feminist and social constructionist approaches, the study's aim was to focus on women's experiences of sex and sexuality in their own words and for these purposes, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods has been employed to maximise, not only the feminist framework of the thesis, but also the project's objective of providing a contemporary view of female sexuality in Ireland. Although feminist research has tended traditionally to reject quantitative research

methods, arguing that the generation of statistics and 'hard fact' is far removed from real female experience which can result in 'the silencing of women's own voices' (Maynard in May & Williams 1998, p18), progressive voices in the field have begun to champion the combined use of quantitative and qualitative data as *enhancing* rather than limiting the potential of feminist research; 'the commitment of feminist researchers to qualitative methods is not universal. Jayaratne (1983) has observed that feminist political aims might just as well be furthered by quantitative methodology' (Seale 1998, p209).

Bearing this in mind, it was considered important, with a view to painting a larger picture of the ways in which Irish women communicate, enact, interpret and internalise their sexualities, that a more quantitative approach be taken to the study during the initial empirical stages. This took the form of a self-completion questionnaire which, contrary to the old-fashioned feminist idea that this quantitative method would simply submerge women's voices 'in a torrent of facts and statistics' (Bryman 2001, p286), succeeded in supporting, framing and enhancing the subsequent generation and analysis of qualitative data produced through face-to-face interviews.

Potential Limitations of Social Constructionist Methodologies

The use of face-to-face interviews as a method, however, is based not alone on the feminist focus on learning from the words of women and their experiences, but also on the importance of language in social constructionist research and the use of methods of interpretation and analysis such as 'linguistic repertoires', 'Discourse Analysis' and 'Conversation Analysis'. Linguistic repertoires, for example, describe 'the resources upon which people draw in constructing accounts. Certain words, phrases and ideas which are characteristic of certain popular discourses are used to achieve various affects' (Seale 1998, p212). This is a concept which has been utilised within this study's interview process and, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6, was successful in determining, for example, the dominant linguistic repertoires that surround abstract concepts such as 'sexiness' and 'hotness'. Obvious links then exist between this method and that of 'Discourse Analysis' which 'takes its place within a larger body of social and cultural research that is concerned with the production of meaning through talk and texts' (Tonkiss in Seale 1998, p246). Within this method, language 'is seen not simply as a neutral medium for communicating information, but as a domain in which our knowledge of the social

world is actively shaped... (and) involves a perspective on language which sees this not a *reflecting* reality in a transparent or straightforward way but as *constructing* and organizing that social reality for us' (Tonkiss, 1998, p246).

Further to this is the method of 'Conversational Analysis' which has been employed in the layout, transcription, interpretation and analysis of this study's interviews. This is a method of analysis 'which is based on an attempt to describe people's methods for producing orderly interaction' (Silverman in Seale 1998, p266) and looks at, not just language but at the wide variety of nuances available within speech and conversation and the structural and sequential organisation of talk. Practically this involves a number of strategies which have been employed within the interview process of the study such as 'trying to identify sequences of related talk' (Silverman in Seale 1998, p273), examining 'how speakers take on certain roles or identities through their talk' (Silverman, 1998, p273) and looking 'for particular outcomes in the talk' and '(working) backwards to trace the trajectory through which a particular outcome was produced' (Silverman, 1998, p273).

Critics of social constructionist methods often refer to the highly qualitative nature of research methods such as 'Conversation Analysis' and the difficulties that lie therein of generating what are regarded as quantifiable, scientific 'hard facts' in relation to sexuality studies. This thesis would suggest, however that the acceptance of anything as a sexual certainty based on biology alone is to ignore thousands of years of social interaction, interpretation and evolution. It also infers that once accepted as 'fact', the topic is closed to further interpretation, is inarguable and impenetrable, and is therefore limiting to further research or investigation of the topic.

Further to these potential limitations is Miles and Huberman's assertion, for example, that 'qualitative analyses can be evocative, illuminating, masterful, and downright *wrong*' (Miles & Huberman 1994, p230) as it often involves only one researcher and therefore one person who defines its parameters, the problem, the sample and interprets the resulting data. Within this study, however, the potential for errors associated with this 'vertical monopoly' (Miles & Huberman 1994, p230) and more significantly the 'availability heuristic' which is associated with the registration, retrieval and more frequent use of 'vivid' rather than 'pallid' data within qualitative findings are significantly reduced by the employment of several pre-emptive

strategies. These include checking for researcher effects during the transcription process and when re-reading and analysing those transcripts, deciding prior to analysis which kinds of data are most trustable, replicating findings where possible and looking for negative evidence (Miles and Huberman 1994, p231). Further to this, the supplementation and cross-checking of these qualitative data with those collected through the quantitative survey which allow little capacity for subjectivity also succeed in strengthening the validity of the qualitative data.

Potential Limitations of Feminist Methodologies

The most obvious limitation associated with feminist qualitative research, then, is the *positionality* of the researcher. This refers to the pre-existing position, knowledge and agenda of the researcher themselves and its potential to influence the ways in which he/ she interprets and analyses the words, experiences and accounts of their female participants. The danger attributed to this influence is the issue of 'false consciousness' whereby tension may exist between the researcher's feminist *interpretation* of the reported experiences of participants and the meaning attributed to those experiences by the participants themselves.

However, several measures have been put in place to ensure that the most balanced and reliable findings emerge from the data collected that reflect, as accurately as possible, the experiences of the women who were interviewed. Among these measures is the provision for participants of full details of the project and its primary aims and objectives prior to each interview. This ensures that each interviewee acts as a *knowing* participant who is *aware* of the framework of the study and who therefore is less susceptible to having an unknown agenda applied to her reported experiences. Similarly, since the interview questions themselves were devised according to the responses given by the female participants of the previous (questionnaire) phase of the project, the line of questioning and thematic layout of the interviews were therefore be familiar to them.

Underpinning this thesis, however, is a feminist methodology that regards objectivity as neither possible nor desirable but rather embraces self-reflexivity and subjectivity as an enrichment of feminist discourse rather than a limitation to it. Katz, for example, is critical of "methodological inventiveness", whereby the researcher tries empirically to "get inside viewers' heads" (Katz 1996 p19). He claims that: If some progress has been made in naturalness and unobtrusiveness,

it is usually at the expense of representativeness, and at the expense of the mapping the need of the alternation - or even the co-existence - of different viewing patterns in the same individuals, in different groups, and in different cultures" (Katz 1996 p20). This thesis, however, is more closely aligned to the views of Clive Seale who, in his overview of qualitative interviewing states that 'The implied goal of an objective social science is seen as a sham, brought about to hoodwink respondents into exploitative social relationships' (Seale 1998, p207).

Further to this is the level of significance within feminist research, attributed feminists interviewing women, and particularly where women are interviewing women or 'objectifying your sister' (Oakley 1981, p41) due to the fact that there is a delicate balance to be struck 'between the warmth required to generate 'rapport' and the detachment necessary to see the interview as an object of surveillance' (Oakley 1981, p33). Given this necessity to build rapport and Oakley's assertion that these types of interviews often require a certain level of personal investment by the interviewer, there is a danger, particularly where the subject matter is both sensitive and personal, that the interview may become a therapeutic space for interviewees. Oakley, for example, reported a large number of cases where interviewees had asked her questions within the interview setting and refers to the work of Goode and Hatt (1952) who employ a number of conversational strategies in order to avoid engaging with participants at a level that is personal and might therefore have the potential to bias the interview process and any subsequent analysis thereof. These are strategies which have been carefully considered when carrying out the interviews within this study and include the use of certain phrases to avoid answering such as 'right now, your opinions are more important than mine' (cited in Oakley 1981, p36) or, to offer to provide the interviewees with an honest response to their question once the interview has been completed.

4.2 Research Design

Operationalisation

The above section has outlined the chosen methodologies of this study, those who have used them before and the ways in which they have the capacity to guide and focus research on sexuality. With that in mind, this section aims to explain the ways in which these lenses have

been applied to this study in order to provide a comprehensive response to its most important research questions.

The central research question, for example, upon which this thesis is based is as follows: 'To what extent has the recent expansion of Raunch Culture posed barriers to the development of an autonomous Irish female sexuality?', and its success relies heavily on the provision, at the project's end, of a clear measure of Raunch Culture's impact on Irish female sexual autonomy. In order to measure this, the central question needed to be sub-divided into two distinct theoretical categories. The first of these explores the concept of Irish female sexual autonomy under a series of further sub-categories and the second deals explicitly with Raunch Culture as a social phenomenon including its key features, its increasing presence in popular culture and the factors that have led to its development.

In the context of this study, the term 'Irish female sexual autonomy' describes an idealised sexuality in which women are free from pressure or coercion and instead enjoy independence, agency and freedom of choice in their sexual decisions, behaviour and identity-formation within the context of Irish society and culture. As a research area, however, this definition is more complex and incorporates a web of interrelated theoretical areas including 'female sexualities', debates on the sexualisation of culture, definitions of autonomy including discussions on power and a close look at Irish sexualities. Based on a thorough exploration of these areas in literature (see Chapter 2), the following is a list of key research questions that pertain to the investigation of this sub-research area:

- What characterises 'Irish Sexuality' and what social, cultural and historical factors have contributed to this characterisation?
- What messages about sexuality are communicated to young Irish women from childhood and where do they come from?
- How do Irish women measure what is 'sexy'/'hot'?
- How do Irish women measure sexual success?
- What pressures exist to meet this sexual standard?
- What value do Irish women place on their own pleasure?
- What value do Irish women place on their own sexual agency, choice and autonomy?

- Can autonomous female sexuality ever truly exist, given the presence of patriarchy?

A similar process surrounded the dissection, within the study, of the topic of Raunch Culture, or more broadly, the sexualisation of mainstream popular culture. It was necessary to first break it down into sub-research areas and to identify key questions within these areas that would best contribute to answering the question at the heart of the thesis. These questions are as follows:

- What characterises 'Raunch Culture' and what social, cultural and historical factors have contributed to that characterisation?
- How visible, present and relevant is Raunch Culture in Irish society?
- How does Raunch Culture portray ideal female sexuality?
- Do popular cultural representations of female sexuality match the sexual *aspirations* of Irish women?
- Do popular cultural representations of female sexuality match the sexual *experiences* of Irish women?
- To what extent does Raunch Culture impose its own sexual standards and rules?
- To what extent does Raunch Culture's 'sexual rulebook' pose barriers to the development of sexual autonomy?

In order to transform these abstract, theoretical questions into something empirically observable and measurable, however, it was necessary to integrate them into the study's research design (detailed below) through the use of two empirical methods: a self-completion questionnaire and a series of one-to-one interviews. This course of action involved the reimagining of the topics and questions outlined above and a process of breaking each topic and its subsequent research questions down to form a set of questions that could be applied in an empirical situation.

Given the complexity of this task and multifarious nature of human sexuality as well as the differences that exist in the ways in which it is discussed, interpreted and lived by individuals, it would be difficult to produce conclusive findings on the topic using just one method of research. With this in mind, and in order to provide a thorough cross-examination of this study's research

topic and its central thesis, the use of two distinct research methods (both qualitative and quantitative) have been employed within its research design.

The first of these centred on a self-completion questionnaire which was designed to provide a quantitative look at patterns in the sexual attitudes and behaviours of young Irish women in order to build picture of female sexuality as it is currently lived, viewed and represented in Irish society. The second method, then, consisted of carrying out one-to-one, semi-structured qualitative interviews with a voluntary sub-sample of those who responded to the initial questionnaire in order to supplement and enhance the quantitative data already collected.

This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods within the project's research design has been consciously adopted so as to provide a comprehensive overview of the field of contemporary Irish sexuality while simultaneously placing it within a specific cultural movement and analysing the socio-sexual consequences, influences and phenomena that exist therein. By using this multi-strategy approach, it will be possible to cross-check, compare and contrast findings deriving from both qualitative and quantitative research methods which will strengthen confidence in the overall findings of the study by relying on more than just one method to measure Raunch Culture's influence on female sexuality in Ireland.

The reliability and validity of these methods are closely linked to this technique and the fact that it provides a multi-dimensional approach to data collection and data analysis. Within the study's quantitative data collection method; its self-completion questionnaire; the layout of the survey, the questions themselves and the conditions for its completion are entirely standardised and no fluctuation exists in the way it has been administered from respondent to respondent. The questionnaires were completed remotely by each participant with no input or interference from the researcher. These factors contribute to a process which can be easily replicated and to the generation of reliable data.

As outlined above, in order to avoid what some feminists would regard as a weakness of quantitative methods, these questionnaires have been further supplemented by data collected through qualitative one-to-one interviews which have been carried out with a sample made up of a voluntary sub-set of respondents to the initial survey. This ensures that the participants are

given a voice with which to elaborate on the themes raised within the questionnaire in order to produce frank narratives of Irish female sexual experience. This use of more than one method of data collected, then, has provided a thoroughly balanced, rounded and informed picture of Irish female sexuality in the context of Raunch Culture.

Self-Completion Questionnaire Method

The self-completion questionnaire was disseminated *to* and filled in *by* participants remotely, using online survey tool www.surveymonkey.com, without the aid of the researcher or any facilitator. The questionnaire itself consisted of twenty-nine closed ‘tick box’ questions, as well as one question that required text input (Appendix A, question 28). These were devised with the study’s central research questions in mind and comprised of a **profiling section**, designed to identify respondents who match the criteria of the study’s ideal sample, a section exploring each participant’s **‘sexual self’** including the sexual information they received growing up and other factors that have contributed to their sexual identity, a section regarding **‘sexual pleasure’**, its importance and the value participants place on their own pleasure and that of their partner(s) and a final section, involving a series of questions regarding **‘sexual pressure’** and the extent to which these participants experienced pressure in their sexual lives. These sub-categories were designed with a set of research questions in mind which are fundamental to the project’s central thesis including:

How do Irish women measure what is ‘sexy’?

How do Irish women measure sexual success?

What pressures exist to meet this sexual standard?

How, and from where do Irish women learn about sex and sexuality

What value do women place on their own pleasure?

Do popular cultural representations of female sexuality match the sexual experiences of Irish women?

Furthermore these questions corresponded directly to the central research question of the study and were devised with the ultimate goal of generating a significant amount of quantitative data that would highlight general gendered and socio-sexual patterns among young Irish women.

These young women are represented in this study by a sample of female staff and students of National University of Ireland, Galway who fit within the age group 18-34 years. This group was chosen as a strong representative sample of the study's overall population due to the fact that it encompasses a range of women from all over Ireland and from a wide variety of social, economic and political backgrounds. Given that the student body of NUI, Galway includes groups from both urban and rural areas throughout the island of Ireland, the project's situation in the west of Ireland and in one of the country's smaller cities can be regarded as less problematic due to its placement within the University context.

Given that Ireland's socio-sexual past has been historically so deeply fraught with and embedded in systems of colonial oppression and Catholic guilt, it was important that respondents to the questionnaire had experienced a legacy of Irish sexuality in order to guarantee a comprehensive overview of this sexuality as it manifests itself within contemporary society and culture, and therefore only Irish were considered to fit the ideal sample. For the purposes of this study, therefore, participants can be considered 'ethnically Irish' if they have both been born in Ireland and have spent at least 90% of their life in Ireland. This group, it can therefore be assumed, have experienced a shared 'national' sexual habitus, a common ethnic identity and a shared history as well as a shared education system, national media and a broad set of shared cultural influences.

The female-only stipulation for the sample was chosen, perhaps obviously, with the notion of female sexual autonomy in mind in order to ensure that responses given were those of lived Irish female sexuality and not those of its observers. Given the location of this study within Raunch Culture then, a phenomenon based largely in contemporary popular media, it was seen as important to recruit participants who have experience of these media. The specified age range of 18-34, therefore, was chosen in order to reflect the opinions, observations and experiences of adults who had grown up in a society immersed in Raunch and 'pornified' representations of sexuality. Given that this group were born between 1980 and the early 1990s when Raunch Culture first came to the fore, they were deemed the most appropriate group of respondents to this questionnaire.

The decision to use sample parameters that included only staff and students of NUI, Galway, has been outlined briefly above. It was chosen as the study's location for two major reasons. The first pertains to the presumed highly diverse nature of its Irish students/staff members who come, not only from the West of Ireland but from all over the country and from a wide spectrum of socio-economic, urban and rural backgrounds. Its 'ethnically Irish' female staff and students aged 18-34, therefore, were seen as an ideal sample for investigation of this topic on Irish female sexuality.

The second reason, then, pertains to the safety parameters of the study, the convenience (for both the researcher and participants alike) of the on-campus interview settings and, importantly, the ready availability of support (from services such as the University's Ethics Board and its free counselling and chaplaincy services) within the University context.

For the purposes of this research method, the sample was recruited through a variety of actual and virtual spaces within NUI, Galway. These included the advertisement (Appendix B) of the survey (including a link to the survey itself) within online student media such as message boards, student union e-bulletins, the student union *Facebook* page and the university's online newspaper (SIN). Student and staff mailing lists were also used to inform both students and staff about the project via an email which included an electronic link to the survey, as well as an invitation for potential interview candidates to participate further.

Permission to use the data collected through this method was inherent in the voluntary responses of its participants. However, as per the appended questionnaire, this has been communicated to participants via an appended 'Participant Information Sheet' (Appendix C) and they were each offered a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality with a reassurance that any information that they chose to offer would be dealt with in an ethical manner.

The questionnaire itself was disseminated and the data collated through the online service tool www.surveymonkey.com. This tool allowed all participants, along with the researcher, to view the survey via a web link and also kept a full record of individual responses as well as overall statistics regarding the data collected (viewable only by the researcher). No reward or financial incentive was offered to participants of this questionnaire.

The use of www.surveymonkey.com in this study, therefore, provided an efficient means of disseminating the questionnaire to an unlimited number of potential participants and also allowed participants to complete the survey with maximum anonymity and ease of use. These participants only had to click on the link provided and tick as many of the questions as they wished to answer. Recruitment and dissemination for this research method began in early November 2010. Once open, the link remained 'live' for two months and was closed at the end of December 2010. During this time, 2087 people responded to the survey, of which 1764 fit all of the sample criteria.

Throughout this period, all data generated was automatically collated and stored within the researcher's online *Survey Monkey* account and could be accessed at any point throughout the process. The tool *itself* proved extremely useful for this type of research, however, in that it included a function that allowed the researcher to easily code and export the entire body of data directly into statistical and analytical software packages such as SPSS. Using this package, the quantitative data collected through this self-completion questionnaire method was processed and analysed in order to generate corresponding statistical values with which to measure the data. In order to produce significant findings regarding the trends and motifs evident among these data, responses and the frequencies and distributions therein were measured and analysed.

Despite the predominantly quantitative attributes associated with this research method and the use of SPSS to collate and analyse the data collected, a largely qualitative research approach was taken to the findings generated therein by 'approaching statistics as rhetoric' i.e. 'ethnostatistics' (Bryman 2001, p437). This approach was further aided by the subsequent use of qualitative empirical methods within the study and provided a strong framework for the interview phase of the project, the questions for which were devised based on the questionnaire findings.

Face-to-Face Interview Method

The interviews themselves, then, allowed a more comprehensive exploration of the ways in which female sexuality is lived in Ireland. They were informal, semi-structured and were conversational (reflexive and reciprocal) in nature. As explained above, they also formed an

integral qualitative approach to the central research question and were heavily driven by the feminist and social constructionist methodological lenses of the study with a focus on the voices of women being heard in relation to their own sexuality and sexual autonomy. This method also has also formed an integral part of the methodological integrity of the study and ultimately has served, not only to supplement, but to successfully cross-examine and increase the credibility and reliability of the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire process with a more qualitative approach.

While the questions contained within the self-completion questionnaire were designed in order to generate a certain amount of quantifiable information, the interview process was devised with a view to further examination and investigation of the themes and issues raised by responses to the survey questions. All of the interview questions were conversational, open-ended and were used to supplement the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires with a qualitative exploration of the participant's experiences of sexuality and the factors that have contributed to their sexual development, their sexual behaviour and their base of sexual knowledge. Using this combination of methods and through the integration of key research questions with the study's line of empirical questioning, a comprehensive argument has been built in response the study's central research question.

The sample selected for this interview process was a voluntary sub-sample of participants from the self-completion questionnaire process. As per the appended questionnaire (Appendix A) each survey participant was invited, upon completion, to contact me directly at s.stokes1@nuigalway.ie if they wanted to participate in the interview phase of the project. At this stage they were also be asked to appoint themselves a codename which would be used throughout the process. Once a potential participant had expressed an interest in being interviewed, they were each emailed a Letter of Intent (Appendix D) and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix E) which included an outline of the process as well as what would be expected of them should they agree to be interviewed. In the case of those who expressed further interest in taking part in this process, a time and date was arranged that suited both interviewer and interviewee.

Interviews were held in a pre-specified office in the School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI Galway which was both private and quiet. Each participant was required to submit a signed copy of the Informed Consent Form prior to the interview commencing. Audio recordings were made of all interviews and notes were made by the researcher throughout. The individual interviewee largely determined the nature and structure of the interviews in that each interview was treated as co-constructive i.e. the interviewee's own experiences led the line of questioning. Similarly, different interview techniques were required depending on how relaxed the participant was and depending on her comfort level over the course of the interview. A guiding framework for questioning, however, was based on the responses collected through the questionnaire method in order to build on the quantitative data generated therein with a comprehensive and cohesive qualitative inquiry. The interviews each lasted approximately one hour in duration, but this, again, depended on the individual being questioned.

The data collected using this method included notes made by the researcher during the interview process and, most importantly, an audio recording of each interview. These recordings were then orthographically transcribed, resulting in a verbatim record of each of these interviews including repetitions, hesitations, grammatical errors etc. As outlined earlier in this chapter, analysis of this interview data incorporated the use of both 'linguistic repertoires' and 'Conversational Analysis' and involved a number of thorough, thematic, close-readings of each transcript during which frequency information such as behavioural or attitudinal trends, themes and motifs which are common to some or all interviews were identified. These techniques were applied to the transcripts in order to detect commonalities in the types of language used in participants' discussions of their own sexuality and sexual experiences, as well as their discussions of society's approach to sexuality and the sexuality of others. These commonalities were then placed within the context of the study's central research question and were compared and contrasted with the data generated using the quantitative self-completion questionnaire.

4.3 Further Methodological Considerations

Given Ireland's history of silence and secrecy on the subject of sex and sexuality, the primary topic under investigation within this study remains a sensitive one. Even in our current cultural climate in which sex and sexuality feature heavily in every facet of popular entertainment,

media and communications, Irish people are extremely slow to discuss and confront issues of their own sexuality. As outlined in the opening chapter, this is a culture which stems from the traditional enforcement of Catholic morality in the Irish experience of sexuality and the severe punishment or threat thereof for anyone who deviated from the strictly proscribed sexuality of Catholic doctrine. This legacy has resulted in a history of sexual ignorance and fear of exploration, or of seeking further knowledge in sexual matters.

Despite Raunch Culture's penetration of Irish society in recent decades and the subsequent flurry of discourses on the issue of sex and what is 'sexy' therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that deeper issues of Irish sexuality remain shrouded in silence and remain, even into the second decade of the twenty first century, almost taboo. As a result, it has been important within the delivery the study's research methods, to demonstrate a level of sensitivity and awareness (particularly during the interview process) of the methodological issues that arise as a result of its intimate subject matter. Among these is the potential for participants to be selective in their disclosure, for example, omitting details that may reflect poorly on them or which may be deemed private. Along with this, there is also the possibility, within discussions on autonomy, that interviewees might underestimate the level of influence that external sources might have on their identity, opinions and behaviour. With this in mind, the data collected therein, and more specifically the interview transcripts have been regarded, interpreted and analysed in a way that reflects not just what has been explicitly stated by each participant but also the wider discursive contexts of their statements as well as the level of enthusiasm and levels of reticence or hesitancy in their discussion of certain topics.

Ethical Considerations of the Study

(1) Questionnaire

A number of ethical considerations were given to this choice of method and the way it has been executed. The choice of sample, for example, was based on the fact that it would comprise of adults only, (aged between the ages of 18 and 34) and would incorporate a wide range of competencies, experiences and backgrounds.

The recruitment process for this method was also scrutinised and it was felt that several elements would contribute to the most ethical outcome, such as the fact that participation in

the process was completely voluntary and any information disclosed or omitted at any point throughout was at the discretion of the respondent. Similarly, the very nature of an online survey, such as those facilitated by *Survey Monkey* ensure that participants enjoy full anonymity and there is therefore no requirement for them to contact the researcher directly or to divulge any of their contact details.

Throughout the design of this process, I was also mindful of the wording of the recruitment literature (emails etc) and the phrasing of questions within the questionnaire itself so as to avoid value-laden language and to ensure that my own personal opinions, feelings and experiences did not influence potential responses.

All potential participants in the questionnaire process were guaranteed that the data collected would be stored carefully and would be dealt with and analysed in a confidential, sensitive and ethical manner. An outline of the study was given in the advertisement of the questionnaire (Appendix B) and any interested parties were invited to contact the researcher directly with any further queries. Once these parties clicked the link to the survey, prior to responding to any of the questions, they saw an introduction comprising of the text of the participant information sheet (Appendix C). At this point they were reminded that complete confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to every participant and contact details were given for both the researcher and the primary research supervisor of the project. Participants were not obliged to answer any of the questions and, should one question have made them uncomfortable, they could move on to further questions or may have ceased participation at any point in the process.

Data collected was not printed in hardcopy but was kept in password-secure computer files accessible only by the researcher until the study's end, at such a time all data was submitted to the project's primary research supervisor to be maintained and stored by her for no less than five years.

(2) Interviews

As with the Questionnaire process outlined above, the interview method adopted for this study included only participants who willingly volunteered to be interviewed. The fact that they had

already responded to the questionnaire and contacted me directly, expressing their interest in participating, indicated not only that they had an interest in the research but also that they were comfortable with the process and its research objectives which were made clear from the outset.

Those who did contact me were sent full details of the project and the interview process and were each briefed with a letter of intent (Appendix D) regarding the objectives of their sessions. In each case, where a potential participant had received all of this information and expressed an interest in furthering their participation by being interviewed, they were asked to sign a statement of informed consent (Appendix E).

As there was no financial or material reward offered for participating in this interview process, it can be assumed that the primary incentive of the interviewees was to share their experiences, that they were doing so voluntarily and that they were confident and comfortable in doing so.

Data collected through this interview method, including tapes, were stored in a locked file cabinet and were only accessible to the researcher until full transcripts had been made. Through consistently using each participant's code name, these records did not contain any names or indicators that might be used to identify the participant. Once transcripts were made, all audio recordings were handed over to Dr. Vesna Malesevic, the project's primary supervisor, who will maintain them securely for no less than five years.

Should the participant have wished, at any time to withdraw from the study or to remove or omit any data, they were free to do so. Similarly, if they had felt that any part of this research had been carried out unprofessionally or unethically by the primary researcher they were invited (within the Informed Consent Form and the Letter of Intent- see Appendices D and E) to report to NUI, Galway's Research Ethics Committee who approved the proposed research methods and protocol of the thesis. Within the informed consent form, contact details for NUI Galway's chaplaincy and counselling services were also provided in the event that any of the interviewees might experience any distress or discomfort during their participation in the study.

It can therefore be assumed, that with these provisions and levels of transparency in place, the research process, methods, results and conclusions have been executed and presented in a way that is ethically sound.

Limitations of the Study

This is a study carried out within the parameters of ‘Western’ popular culture and although it does not preclude the experiences of any sexual orientation, the heteronormative imperative of Raunch Culture has resulted in its focussing on heterosexuality and the standards, representations and behaviours that exist therein. Similarly, there are inherent assumptions within the study regarding the implications of an Irish history which was heavily influenced by Catholicism and until the mid-twentieth century, largely isolated from the rest of the world. While these assumptions are based on the experiences of the majority, it is accepted that they are not necessarily an accurate representation of every Irish person’s experience.

The study itself is also constrained by certain limitations, in that although it aims to draw certain conclusions regarding female sexual autonomy in Ireland, there is an acknowledgment that no single study can encapsulate every Irish woman’s experience of sexuality. However, through the careful and meticulous selection of the project’s main methodologies and research methods, a balanced, credible and valid picture of Irish female sexuality has emerged therein.

Limitations of Self-Completion Questionnaire as a Research Method

A number of limitations are associated with these methods. With self-completion questionnaires such as the one being used for this research, for example, the potential for misunderstanding among participants is said to be increased due to the absence of the researcher who could otherwise clarify any issues while the questionnaire is being completed. Within this study, however, these limitations have been significantly reduced prior to the questionnaire being filled in by respondents by ensuring that the objectives of the research have been clearly communicated to all potential participants (through the appended Participant Information Sheet Appendix C and Questionnaire Advertisement Appendix B) and that the wording of the questions themselves is unambiguous. The potential limitations of an absent researcher in this case have also been outweighed by the benefits of allowing each participant to be completely anonymous, particularly given the potentially sensitive information being disclosed.

Similarly, the standardised format of most questionnaires could limit the potential depth of the investigation in that it makes it difficult for an absent researcher to explore more complex issues with participants, or for the respondents to expand on issues that they feel are most significant. It can be assumed, however, that the supplementation of this quantitative data with more qualitative data generated through listening to women's own experiences (within the interview process) has minimised this limitation within the scope of the research.

Limitations of Face-to-Face Interviews as a Research Method

Among the potential limitations of using face-to-face interviews as an intended method for this study, then, is the notion that, unlike the anonymous structure of the questionnaire, this method involves a face-to-face meeting between interviewer and interviewee which could potentially result in a level of discomfort on the part of the participant when discussing their sexuality. In order to lessen this discomfort, a comfortable, quiet, and familiar location was provided for the interviews on campus and the structure of each interview was conversational and largely led by the interviewee herself. All participants were also guaranteed complete anonymity, with pseudonyms of their choosing being used on any tapes and documents generated throughout the process. The timing of each interview was also allotted carefully in order to ensure that participants did not meet one another between interviews.

Similarly, the project has ultimately *benefitted from* rather than being *limited by* the presence of the interviewer during this process due to the fact that I was on hand to provide clarification and further information to the participants where needed and could therefore direct each interview while at the same time giving the interviewee time and space to express her reactions, opinions and experiences. Therefore, although the feminist and social constructionist methods and methodologies adopted within this study are not without their limitations, the conscious adoption of both qualitative and quantitative research methods have made provisions for these limitations and by adopting two different standpoints from which to view the data, have provided a thorough examination of the topic and its central research questions.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

As described within Chapter 4, two distinct research methods; a large quantitative questionnaire and a series of qualitative, in-depth, face-to-face interviews have been utilised to investigate the central research question of this thesis. Within this chapter, the findings produced by the analysis of data collected via these two methods will be presented in the context of the common attitudes, trends and themes that emerged therein.

5.1 Survey Findings

The first of these empirical methods is a self-completion questionnaire that, as outlined in the previous chapter, involved a large-scale quantitative survey which was carried out among female staff and students of NUIG. Over 2000 people responded to this online survey and of this number, a total of 1764 women fit the exact parameters of the ideal sample, (i.e. they were aged 18-34, were 'ethnically Irish' and were female staff or students of NUIG). It is upon those 1764³³ responses, therefore, that these findings have been based.

Of this number almost 84% were aged 18-24 while the remaining 16% were aged 25-34. The vast majority of respondents (80%) identified as 'Exclusively Heterosexual' and a further 14.5% identified as 'Mainly Heterosexual'. Only 3.2% identified as 'Bisexual' and a tiny 0.9% and 0.6% of the women identified as 'Mainly Homosexual' or 'Exclusively Homosexual' respectively. A slightly larger number of women surveyed were 'single' (34.9%) or 'single but engaged in casual relationships' (16.5%) than those who were 'in a relationship' (39.6), 'cohabiting' (7%) or 'married' (1.8%). Only four women identified as 'separated' (0.1%), 'divorced' (0.1%) or 'widowed' (0.1%)³⁴.

³³ Where percentages are lacking, the remaining figure is attributed to those who left the related question blank. In cases where 'those who responded' has been specified, this indicates non-blank responses only

³⁴ It is important to note at this stage that this sample shows deviations from a representative sample e.g. as pointed out by Quinlan in his paper on The Health Needs of Gay and Bisexual Men in Ireland, although Irish census information does not reflect the sexual orientation of the population, the Kinsey's 10% rule is usually used to define a gay, lesbian and bisexual population

Being 'Hot'

Within Chapter 3, the importance of 'hotness' and its centrality within Raunch Culture to discussions of sexual attractiveness and worth was highlighted. This was further explored within the questionnaire through the following question, 'How sexy do you believe you are?' Of those who responded, the majority believed themselves to be 'Moderately sexy'. It is significant, however, that over a quarter answered that they believed themselves to be 'Not sexy' (19.7%) or 'Not sexy at all' (6.7%).

How 'sexy' do you believe you are?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Not sexy at all	6.7%	103
Not sexy	19.7%	304
Moderately sexy	59.9%	925
Very sexy	9.7%	150
Extremely sexy	4.0%	61
answered question		1543
skipped question		221

Figure 5.1(1)

Building on this notion of 'sexiness' or 'hotness', participants were then asked to identify from a list, the factor that *most* influences their perception of how sexy they are. In response, a high number of the sampled women (37%) selected 'Romantic/ sexual partners' and a further 12.9% identified 'Intended romantic/ sexual partners' as the greatest influences on this perception. 'Friends or peers' were also shown to have a noteworthy influence, however, 'Family', appeared to have negligible influence over how sexy the women believed themselves to be (0.8%), whereas the collective influence of media, celebrity images and pornographic material amounted to a substantial 18.4%.

Which of the following MOST influences your perception of how sexy you are?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Romantic/ sexual partner(s)	37.0%	570
Intended romantic/ sexual partner(s)	12.9%	199
Friends or peers	16.8%	259
Family	0.8%	12
Media influences	9.1%	140
Celebrity images	5.9%	91
Pornographic material or other media showcasing sexuality/ nudity	3.4%	53
This view has been formed independently of any of the above factors	14.1%	218
<i>answered question</i>		1542
<i>skipped question</i>		222

Figure 5.1(2)

Pressure

In order to further explore this notion of external influences over the sample's self-perceived sexiness and sexuality then, they were asked whether they felt pressure to be 'good' at sex. Of those who responded to this question, over two thirds cited 'yes' that they had experienced that pressure, while just over 30% said that they had not. This supports the discussion in the first three chapters of this study which have explored the influence of the mainstreaming of pornography on sexual standards and the ways in which Raunch Culture encourages women to 'embrace sex' and to exude 'hotness'. When asked about the source of this pressure, of those who responded, 36.6% cited either current or intended partners/ lovers as the chief source of this pressure.

Interestingly for the purposes of this study, it was also found that almost the same number (34.1%) cited media influences including TV, erotica and women's magazines as the primary

source of this pressure in their lives. Again, this supports the discussion in Chapter 3, which suggested the ways in which these media enforce Raunch Culture's 'sexual rulebook'.

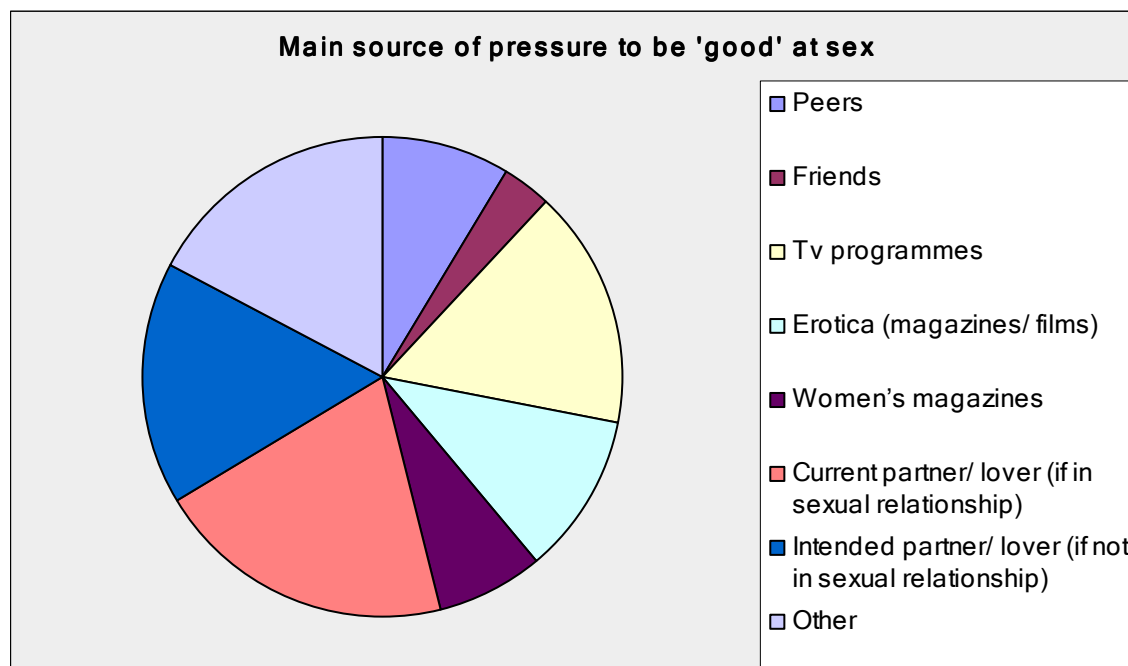


Figure 5.1(3)

Empowerment

As discussed previously within this chapter, it is this rulebook and its enforcement through Raunch Culture that forms the basis of the central thesis of this study. In order to explore it further as it translates to Irish women's lived experiences of sexuality, then, questionnaire participants were given a list of statements regarding the ways in which female sexuality is represented in the media, next to which they were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement.

Within the findings of this question, a large number of those who responded selected 'Don't know/ neutral' in reaction to these statements. Similarly it was found that high levels of contradiction and disparity exist within the responses given. This is evident in the fact that although 54% 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' that media representations of female sexuality are 'Entertaining/ fun', over 45% of respondents also agreed to some extent that these representations are 'Degrading'. Similarly, while almost 40% of those who responded agree/ strongly disagree that these representations are 'Empowering', over half of the sample disagree

or strongly disagree that they are relevant to their own sexual lives. In fact, despite the high levels of agreement with the fact that these media portrayals are entertaining, fun and empowering within the findings of the questionnaire, only 16% agreed that they are either realistic or accurate.

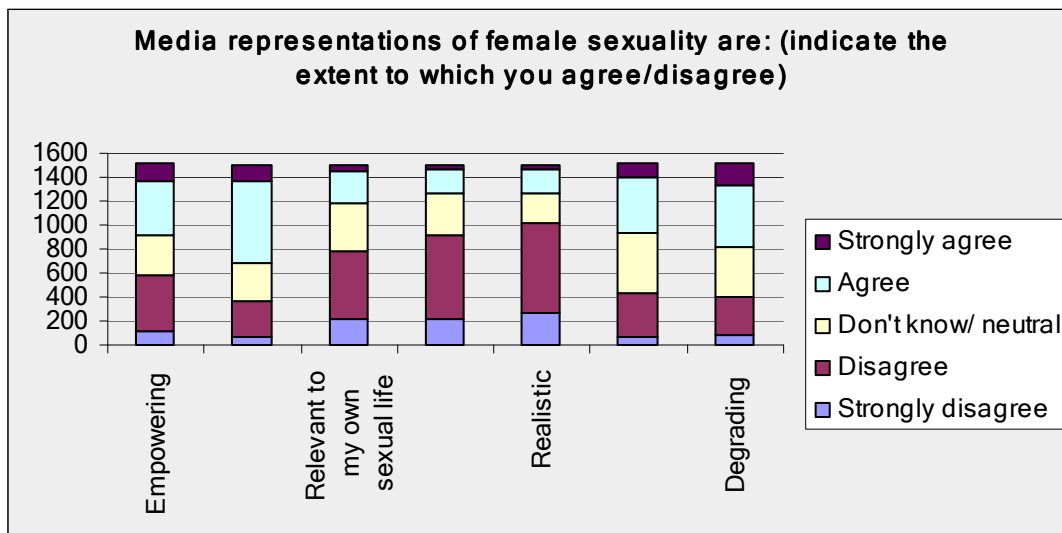


Figure 5.1(4)

Within the data collected through this survey question, then, perhaps most significant to the findings of this thesis is not alone the level to which the women agreed or did not agree, but the high levels of responses which were left blank (almost 13% throughout), as well as those who responded 'Don't know/ neutral' to each of these statements. These figures support the trends evident throughout the entire study and suggest a lack of cohesion between the way female sexuality is represented in the media and the way it is lived by young Irish women and in particular the inferred disparity that exists between representations of empowerment and the reality of it.

It should be noted at this point, however, that in line with Gerbner et al's (Bryan and Zillman 2002) writings on cultivation analysis in television audiences, this process of media influence and impact within mainstreamed mass media can be underestimated by audience members themselves and can happen at an almost unconscious level; 'The 'facts' of the television world are evidently learned quite well, whether or not viewers profess a belief in what they see on television or claim to be able to distinguish between factual and fictional presentations. Indeed,

most of what we know or think we know is a mixture of stories and images of what we have absorbed' (Gerbner et al 2002, p52).

In order to investigate this further, a second list of statements was presented to the survey participants that sought to explore the extent to which they viewed media representations of female sexuality as mirroring the everyday sexuality of women, as realistically portraying women's sexuality and as something which is achievable for women. The data collected therein reflects that a large majority of those surveyed (87.6%) 'Disagree', or 'Completely disagree' with the statement that these representations mirror the everyday life of all women and a further 67.5% disagree with the suggestion that these media representations realistically portray women's sexuality.

Notably, however, despite these statements, a majority of over 71% agree to some extent that these representations may be achievable for *some* women and a further 42% of the respondents agree that these representations mirror the everyday life of *other* women but *not theirs*. This data supports the discussion within earlier chapters of this study which explored the popularity of self-improvement as a concept within popular cultural texts and the tendency within Raunch Culture for women to be compared and to compare *themselves* to other women.

Responses to this question exposed a similar pattern to those generated by the previous question and once again, high levels of uncertainty and a lack of cohesion among participants' perceptions of media representations of female sexuality were found. As with the previous question, although this does not provide the optimum conditions to make inferences about the beliefs and perceptions of the sample or its majority, it is important to the study's findings due to the fact that it demonstrates a diversity, disparity and uncertainty among the sample in terms of the conflict that exists between media representations of female sexuality and the ways in which that sexuality is lived, experienced and perceived.

Sex Education

In order to explore these attitudes further, two questions within the questionnaire were allocated to finding out first where participants learned most about sex and sexuality and second who or what influenced most the way they *think* about sex and sexuality. The most

significant source of learning for those who responded was made up of media related entities such as TV, erotica (such as magazines and films), teenage magazines and women's/ men's magazines. These were attributed almost 44% of the overall response. A further 21% said that they had learned most about human sex and sexuality from friends while partners/ lovers were cited by a quarter of those who responded.

In response to the question of what most influenced the way they think about sexuality, then, 33% of those who responded felt that media such as those listed above *most* influenced the way they think about sexuality while 30% cited 'Friends' as their greatest influence and a further 27% listed their 'Partner/ lover' as that which was most influential.

It is apparent, from the data that parents do not feature prominently either as a source of sexual learning (2.3% cited their parents as the place they learned most about sex and sexuality) or as a significant influence over the way the sample think about sexuality (5.6%). This is in keeping with the suggestion that sex and sexuality have become the domain of the media and is becoming more influential on the ways in which we learn about and live our sexualities than what we learn within the family.

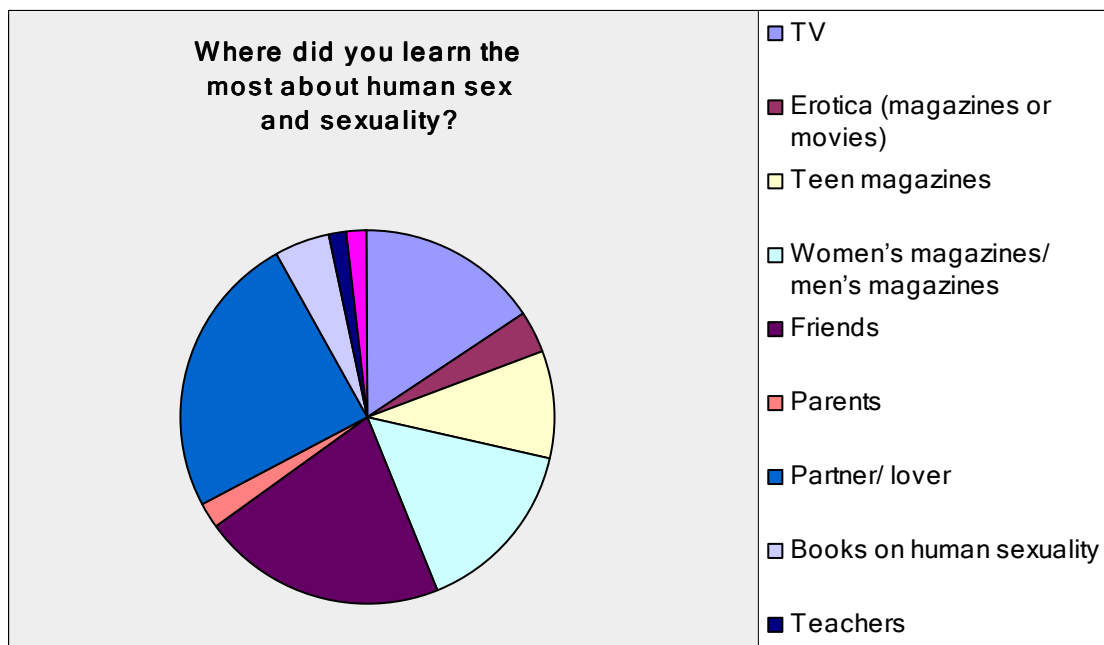


Figure 5.2(5)

In a similar vein, it is notable that the number of respondents who listed educators or authority figures such as teachers (1.4%) and spiritual leaders (1.6%) as their primary site of learning about sex and sexuality was negligible within the findings of the survey. Furthermore, in response to the question that followed, a lower percentage *still* identified these authority figures as among those which most *influenced* the way they thought about sexuality (teachers 0.3% and priests, pastors or ministers 1.7%). These data are further supported by the responses of participants to the final questions of the survey which pertain to religion and the level of influence that it has on the participants' sexual behaviour. Of those who responded to the question, 62% state that religion has 'No influence at all' over this behaviour while almost a further 20% say that it has 'Minimal influence' or 'Almost none'.

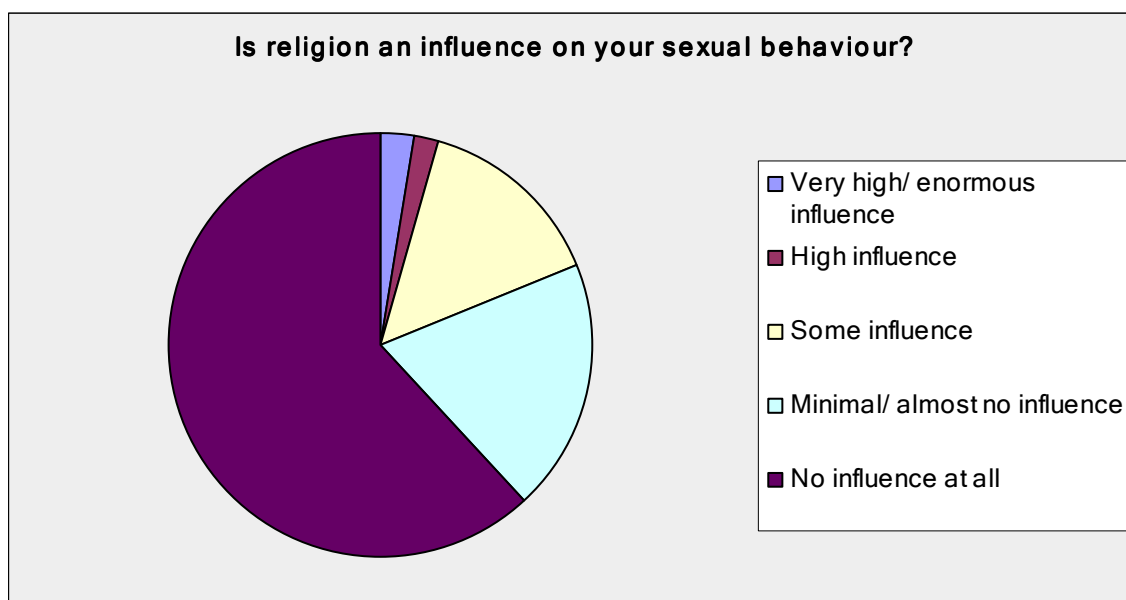


Figure 5.1(6)

Pleasure

Central also to a discussion on the topic of sexual autonomy is the concept of pleasure and in order to learn more about the ways in which the sample experienced and perceived pleasure, they were asked a series of questions related to pleasure, orgasm and the connection between their sexual behaviour and their sexual pleasure.

When asked, for example, if they achieved orgasm when they masturbated, almost 70% of the women responded positively. It is significant, therefore that of those who responded to the question regarding experiences of orgasm during intercourse, only 9% of the sample said that

they 'always' experience orgasm during intercourse that consists solely of penetration (i.e. no clitoral stimulation etc) while just over 30% say that *they* 'always' achieve orgasm when coitus was accompanied by clitoral stimulation. Similarly, of those who said coitus (without clitoral stimulation) was their most frequent sex act, only a third said they 'always' achieved most pleasure through that act. While almost half of those who said that coitus accompanied by clitoral stimulation was *their* most frequent sex act claimed that it 'always' give them most pleasure. These findings support those of Hite and Segal whose research suggested that coitus alone is not the ultimate sex act when it comes to female sexual pleasure and the achievement of female orgasm.

Within the questionnaire a series of four further questions regarding the *importance* of orgasm for the participants were then asked in succession. The first two asked respondents to rate the importance of their orgasm, first with a long term partner and second with a casual partner. In response, only a quarter of the respondents rated their orgasm as 'extremely important' within a long term relationship and less than 15% rated their orgasm as such in a casual relationship.

The third and fourth question in this section, then, asked the sample to rate the importance they placed on *their partner's* orgasm, first within a long term relationship and second within a casual relationship. The findings of this question differed from those of the question above in that almost half of the sample saw their partner's orgasm in a long term relationship as 'extremely important' and just over 12% felt that way about a partner's orgasm in a casual relationship.

These figures then indicate that within a long term relationship, the women surveyed regard their partner's orgasm as almost twice as important as their own, whereas within casual encounters the importance they place both on *their* orgasm *and* that of their partner is diminished. Highly significant also, and in keeping with the findings of the interviews is that of those who responded, almost 400 women said that they 'didn't know' or were 'neutral' about the importance of their own orgasm in a casual relationship. These findings, therefore, are in keeping with those found within the discussion of popular cultural texts within this thesis, which demonstrates the presence of a male-normative, porn centric attitude to sex within the media that prioritises male pleasure.

In an apparent contrast to these negative and apathetic findings, however, of the responses given to the question 'How often do you enjoy sex?' almost 30% said that they 'Always' enjoyed sex while over 35% said that they 'Often' enjoy it. It is highly significant in the analysis of these findings however, that almost 40% of the women sampled chose to leave this question blank, signalling, once more, an uncertainty or potential disinterest on the part of the sample in relation to their own enjoyment or pleasure.

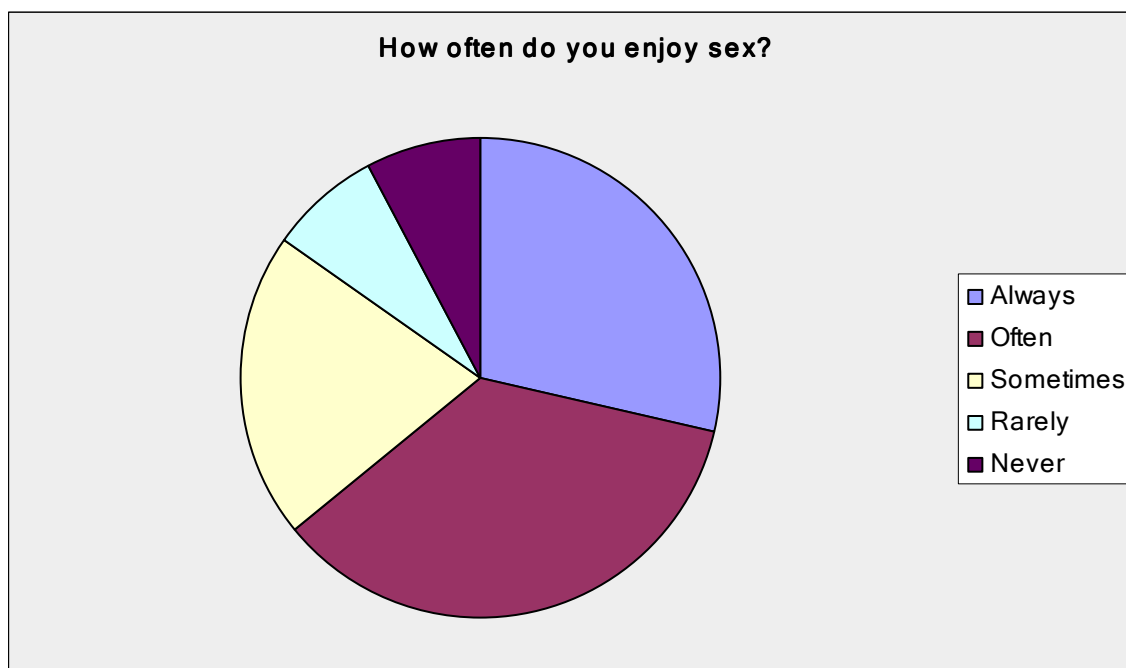


Figure 5.1(7)

What can potentially be garnered from the disparity between the number of women who enjoy sex and the importance they place on their own orgasms, is an argument that despite the heavy emphasis placed on the orgasm as the *raison d'être* of sex in the media, the women sampled demonstrate high levels of enjoyment when it comes to sex without necessarily 'achieving' orgasm or attributing a central importance to it.

These findings have contributed significantly to this discussion of Irish female sexual autonomy and have uncovered themes and trends within the sexuality of this group of young Irish women including their apparent apathy regarding their own orgasm and prioritisation of that of their predominantly male partners, particularly within casual encounters; a pressure experienced by the vast majority of the sample to be 'good' at sex; and significantly, a focus on coitus as a

primary sex act despite the low number of women who identify this act as that which is most pleasurable to them. In order to uncover the sentiment, perceptions and reasoning behind these trends in the words of the women themselves, then, they are explored qualitatively within the interview findings discussed in the following section.

5.2 Interview Findings

Following the questionnaire method (as per the process outlined in the previous chapter), a number of respondents contacted me, expressing an interest in participating in the interview phase of the project. Of this number, twelve interviews were arranged to take place during the last week of January 2011 in the School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI Galway. Of the twelve women, all were born in Ireland and had lived here for over 90% of their lives, nine of them were aged 18-24 and three were aged 25-34. In terms of sexual orientation, six of the twelve identified as 'Exclusively Heterosexual' with a further five identifying as 'Mainly Heterosexual' and one as 'Bisexual'. Half of the participants said that at the time of interview they were 'In a relationship', two were cohabiting, one was married and one identified her relationship status as 'Single but engage in casual relationships'.

As a result of the differing personal circumstances and the wide diversity, variety and range of experience within the sample, it was understandably important to tailor the questions of each interview to the individual participant while also adhering to a list of key thematic areas and questions that were seen as integral discussion points of *all* of the interviews carried out. The fact that sex, sexuality and personal sexual experiences can be extremely sensitive and private topics for some and not for others, was also taken into consideration and the tone of each interview was also set according to the participants, their demeanour *towards* or rapport *with* the interviewer and the level of comfort they displayed in reaction to the line of questioning. This is evident from the tapes and transcripts which reflect the friendly camaraderie demonstrated by some participants with the interviewer and the wariness or discomfort evident in the language, tone and hesitancy of others. As a result, these face-to-face qualitative interviews were semi-structured and despite the presence of a recording device, as informal as possible.

Thematic Analysis

The orthographic transcriptions of each of these interviews were then analysed thematically by adopting the categorical breakdown that included 'hotness', 'pressure', 'anxiety', 'pleasure' etc. Under these categories, then, a number of subcategories, themes and motifs emerged throughout the twelve transcripts through which they were analysed, compared and collated.

Being 'Hot'

The first question that was asked to every interview participant was 'what does the term 'hot' mean to you?' The purpose of asking this question was not only to establish what exactly the term meant to each interviewee but also to ascertain how the term is understood by young Irish women and the ways in which they either identify with it or are removed from it. This line of questioning also goes some way to establishing how these women perceive 'hotness' and whether or not it is a significant factor in the construction of their socio-sexual identities.

Overwhelmingly what emerged from the data was the notion that to be considered 'hot', a woman needs to meet a narrow set of physical attributes and criteria including a specific body shape that is both slim and curvy simultaneously. These conditions are read by some of the women as a checklist of 'hotness' and one even uses the term 'generically hot' (Louise) to describe the women who meet them. Almost all the descriptions of hotness given by the participants mention an ideal body shape and paint a vivid, standardised picture of what hot should look like: 'Slim, toned, tanned...curvy' (Erica) 'Skinny...Blonde, big boobs' (Emer) 'Symmetrical face and the shiny hair' (Laura) 'Tall, thin, athletic...nice skin, nice hair' (Louise) 'a really good figure would probably be the main thing...curvy but not overly curvy' (Orla) 'quite skinny, pretty good chest, pretty flawless skin and probably blonde-ish' (Ruth).

The obvious commonalities found in these descriptions highlight the notion that 'hotness' is not an abstract concept such as 'beauty' or 'prettiness' which are often thought to be in 'the eye of the beholder'. Instead it is perceived to be a tangible status that can be accessed by those who meet a set list of physical attributes and a willingness to exhibit themselves as sexual above all else. Ann, for example, asserts that 'it's not even good looking or beautiful because I think that's separate from describing someone as hot. I suppose its kind of a level of their sexual attractiveness or how appealing they are to somebody' (Ann). This is a sentiment echoed by

Laura; 'hot mightn't always mean beautiful or pretty...she has sex appeal' (Laura) and of Louise who equates 'hot' with looking good, but 'more in a sexual way than a sort of cute or pretty sort of way' (Louise).

Similarly, several of the interviewees mentioned that a 'hot' woman might include someone who was 'seductively dressed' (Louise) or 'a woman...who's scantily dressed and sort of 'raunchy'...showing (herself) off as a sexual object' (Paula). This notion of women having to, not only appear sexy but to overtly exhibit that sexiness (usually for men) in order to be classified as 'hot', featured prominently in these discussions. Laura for example goes on to explain 'I suppose you'd use it to describe a woman maybe being 'on show'...for a man I suppose' (Laura), a point supported by Claire who says 'other women who might be gorgeous but don't show themselves off as much, people say that 'oh they're beautiful' or 'they're pretty' but they don't call them 'hot'' (Claire).

The contrived and standardised nature of this 'hotness' emerges as a motif throughout these interviews and is acknowledged by the participants therein. In response to the question 'What female celebrity do you think Irish men think is hot?', for example, many of the women alluded to the notion that often, these 'hot' celebrities do not look like *them*, nor do they look like the women they encounter on daily basis; 'people in real life don't actually look like that...you don't generally see people walking down the street looking like Cheryl Cole' (Erica). 'You would rarely describe somebody who is very average like myself or yourself as very *hot*' (Rah). They also suggested the idea that 'hotness' is something that most people have to work at and not something that naturally occurs. Erica, for example suggested that someone hot might be 'Big into their appearance...a lot of time on hair and make up and all that' (Erica) while other participants referenced the ways images of hotness ['they look a normal size...when in reality they're probably a 6 and have been photoshopped' (Orla)] and the 'hot' body itself can be manipulated and reconstructed in order to meet the required standard; 'fake hair, fake boobs, everything' (Rah).

These findings support those of the questionnaire in which a large number of participants agreed that media representations of female sexuality were inaccurate or unrealistic, but a similarly high proportion also agreed that they were, to some extent 'Fun/ Entertaining'. This

trend of accepting the frivolity of media representations of female sexuality while also acknowledging the falsehoods that exist therein can also be observed throughout the interview data collected. Within this data is an awareness on behalf of its participants that many of these representations are falsified before we consume them; 'They're airbrushed- those pictures aren't real...looking at magazines...people's boobs probably aren't real and if they are they're probably still airbrushed, and girls' bellies are airbrushed and their thighs are airbrushed' (Laura); 'even the models don't look like that. Like that's just the photo that's taken, airbrushed to shit...it doesn't even resemble them' (Daisy).

What also emerges within these findings, then, is the prerequisite that a 'hot' woman must be equipped with, not only these physical attributes, but with an air of sexual confidence that is commensurate with the standards set out by the media; 'It's their confidence, whenever you see them they always seem to be confident and sure of themselves' (Louise). The participants elaborate on this notion in their depiction of 'hot' female celebrities such as Megan Fox; 'There's something really like, sexy about her, I don't know, I don't think she's that sexy myself...she just seems to give off that impression' (Claire) or Lady GaGa; 'it's the image she gives out...super confident, extroverted and very, very sexy videos' (Emer). While this image of the empowered 'hot' female appears strong and in control, however, evidence within the interviews shows that her hotness is dependent, at least to some degree on her appeal to the opposite sex. Angelina Jolie's powerful character Lara Croft, for example was described by Rah as follows 'She was kind of incredibly strong, but at the same time a guy could 'have a go at her' (Rah). Daisy's comment on what it means to be a hot woman supports this point 'if it was a man saying it I think he'd mean a woman he'd like to have sex with and if it's a woman saying it I think it's a woman they would like to look like' (Daisy), highlighting the perception among these women that this 'hotness', reliant on the male gaze, is one which is commonly aspired to by women.

Pressure

This aspiration and the pressure generated both internally and externally to conform to these criteria of 'hotness' is evident throughout the interviews; 'there's a norm of how girls, when they want to be attractive, they have to look a certain way' (Ann). Of the twelve women interviewed, when asked whether they felt that they fit their own description of 'hotness', ten said no outright and some laughed at the idea. Of the two who did not flatly reject the

possibility that they might be considered 'hot', their responses were not emphatic. Claire, for example said 'HMMMMM...sometimes maybe' (Claire) and Ruth, despite feeling that she was an attractive person asserted that 'maybe a lot of people wouldn't go for me just because, you know I'm kind of alternative or whatever and that puts people off...if they saw me without my piercings and stuff like that, and in a different outfit, you know they would have a completely different view of me' (Ruth).

A similar level of response was given to the question of whether the women felt pressure to conform to the 'hot' ideal. Some embraced 'hotness' as an ideal; 'Yeah...You think 'Oh Wow! I'd love to look like that' (Claire); 'I would love to look like that. And I do try, like I work out and I do weight watchers' (Erica); while others acknowledged the pressure but demonstrated a reluctance to accept it; 'Yeah, I'd love to say 'no I don't' but I think I have felt that pressure from a long as I can remember' (Daisy). Most strikingly, however, were the responses of women that indicated a need on their part to self-regulate in order to conform to this 'hot' standard despite it going against their nature; 'I think I'm trying to get there but its far from my personality' (Paula); 'There's definitely pressure there...I try and resist it and, like the way I dress or whatever doesn't really conform at all but the pressure's still there, you feel it and you're constantly questioning what you're wearing and how you look and I think you have to keep constantly reinforcing your own like em...belief that you don't need to be like that' (Emer); 'Yeah I think it sort of creeps up now and again...I would like to have lighter hair or clearer skin...these are vey often seen as what is the epitome of hotness and you can't help going 'Yeah I wouldn't mind like' (Louise); 'Yeah I suppose. I mean one example you know growing up I would have been bordering on tomboy in my clothes and my activities and that so em if I was going to a disco I would have been 'Right, I have to change things here. I have to dress up in some way' (Paula). This self regulation extends to actively seeking to alter the way they look from superficial changes like 'dressing up, putting on make-up, getting my hair done' (Claire); to rigorous exercise regimes and restrictive diets; 'That's what drives us all to the gym and what drives us all to keep our diets' (Daisy).

Despite the palpable pressure that they experience at the hands of celebrity images of 'hotness', however, participants are also quick to acknowledge that the very nature of celebrity is both transient and contrived. Orla once thought, for example, of actress Jessica Alba as 'hot' because

'she was in a couple of movies...in bikinis' (Orla). She then admitted, however, that her desire to look like her lessened when she 'went under the radar there for a while' (Orla). Similarly, Daisy, in her explanation of why she thinks Irish men find Cheryl Cole hot, suggests that she has 'a great PR machine behind her' (Daisy). This notion of marketing, however, is not exclusive to celebrity images and brands. Within the interviews some of the women make reference to experiencing a pressure to adapt themselves and the way they look to accommodate certain social situations. Ann, for example states 'So say if you're going to CPs on a night out and then going to like the Roisin Dubh...you would dress really differently so you're kind of **catering to a different market**' (Ann). This links in with the references made by participants to the notion that being 'on show' is central to being 'hot' and suggests that women, in pursuit of 'hotness' must tailor themselves, their look, their dress and the ways they act to cater to different audiences or markets.

This pressure to be sexy and hot is not manifested solely in physical terms, however, but extends to a desire to be 'good' at sex, a sentiment shared by eleven of the twelve participants. In fact, although several initially responded that they had not experienced this pressure, they went on to revise this statement, explaining that in previous relationships or as younger women, they had indeed had experiences of this pressure at some point in their lives; 'I was going to say 'I'm going to say no' but I would say I suppose 'yes' too' (Laura); 'Just going back to what you were saying about sex...about would I feel pressure to be good in bed...*now* I wouldn't but I'm just remembering yes I absolutely did when I was younger' (Daisy).

While some of the women stated that this pressure stemmed from a desire to please their partners sexually; 'I guess pleasing the guy you're with' (Emer), others alluded to the emphasis placed on 'performance' in popular culture; 'the portrayal of Sam from Sex and the City' (Ruth); and in pornography that depict women as 'sexual dynamo(s)' (Emer) who 'have to have a screaming orgasm the entire time' (Michelle) and that are 'meant to be amazing no matter who..(they are) with' (Ruth). This emphasis on performance in mainstream cultural portrayals of female sexuality increases pressure on these women to adhere to it; 'you have to be really adventurous and really wild and, you know be up for all these different positions, sexual positions...em...you have to enjoy giving a blow job...you have to be good a giving a hand job, to have techniques or something' (Erica).

While for these women the pressure to please and the importance of performance are indicative of being 'good' at sex, many of them also allude to the fact that an area of extreme pressure surrounds, not just the desire to be 'good' at sex, but a fear of being 'bad' at it, and moreover, of being labelled as being 'bad' in bed by their partners. Both Ann and Rah mention the fact that in Irish colleges and university towns there is a likelihood that, even in the case of having sex with a stranger, you may have friends or acquaintances in common. Ann sees this as a reason to debate engaging in sex with that person; 'does this person know anyone that I know and would this person be saying anything to someone?' (Ann). Similarly, Claire's experiences of her female friends' discussions of their partners' performance has caused her worry; 'You just hear about someone talking about someone else and they're like 'Oh they're really bad in bed' and you're like 'Oh my God what if somebody said that about me' (Claire).

Laura, whose peer group includes an equal male/ female ratio, explains that this performance rating is common among her male friends, particularly those who are single but engage in casual relationships or one night stands; 'one of the boys would say 'Did you get the ride?' and they'd be like 'Yeah I got the ride', they'd be like 'Was it good?' and they'd be like 'Yeah she was good' or 'She was shit'' (Laura). A fear of this 'boy talk' and being labelled 'bad', 'inept' or 'prudish' appears to impose a form of self-regulation and the women interviewed indicated that their willingness to consent to and/ or ability to refuse a sexual encounter might be based on it. Erica, for example, discussed her tendency to gravitate towards illicit sexual encounters and relationships such as affairs with men who were engaged to be married so that both of them would be forced to keep all details of their sexual relationship secret; 'yeah definitely because every thing *has* to remain a secret. It's not just on my part, he has to keep it a secret as well so he can't even go running and telling his friends' (Erica).

Furthermore there is a fear amongst the women, of the double standard, and a fear of being labelled a 'slut', even by the person that they are having sex with. Daisy for example expressed that 'I would worry, if I liked somebody that he'd see me as a slut, yeah' (Daisy) while Erica spoke of her recent concern that a casual male partner might think negatively of her; 'We'd had unprotected sex and I was afraid that he was going to think that I was a whore for doing that' (Erica); despite the fact that he too had engaged in unprotected sex. Of the women interviewed, all twelve had witnessed or had experienced first hand, the continued prevalence of the double

standard and a negative labelling of sexual women that impacted their sexual identity, behaviour and decision making. This is true for women who enjoy sex outside of established or long-term relationships, a point which is highlighted by Orla who sees the fact that she has been in a relationship for several years as a form of protection against these standards; 'the only reason I can enjoy sex is because I'm with a long term partner' (Orla).

Many of the other participants support this feeling and see women who engage in casual sex or relationships as being vulnerable to being labelled, rather than being seen as taking charge of their sexuality; 'Girls who actually probably are sexually empowered...might still be labelled a 'slut'' (Ann). This sentiment is echoed in the interviews with Daisy and Erica, both of whom are single women who enjoy casual sex but who express a fear of disclosing the nature of these relationships to others; 'I slept around a lot and would have had a lot of one night stands...but it's not something I would tell everyone about' (Erica). This sentiment is reiterated by Daisy whose experiences of being judged by friends and family as a result of her sex life, despite the fact that she always enjoys her casual relationships and sexual encounters, has resulted in her keeping these relationships a secret; 'I just think because I've got a fairly colourful sexual past that I don't want to be measured by that' (Daisy). A range of social factors are at work in these interactions and self-imposed silences. While Erica's fear is of being seen as a 'whore' or a 'slut', for example, Daisy's is that her sexual past might inhibit her future; 'I think if I was completely honest about my sexual history, I think I would really be limiting myself of ever meeting somebody or ever having a meaningful relationship' (Daisy).

Empowerment

This fear of negative labelling, and of women being judged for being sexual, negates and contradicts the media's promotion of the 'empowered' woman, (described in section 5.1) who is shown to enjoy a range of sexual activities with a range of different partners. Each of the participants has a clear idea of what empowerment should look like, but many are not so certain what empowerment means to them. For example, their descriptions of sexy, strong women enjoying their sexuality in the media, is undermined by their allusion to the idea that ultimately, female sexual empowerment is dependent on a host of other factors such as being in a relationship, male pleasure, and an adherence to a silent set of socio-sexual rules revolving around the double standard.

Ann, for example asserts that 'for me, to be sexually empowered is, if you're in a sexual relationship with somebody and you have as much choice as they have and that there is equal power' (Ann), thus acknowledging that not only does our vision of empowerment rely on having a partner, but also that a palpable level of inequality exists within many sexual relationships. She goes on to demonstrate a further awareness that the image of the sexually empowered woman does not match the sexual reality of most women; 'That's not empowering, that's actually keeping women at a second level to men, I think because its making them look 'sexy' but they're not particularly sexual or its not actually saying that women are afforded you know, the same sexual rights that men are' (Ann).

In contrast, Claire's view of female sexual empowerment, celebrates textual products of Raunch Culture such as *Sex and the City* and its success in generating more open discussions about sex and sexuality, particularly among women. Despite this stance, however, she too goes on to observe that 'Empowerment in the media and everything in the media is always on the man's pleasure' (Claire). She disagrees with this portrayal of female sexuality and claims that in terms of the differences between male and female sexuality, 'we feel the same about it as you (men) do' (Claire).

This is an important theme within the findings of this particular research method; the notion that empowerment is, or should be, based on the fact that female sexuality is equal to that of men. Daisy, for example, sees her enjoyment of casual sex and her lack of emotional attachment to her male partners as a typically male trait saying that she has 'quite a male attitude...I don't know what happened to my brain, I think it got reprogrammed as a man's' (Daisy). Similarly, when asked has she ever tried to get a man into bed, she answers 'yeah...and I remember thinking 'Oh my God you've turned into a man' (Daisy). However, despite the fact that she sees herself as having sex 'like a man' and as in control of her sexuality and her pleasure, she concedes that she does not enjoy the same freedom as her male counterparts in those respects, 'in an ideal world it would be great you could go out and say 'I'm an empowered woman' ...but like those double standards do exist and so its naïve to pretend that they don't' (Daisy).

Similarly, Orla, who asserts that she almost always enjoys sex and who feels protected from the double standard by her status in a long term relationship, also discusses the barriers placed to

her scope for sexual experimentation when she recently took a break from that relationship; 'while on a break I was so much less likely to have an opportunity to explore that side with another women because of the attitudes' (Orla). She elaborates upon this point and discusses the recent phenomenon of women kissing one another in order to titillate a male 'audience' (see Gill's 'hot lesbian', Gill 2009). This was something Orla had experienced with female friends and had really enjoyed it. When she attempted to pursue the issue further with one of her friends she was ridiculed due to the fact that there was no audience this time. She was upset by this incident and asserts 'It's that thing again of giving the appearance of wanting to do these things' (Orla).

Sex Education

These attitudes, described by Orla, which relegate female sexual autonomy to an existence reliant on that of men, however, have not been formed solely through media influence but also through the shared habitus of these participants. The most significant element of this habitus, and perhaps the most influential that emerged from these discussions, is the seemingly common sexual education shared by all the women. Although many of them name their parents as the place they first learned about sex, they go on to say that this education consisted solely of biological, factual information regarding puberty and reproduction rather than the relationships, emotions, pleasures and desires that form an integral part of sexual development and sexuality.

Echoing the findings of the questionnaire, Claire, for example, says that she first learned about sex 'Probably from TV and friends and stuff. Yeah and then like my parents' (Claire). When asked, she explains that the information that she got from parents and then teachers revolved solely around the biological 'facts of life' of reproductive sex and that any information she required about desire and pleasure she got from '*Cosmo*'. The only people she felt she could ask questions about those topics to were friends.

Similarly, Daisy says her mother first told her about sex but that she learned about pleasure and desire from films, often where the primary female character was a 'cold, detached' ... 'temptress' ... who wore her 'sexuality as a bit of a shield' (Daisy). Later in her interview, she also cites magazines like *Cosmo* as a source of information (or misinformation) that she took many of

her sexual cues from throughout her twenties 'Yeah I think I got *all* my knowledge from magazines...I took them so seriously' (Daisy).

Emer's story is a slight exception to this pattern in that her parents, both products of strict Catholic upbringings, were keen to open sex and sexuality up to discussion within the family. She even refers to an incident where her father attempted to speak to her, not just in terms of biology, but in terms of relationships and pleasure too. Her reluctance to associate her parents with conversations such as these, however, resulted in her rejection of her parents as sources of sexual knowledge and she turned instead to 'girls' magazines' such as *Cosmo* for information.

After the interview, Emer emailed me to add that television shows such as *Sex and the City* were also an influential source of information for her; 'I got most of my info from this TV show about things like turn-ons, fetishes, positions, techniques and even anatomy. I do not believe the four women in this show represent the average female and her experience of sexuality by any means but it certainly had an impact on my own view of sexuality' (Emer).

Erica, then, was given a book about human sexuality by her mother but this was kept in her mother's drawer and Erica says she 'didn't like looking at it' (Erica). She too says that her mother was 'very open' about sex but says that 'back then I suppose in my head it was something I wasn't supposed to be doing...I didn't even want her to know that I was thinking about it because I'd get in trouble' (Erica). Although she admits now that that probably wouldn't have happened, her fear of repercussions from being open about sex resulted in her inability to ask questions about it. Instead she cites teenage magazines such as '*More*' as her primary sources of information.

Laura's experiences of sex education were very similar to those of Erica. Although she says 'Like I think, like my Mum would have told me some stuff' (Laura), she cites friends and TV shows as the places she learned most about sex and sexuality. While she feels now that her mother would have been quite open about sex and that she probably could have asked her questions, at the time she did not feel comfortable doing so. She also feels that her mother might have been particularly reluctant to discuss pleasure or the positive aspects of sex and that she may have

thought (particularly before marriage) 'Oh I better not tell her because, you know, she might want this pleasure then' (Laura).

Louise too asserts that television shows were where she first learned about sex. While her mother also gave her a book about sex, she never felt that there was an adult to question or discuss the issues of sex and sexuality with and instead learned from books, films, TV and friends. In primary school she remembers one session where puberty and the 'facts of life' were discussed but when asked about further sex education in secondary school, she says 'I think I might have missed that class' (Louise), indicating that where this type of education existed, it was very brief.

Michelle also learned about sex initially from her parents when her mother became pregnant with her brother. This education revolved solely around reproductive fact within the context of a loving marriage and was never discussed again. Like the other women, she did not feel that she could ask her parents, teachers or other adults about non-biological aspects of sex and sexuality; 'in schools you can't talk about it, it's a taboo subject, and when you're with your friends, half of them are making up crap that they've seen on TV or somewhere anyway and you're never hearing something that's really true' (Michelle).

Like Erica, Paula was given a book about sex in which it was defined within the context of 'when a man and a woman love each other' (Paula) and focused on issues like reproduction, puberty and menstruation. She also says that her mother talked to her about the 'birds and the bees...but...that was it' (Paula). When asked if she could speak to her parents about the non-biological aspects of sex, Paula laughs and explains that when her mother discovered that she was sexually active at nineteen or twenty she regarded it as a 'huge shock, disappointment, like just a tragedy' (Paula). Like the other women, she too looked to friends, films and magazines such as *Cosmo* for further information.

This experience was shared by Orla who was given a similar book by her sister and then, in turn, passed it on to her younger brother as he approached puberty. This constituted the sex education they got from their parents. Although she became involved with boys at a young age,

engaging in explicit sexual interactions such as 'sexting'³⁵, she admits that that a lot of the information she had at that time 'was kind of what you see in the movies and on TV like, you know a man and a woman get into bed...its all romantic and intense all of the time. It's never just 'OK' like, it's always phenomenal' (Orla).

Similarly Rah cites her friends as a primary source of information about sex and also mentions that she could always go to her mother with questions or problems, while Ruth on the other hand admits that she initially learned about sex 'probably from TV' but does not mention her parents as a source of information about sex or sexuality. Interestingly none of the women mentioned school or teachers as the place where they first learned, or learned most about sex and of the twelve women, only one (Emer) described parents who were willing to openly discuss the pleasurable and non-biological aspects of sex and sexual relationships.

Pleasure

This reluctance to discuss female pleasure and desire follows through in the sexual lives of many of these women who, particularly within casual relationships or one night stands, find it difficult, uncomfortable or pointless to discuss their pleasure and/ or sexual preferences with their partners. Ann, for example, speaking about casual sex states 'In situations like that I don't know if pleasure really comes into it...you're not really thinking about pleasure to be honest...you're more caught up in the whole...you're back at consent' (Ann). She then goes on to say that mutual manual stimulation was the sex act she would engage in most frequently with a partner because it's 'very easy to just give someone a hand-job' (Ann). Although she admits that this is not the sex act that gives her most pleasure, she feels that 'going beyond that' (Ann) is too personal.

This is a common thread within many of the interviews and often the women expressed that, particularly in sex outside of a committed relationship, the pressure they felt to please took precedence over their own pleasure. Daisy, for example, admits to disregarding her own pleasure in her past relationships; 'I think there was kind of a performance aspect, where...you came across as somebody who loved having sex, and I don't think I really did' (Daisy) and of her

³⁵ sexting: a form of sexual interaction carried out using mobile phones usually in textual form but may also include picture and video messaging

experiences of casual sex, Emer admits that 'the emphasis isn't on mutual pleasure...it's something you have to be good at' (Emer).

Erica too shares this experience and feels that often 'the man gets pleasure first, and once the man is pleased that's kind of, that's it, sex is over or intimacy is over' (Erica). For this dismissal of female pleasure within heterosexual relations, she blames the coital imperative reinforced by the mainstream media. When asked if she feels that penetrative sex is the ultimate or inevitable sex act in heterosex, she replies 'Yeah definitely...that's what happens on TV, a couple gets into bed and they don't just masturbate each other. They have sex. In magazines they mostly talk about having sex and how to get the most out of it...I'm not sure why, it just seems to be the inevitable, the be-all and end-all and that's how you show you care about someone. Then again, if it's a one night stand...it also seems like its, it is expected' (Erica). This imperative is at odds with her own sexual desires and quest for pleasure and she says that within her heterosexual relationships this often became a chore for her or a duty to her male partner; 'I had to look after his needs or a hand job or a blow job isn't going to be good enough' (Erica). She also demonstrates a reluctance in her past relationships to ask for pleasure, for example, asking her partner to stimulate her clitoris during intercourse because 'it kind of feels like, well your penis isn't enough...you're not doing a good enough job...you feel less of a man if he can't make me orgasm through just penetration...I think a lot of women don't orgasm just through penetration but I think men get quite insulted by that' (Erica).

Louise, who despite asserting her opinion that women are probably capable of greater pleasure than men, expands on this by saying that 'I think a man can just go in and out, in and out and that's them, they've had an orgasm, whereas a woman can do that and can enjoy it to a certain extent and it's handy and convenient but is not the full pleasure that they could have' (Louise). This is a point echoed by Orla; 'for it to be sex the guy has to come but if the girl doesn't it doesn't really matter' (Orla) and Laura, who, in her own experiences of casual sex, did not feel that her pleasure was a priority; 'a lot of girls, I would know from my own experience, would never be able to orgasm or anything or experience any kind of pleasure when they're with someone just 'first off'...but for a boy, they can usually, like I suppose orgasm anywhere' (Laura).

A clear distinction is made by the interviewees between these 'first off' encounters, casual relationships or one night stands and more long-term, established and committed relationships. Most of the women who had experiences of casual sex, for example, felt that the tendency therein towards coitus and ultimately towards male pleasure, resulted in a less pleasurable experience for them than they might have within an established relationship where mutual pleasure is more likely to be prioritized; 'my experience of sex in a casual relationship wouldn't be positive' (Ann); 'from all my friends anyway I know that like none of them would ever say they got pleasure out of a one night stand' (Laura); 'in a casual relationship...you'd be like fine to fake it because its just the one time and you're never going to see them again and what's the point in getting into 'well if you did this or that or the other' (Orla); 'the words just get stuck in my throat' (Ann). This relegation of female sexual pleasure within casual sex is exacerbated by an inability, due to a lack of sufficient education, tools and language on the part of young Irish women to negotiate their own pleasure.

Consent

These inadequate negotiations of female pleasure, and an expectation that their male partner will get pleasure even if they don't, extends also to the issue of consent. Many of the women interviewed discuss the woman's responsibility to say no and many mention the issue of consent; 'I think it's a woman's place to say no' (Laura); 'I think its worth bearing in mind that if you really like somebody, to say no and to make them wait a while' (Daisy). This pressure to 'do the right thing', and to not be a 'slut', however, clashes entirely with the simultaneous pressure not to be prudish and to present yourself as an empowered 'sexual dynamo' (Emer).

As a result, a number of the interviewees have experienced situations where although they wanted sex, felt they were unable to consent to or pursue it (e.g. Orla wanting to further her encounter with another woman) and similarly, several of the women described situations where they consented to sex that was ultimately unwanted. Erica, for example, describes her recent relationship with a man who insisted she must have some form of sexual dysfunction because she couldn't orgasm through coitus alone. Within this relationship, she engaged in coitus and other acts such as performing oral sex, purely to please her male partner but conceded that it was a chore; 'it's a job-its called a job for a reason' (Erica).

Many of the women interviewed alluded to the fact that their experiences of casual sex were not always pleasurable, nor were they always driven by desire. Both Ann and Emer, for example, explain their engagement in unwanted consensual sex with casual partners and the driving forces behind their decisions to consent. Emer describes her experience at nineteen of being set up on a date with an older man (aged 27) who coerced her into going home with him. In this description, she blames herself for getting herself 'into that situation' and explains that 'things moved on a lot faster than I thought and I just sort of went along with it and thought it was fine in the moment and then sort of felt crap afterwards' (Emer). She asserts that 'he didn't push me further than I wanted to go but he was very insistent...I think he expected something else from me' (Emer). When asked if she considered her own pleasure in this encounter, it seems that it had not occurred to her; 'I was still a virgin so...I was just really worried about what it would be like and if I'd be good actually and if he'd get mad if I said no...I wasn't really thinking about 'would it be good?' at all. It was all those worries really' (Emer).

Ann, too has had similar experiences to that of Emer; 'I've often ended up doing things with people that you wouldn't really have intended at all but when you're put in that situation it's hard to say no...it's nearly easier to say 'yes'...you're kind of going with the flow...I don't think pleasure would come into it much' (Ann). Like Emer, she explains that although she did not want to engage in sexual activity with these men, at that particular point in time, a variety of different pressures influenced her decision to ultimately consent; 'well why couldn't I say 'no'? Because you seem a bit of prude if you do' (Ann). They also share the experience of coercion and insistence on the part of their male partners; 'I'd say as far as a lad is concerned you've probably consented (by going home with them for a drink etc) and they would try you for anything. They will just push and push and push and it's very hard when you're in that situation to say no' (Ann). This difficulty in saying an explicit 'no' is compounded by the notion that if a woman engages with a man and, for example, invites him home for a drink, she is committed to having sex with him whether she wants to or not; 'there is that expectation from the other person because you feel in a way you've kind of committed to them by going home with them or bringing them home ...it's really hard, you feel really hard if you made a commitment letting it down and you think you have to spend the rest of the night with them no matter what' (Ann).

These issues of consent, pressure, empowerment and pleasure featured heavily throughout the interview process. While the questions posed *to* and discussions held *with* each individual interviewee differed in approach and to an extent in content, the body of data that was collected using this method revealed themes, trends and motifs that were common to them all. This retrospective cohesion, however, was not accidental and its structure and subsequent thematic patterns were developed according to the findings of the quantitative questionnaire that preceded the interview process.

Chapter 6

Discussion Chapter

The themes, patterns and trends uncovered by the findings of the research methods utilised within this study have been identified and outlined in the previous chapter. This chapter, then, aims to place those findings within the context of the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 and to debate the range of multifarious arguments and discussions generated therein. Within these arguments is the idea that female sexuality in Ireland has existed within a patriarchal (predominantly Catholic) regime of control and silence and that, with the dawn of Raunch Culture, has not simply been released from that control but has moved from one system of sexual regulation to another. This new sexual regulation includes a complex network of social cues and adherence to socio-cultural norms that, as this chapter suggests, ultimately inhibits the development of female sexual autonomy in Ireland. It is this concept of autonomy that is key to the central research question of this thesis and which will be discussed at length within this chapter.

6.1 The Prevalence of Raunch Culture

The findings generated by the data collected over the course of this study highlight the extent of Raunch Culture's presence and pervasiveness in the Irish media and Irish popular culture over the past two decades. Evidence of this is shown not only in the analysis of popular cultural texts, but also in the responses given by the study's questionnaire and interview participants who have collectively painted a picture of Raunch Culture that involves the promotion of 'hotness' as a form of social capital, a mainstreaming of pornography, a focus on sexual performance and a prioritisation of male sexual pleasure over that of women.

In the findings of both the questionnaire and interview methods, for example, this picture and the sexual rules and standards that it propagates were shown to have a significant impact on the lived sexualities of participants. Within the questionnaire, for example, almost 38% of respondents cited media-related sources such as TV, erotica and teen/ men's/ women's magazines as that from which they learned most about human sex and sexuality and a further third of respondents cited these sources as that which *most* influenced the way they think about

sexuality. These figures are significant given the ways in which pornified messages about sexuality are mediated, commoditised and regulated through these media. They also lend themselves to the argument that not only is Raunch Culture prolific in its infiltration of mainstream media and popular culture but is also extremely pervasive and influential in terms of our sexual habitus.

6.2 The Impact of Raunch Culture's Sexual Rulebook

This influence manifests itself in the form of a sexual rulebook which, as discussed in Chapter 5, involves four key rules and standards around which the way we view sexuality, sex appeal and sexiness is based within the context of Raunch. For the purposes of this argument, however, it is necessary not alone to demonstrate the existence of these rules, but to discuss their real impact on the lived sexualities of young Irish women.

This first of these rules is heavily linked to Raunch Culture's renewal of interest *in* and support of concepts such as determinism and sexism by repackaging them as 'new', 'ironic' and 'fun'. It is a 'rebranding' which has coincided with an open rejection of feminist ideals, particularly those of the second wave and has thus encouraged women to "be empowered" by embracing this new sexism as their own.

Impact of Rule #1 Reject Feminism

This is a rule which, through the scrutiny of women and the promotion of competition between them, has engrained within the female psyche a wariness of other women, who are portrayed as being naturally combative and 'bitchy'. Evidence of this thought-pattern is found within my interview with Rah who believes that although this phenomenon is predominantly media-led, it is also something that is in women's 'nature' and that is ultimately inevitable; 'women are just bitchy I think by nature, they genuinely are'....'So if you have flawless skin of course I'm going to hate you...and I think its because it has been set up and the media portray one image of women and then women have just run with it' (Rah).

Similarly, the blatant popularisation of misogyny evident in the findings of the study has infiltrated the way women view and speak about one another, leading to an increased acceptance of and tendency towards name calling and negative labelling. In the interview with

Orla, for example, she notes that although she disagrees with the term 'slut', she says that it has been normalised to such an extent that she finds herself using it to label other women; 'you know as much as I say I don't like labels and everything else, I know sometimes I would have seen girls...and in my head I would think 'Slut'... But then I don't like to call people that and I always,...you know you have these reflex reactions that you do but then I always kind of make sure to correct myself and go that's actually not what I think at all and I don't know why I said that. Em...but I suppose you know as much as you know it's still easy to be influenced by the situation you're in and the people around you and those responses and just make sure you keep correcting yourself and reminding yourself that that's not the way it is' (Orla).

This notion of reactions being easily influenced by situations and external messages is central to this discussion of Raunch Culture's impact on autonomy. Orla's experiences, for example, provide evidence not only of women's increasing tendency to embrace misogynistic language, but also to use patriarchal attitudes and labelling against one another. This is in keeping with Levy's (2006) assertion that this culture is not sustained by androcentric and patriarchal structures alone but by the 'female chauvinist pigs' Levy (2006) who adhere to its socio-sexual standards.

Similarly, this rejection of feminism is further propagated within the reality, documentary and 'make-over' programming analysed in the previous chapter. As Rosalind Gill puts it 'Shows such as *What Not To Wear* and *10 Years Younger* subject women to hostile scrutiny of their bodies, postures and wardrobes, and evaluations that include the like of 'very saggy boobs' and 'what a minger' (Gill 2007, p150). In fact, it could be argued that these texts have legitimised women's judgement of one another, a notion that is supported by interviewee Rah's comments about the way other girls dress; 'you would also see a lot of girls...they obviously try to model themselves on the girls who spend the hour and a half in the morning doing themselves up but at the same time they're like 'I don't really want to spend that much time on myself' and I think that sort of...there's a lot of that where they look sort of thrown together almost, and you feel sort of sorry for them' (Rah).

In fact, this rejection of feminism and of the message of sisterhood purported by the second wave has proven to be extremely divisive in terms of how women feel about other women, but

most importantly how they feel about themselves, and as Gill suggests, has signalled a move away 'from an external male-judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic one' (Gill 2008, p45) that leads them to scrutinise *themselves* as well as others. This is supported by media such as women's magazines and by the content of reality television programming which, as discussed within the previous chapter, promote the notion of self-transformation through consumption as the most effective means to 'have it all' which in turn, reinforces the perceived flaws and imperfections of its female audiences.

This notion of being eternally flawed, and the female quest, through consumption, for 'perfection' was highlighted by Erica during her interview in which she alluded to the fact that the prevalence of pictures of skinny women in magazines when she was growing up had made her hate her bottom which she felt was larger than theirs. She explains that for many years she strove through diet and exercise to reduce its size but that with the recent celebration of 'curvy' women such as Rihanna, Beyonce and J-Lo, she has begun to appreciate its potential attractiveness. Notably, however, she mentions that this has not made her happy with her figure but has simply shifted the focus of her dissatisfaction to other parts of her body; 'when I try to work out now it's trying to get rid of weight around my stomach and my arms. I'm not so much focussing on my ass like I used to do. I definitely think that that's influenced by how people see Beyonce or Jennifer Lopez who have always had a big behind as well'. (Erica).

Erica's experiences highlight the pervasive influence of these celebrity images and the ways in which particular attributes are either celebrated or regarded as unattractive at any given time. This is also highlighted in Orla's description (mentioned in the previous chapter) of how she had become consumed with looking like Jessica Alba, but once the actress's level of media exposure lessened, so did Orla's obsession.

This notion of women being happier or *less* happy with their own body because of the images of 'beauty' and 'hotness' that are being communicated to them at a given time is central to this discussion of Raunch Culture's impact on female sexual choice, agency and autonomy. The experiences of the study's interviewees highlight the pervasive nature of this impact and its intrusion on their choices and identities.

Impact of Rule #2 Be Hot

The concept of 'hotness', in fact, and its importance within Raunch Culture has been discussed at length throughout this thesis. As suggested in the previous chapters, however, this is a construct which pertains not to abstractions such as beauty, prettiness or handsomeness, but to a list of physical, sexual and behavioural criteria set out within this culture. This is most clearly evident within the interviews of the study in which each participant was asked what the term 'hot' means to them. Each gave an almost identical list of physical attributes such as slenderness, being 'toned', being 'curvy', having 'nice skin' etc to describe their understanding of the term and while some interviewees alluded to the fact that although 'hot' *could* be used to describe men, it was most recognisable as a term to denote a woman's level of sexual attractiveness.

It is significant, not only that the lists given by these women were so *similar*, but that they also match the representations of 'hotness' found within popular cultural texts and the discourses which have been analysed therein over the course of this study. The most blatant example of this is, when asked 'What female celebrity they believed that Irish *men* think is "hot"', the interview participants all cited women who are *currently* or have in the past been featured in the *FHM 100 Sexiest Women in the World* list. This is evidence, not only of the normalisation of Raunch Culture's representation of what is 'hot', but also of the standardisation, commercialisation and commoditisation of what it is to be sexy.

For the purpose of this study, however, it is important to prove not only that this standard exists, but that it is one which is *aspired* to by women and therefore succeeds in influencing their sexual choices and autonomy. Within the interview data, for example, none of the female participants felt that they fit the criteria of 'hotness' as dictated by Raunch Culture. They did, however, demonstrate a *desire* or aspiration to be 'hot'; 'Oh I would love to look like that' (Claire and Erica) which manifests itself in self-regulating behaviour by these participants such as dieting and denial of certain foods; 'I was like, if I wanted to eat something, I shouldn't eat it' (Orla); and exercise that focuses specifically on enhancing or reducing a specific body part in line with what is considered 'hot' (for example Erica's focus on her bottom as a source of past anxiety). It is also evident in the way these women have expressed their tendency to change the way they are comfortable dressing in order to cater 'to a different market' (Ann) such as wearing

'less clothes or to wear something that was short or to wear something that was low-cut because if you go in and you're *overdressed* you feel really aware of it' (Ann).

The experiences of the study's participants, therefore, provide evidence of Raunch culture's pervasive influence and the ways in which its sexual standards have become *so* normalised in recent years that Irish women feel compelled to adhere to them whether they are comfortable with it or not.

Impact of Rule #3 Embrace 'Sex'

As discussed in detail in the preceding chapters, however, this influence extends, not only to standards of attractiveness but also to standards of 'being' and 'acting' sexy including being seen to embrace 'sex'. As described in the previous section this embrace pertains only to a very narrow definition of sex and as Levy puts it, lies in 'the appearance of sexiness rather than sexual pleasure' (Levy 2006, p30). This includes appearing to embrace pornography as well as the sex-acts and attitudes portrayed therein and, in order for a woman to be seen as sexually 'free' involves her adoption of the role of 'sexual dynamo' (Emer) and 'performing' in the manner of a 'porn star'; 'I was constantly, I don't know, putting on some kind of porn-star show or something' (Daisy). This point is reinforced by Levy who observes '*everyone* who is sexually liberated ought to be imitating strippers and porn stars' (Levy 2006, p27).

Although seemingly positive, this encouragement within popular culture of women to 'embrace sex' is in fact restrictive to female sexual autonomy in that the 'sex' in question is dictated by Raunch Culture's narrow, porn-centric definition of what can be deemed sexy or sexual. Therefore, though widely regarded as a culture which encourages a sex-positive, 'anything goes' version of sexuality, it remains heavily tied to the male gaze, male sexuality and the commodification of female sexuality for male pleasure. Nowhere is this more obvious than within the pornification of mainstream popular culture that has taken place within Raunch Culture which promotes the notion that a woman's level of sexual attractiveness is her greatest asset, that male pleasure should be prioritised in heterosex, that coitus is the ultimate (hetero)sexual act and that the male orgasm is a natural end to sex.

It is through this rigid definition of sex that a woman is encouraged to embrace by Raunch Culture; 'that's what society says we should do and I don't know if that, is it from TV...that's what happens on TV, a couple gets into bed and they don't just masturbate each other. They have sex. Em...in magazines they mostly talk about having sex and how to get the most out of it hmmm....I'm not really sure why, it just seems to be the inevitable, the be-all and end-all and that's how you show you care about someone' (Erica). Erica explains that this act is seen as 'real sex', particularly within media representations of sexuality and that the end of sex and intimacy is signalled, in her experience, by male ejaculation (as it does in the money-shots of pornographic videos). Empowered Irish women are therefore expected to enjoy what Erica Jong called 'the zipless fuck', despite the fact that only 6% percent of the survey's sample (a little over 9% of those who answered the question) admitted to 'always' reaching orgasm through this method where no further stimulation was offered.

Despite this, however, coitus continues to be normalised as 'sex' within popular texts and discourses and along with a pressure to have this kind of 'sex' comes a pressure to be 'good' at it. The pressure to adhere to this sexual standard or to be 'good at sex', in fact, was palpable within both the interview and survey findings, both of which showed that an overwhelming majority had experienced it. This involves, as Ann puts it in her interview, a pressure not to be prudish and instead to be seen as 'up for it'. It also involves an expectation that a woman will have certain sexual 'techniques' (Erica) that will please her male partner.

It is this notion of being able to please their partners that emerged as a key anxiety among the female participants of the study. However, while Raunch Culture promotes an embrace of this pornographic sexuality and encourages women to *have sex* and to be *seen* to enjoy sex free from emotional attachment, it does not provide the tools or language for women to do so. In fact, within the questionnaire data, it became clear that, particularly within the context of casual sex or one night stands, the women surveyed hugely devalued and de-prioritised their own pleasure.

This was supported within the interview findings in which interviewees such as Emer, when asked whether her own pleasure was central to her decision to engage in casual sex answered 'No...I was just really worried about what it would be like and if I'd be good actually and if he'd

get mad if I said no and yeah...I was just...I wasn't really think about 'would it be good?' at all. It was all those worries really' (Emer) or Ann who doesn't think 'pleasure really comes into it' (Ann). In fact, several of the women interviewed including Ann, Laura and Emer discuss their belief that women do not usually find casual sex pleasurable. This contradicts the messages in Raunch Culture that portray the majority of women as extracting enormous pleasure from casual sexual encounters and those who don't as dysfunctional or prudish in some way.

In fact, those who do not embrace this form of sexuality or the notion of 'having sex like a man' are represented in the media as non-desiring, 'needy' women who value emotional attachment and commitment over sexuality. However, the women interviewed did not demonstrate a need for love or romance from their male partners in order to have pleasurable sex. Rather, they required a safe environment, free from judgement and coercion, where they could freely express their sexual desires and preferences in order to maximise their own pleasure.

This environment, however, has proven incongruent with the representations of female sexuality portrayed by Raunch Culture in the popular media. Instead women, it seems, are encouraged to embrace 'sex' as defined by this culture regardless of its compatibility with their own sexual desires, pleasures or preferences.

Impact of Rule #4 Be Empowered

Despite this incongruence, the standardisation and commoditisation of sexuality is sustained within this culture by the message that *embracing* it is the ultimate signifier of sexual empowerment. This empowerment, however, occurs within its own set of criteria that are directly related to the standards of 'hotness' upheld by Raunch Culture as well as its heteronormativity and prioritisation of the male gaze as an ideal lens through which to view sexuality. Within this train of thought, the empowered woman is seen as being (and always *enjoying* being) sexually available to men within the parameters of male sexuality and sexual fantasy while the woman who does *not* prominently present herself as both sexually desirable *to* and sexually desiring *of* men and their sexual pleasure is deemed 'disempowered'. In order to be seen as sexual or as 'sexy', therefore, a woman should be seen to possess and to exhibit a level of 'hotness' or be ultimately desexualised; 'Men and women look at...the likes of Abbey Clancy or, say, Jordan or any of these models and say that they are empowered and that women

are empowered by them and that women are empowered by being able to appear in these magazines half naked' (Ann).

This model of the 'empowered' woman is one which young Irish women have grown up with and, as the findings of this study suggest, is one which has been influential in the sexual education and development of its participants. This is highlighted by the interview data, which show that while the majority of interviewees received information about the biological facts of reproductive sex from authoritative sources such as parents and teachers, none of them learned about or felt comfortable asking questions about other types of sex or aspects of sexuality within these interactions but instead looked to the popular media for further information. In fact *all* of the women interviewed cite media such as television and glossy magazines like *Cosmo* as key sources of learning when it came to finding out more about non-reproductive aspects of sex that include pleasure, desire, choice, agency and what it means to be sexually empowered.

From these findings, it can therefore be suggested that young Irish women who have grown up within Raunch Culture's sphere of influence are learning about sex and sexuality, and particularly aspects such as pleasure, desire and sexual relationships from the media and from popular cultural texts whose agenda it is to profit from these messages and not to educate, nor to provide its audiences with the tools to negotiate their sexuality safely and autonomously.

As a result, and as shown in the previous section, young Irish women are equipped by Raunch Culture with the power to say 'yes' to media-led sexualities and to freely talk about what is or isn't 'sexy', but not with the language or skills required to discuss their own sexual pleasure; 'the words get stuck' (Ann); or to make educated and autonomous decisions about their own sexuality and sexual preferences.

This is evident in the fact that that the study's interviewees were all able to explain what the term 'hot' meant to them but why, even those who had experienced pressure to be 'good' at sex could not coherently explain what 'good' sex actually *was* or what it meant to *be* 'good' at sex; 'when I thought more about what it means 'to be good at sex' I realised that...I couldn't exactly put into words what that means' (Ruth). This demonstrates a pressure on the part of these women to be something or to conform to something that they *think* they *should* be but

struggle to translate and relate it to real life experience; 'How do you know how to be good at sex because loads of different people have loads of different preferences and I often find myself in situations and I know the mature thing to do is to ask someone what they like but I just wouldn't, I personally, and I'm not shy' (Ann).

The term empowerment is usually synonymous with concepts such as agency, autonomy and a power which is free from coercion. Within Raunch Culture, however, it is used to denote a form of 'power' that comes with an adherence to a rigid set of socio-sexual rules such as those discussed within this chapter. The vision of female sexual empowerment portrayed through this culture is therefore intrinsically flawed in its prioritization of female sexiness over female pleasure and also in the many falsehoods and contradictory versions of female sexuality that it perpetrates. It is, for example, a form of empowerment accessible only by those who conform (or who are able to conform) to a strict set of physical and sexual standards, a fact that makes it exclusionary and by extension, automatically *disempowering* for those excluded. As well as this, Raunch Culture's narrow definition of 'good sex' that glorifies coitus and male sexual fantasy restricts the sexual autonomy of women who, for example, wish to explore the possibility of sex with other women outside of the heterosexual male gaze, or of women who wish to engage in acts or to seek pleasure outside of these parameters.

Similarly, although the 'empowered' woman is expected to embrace and enjoy sex, and in particular, casual sex, the findings of the study's interviews do not show that women who engage in casual sex, even those who thoroughly enjoy themselves, are commonly regarded as such. Instead, these sexually active women are seen, by other women as being vulnerable to labelling or to being talked about negatively by men. In the cases of Daisy and Erica, for example, both women describe the pleasure they take from their casual sexual experiences and one-night stands. However, they are both quick to admit to maintaining a level of discretion and secrecy when it comes to their sex lives, in order to reduce the likelihood of judgement and of being talked negatively about.

This silencing and suppression of their sexuality and sexual activity, even when it is both pleasurable and enjoyable, is a strong example of the pervasive power of the double standard. It is just one example of the ways in which young women, often at the expense of their own

pleasure, reject potentially pleasurable experiences in order to protect their public image, and similarly how they consent to unpleasurable or unwanted sex. In fact, throughout the interview findings, a fear of negative labelling is often shown to dictate the women's decision to consent or not to consent to a sexual encounter.

6.3 Evidence of self-regulating behaviour

This notion of 'consent' features prominently throughout the interview data and can be linked to both the image of the 'proper' woman as the gatekeeper of sexuality and the 'belief that they're responsible for male sexuality' (Powell 2008, p173). It is this pressure, along with a contradictory but equally powerful social pressure to be a 'hot', sexually empowered woman (according to the criteria listed above), that generates a perceived need among the study's participants to impose a set of self-regulating measures that can only be seen to inhibit their sexual autonomy. These measures are the product of extreme social and cultural pressures that ultimately result in a woman's consent to unwanted sexual behaviour or sex acts as well as her decision *not* to consent to sex that *is* wanted.

This notion of consent is heavily tied to the concept of sexual labelling which many of the interviewees suggest is more likely to be applied to a woman than a man, and which has the potential to mark a woman's sexual image and identity for life. A fear of being seen as being 'bad' at sex, for example, has been seen to increase pressure for the young women both to engage in acts that do not give them pleasure but also to refuse 'wanted' sex due to a fear of being talked about afterwards. Similarly, a significant level of pressure is attributed to the notion reinforced through Raunch Culture which insists that women ought to be 'good at sex'. The vast majority of the sample expressed that they had experienced this pressure and for interview participants such as Daisy, Erica and Ann, a desire to be seen as sexually competent and 'hot' resulted in experiences of sexual behaviour that did not necessarily come naturally to them or give them pleasure.

This self-regulation is influenced by three primary sources; firstly through a pressure on the part of the study's participants to be seen *positively* in sexual terms (i.e. as *good* at sex, as 'hot', as 'empowered' etc); secondly through a fear of being spoken about *negatively* or being the subject of 'boy talk'; and finally, through a fear of being negatively labelled (as 'prude', 'slut',

'bad at sex' etc) and thereby being sexually branded by others, particularly male partners or intended male partners.

Pressure to be labelled 'sex positive'

The first of these, the pressure that exists to be labelled as sexy, as sexual and as 'good' at sex, is in line with the pressure that exists to adhere to Raunch Culture's sexual rulebook, discussed within section 6.2 of this chapter. Its influence over the sexual experiences and behaviours of the study's participants can be found, in particular within the interview transcripts, which reflect the perceived need of these participants to regulate their sexuality in order to be regarded positively in terms of their sexuality, sexiness, sex appeal and sexual behaviour. This is in keeping with the assertions of academics such as Gill and Durham who discuss 'hotness' as a form of social capital.

It is in the pursuit of this capital, however, that autonomy is called into question. Within the interview findings, for example, several of the interviewees such as Paula and Ann discuss the notion of changing the way they dress or look in order to cater to a different market, despite the fact that this is a cause of discomfort for them both; 'When I'm trying to dress that way I don't feel comfortable...that's us trying to make ourselves fit in with what we perceive men want' (Ann). It is significant, however, that this discomfort is regarded by these women as *less* harmful or *more* desirable than the consequences of not conforming to the standards of 'sexiness' set out in the media.

Further to this is the pressure that is experienced by young Irish women to be 'good' at sex. As explained above, 67% of the questionnaire participants responded that they had experienced this form of pressure and a significant majority of interviewees also claimed to have experienced it. This pressure, however, is not only internalised within the individual but manifests itself in further self-regulating behaviour including consenting to unwanted sex or sex *acts*. Erica for example, discusses the notion that women are expected to have sexual skills and techniques in terms of performing sexual acts on men '... you have to enjoy giving a blow job...you have to be good at giving a hand-job, to have techniques, or something' (Erica) but asserts that often this performance is duty bound rather than pleasure driven 'it's called a job for a reason' (Erica). She goes on to discuss the pressure that she has experienced to engage in coitus (a sex act that does

not usually give her pleasure or lead to climax for her) in order to avoid being seen as 'dysfunctional' or as suffering from a form of sexual disorder; 'I suppose if I haven't felt in the mood for it but felt like I had to have sex because my partner wanted sex and we hadn't had sex in so many weeks and it wasn't fair to him and I had to look after his needs or a hand job or a blow job isn't going to be good enough' (Erica)

Fear of 'boy talk

This pressure to be seen to be 'good' at sex, and therefore to adhere to Raunch Culture's socio-sexual standards of sex and sexuality, is further exacerbated by a fear of being spoken about *negatively* by their partners or potential partners. This fear is justified by the women interviewed within the study who have frequently observed male peers discussing their female sexual partners in such a way. Laura, for example described the ways in which her male friends discuss their casual female partners 'they'd be like 'Yeah she was good' or 'She was shit' or whatever or like, or they would say 'Oh she did this..' or 'Did you ever get a girl to do this' and I suppose, like, they would be explicit yeah. But it's definitely a one-upmanship thing, you know that kind of thing, you know they're trying to tell the boys that they did this or do you know 'We tried...' or this kind of thing' (Laura).

Ann supports this observation and describes the pressure she has experienced to engage in and consent to unwanted sexual acts as a direct result; 'because I have friends who are boys and you just would kind of feel that they would talk about, you know, if girls were good or bad in bed, amongst themselves' (Ann). However, although it can lead to *unwanted* consensual sex, this social pressure and fear of being negatively spoken about also extends to women *not consenting* to or not pursuing sex or sexual encounters that they *do* want. This is evident in the case of Orla who discussed the fact that during her 'break' with her long term boyfriend, she had many opportunities to engage in sexual activity with *male* partners but did not feel that she could explore her sexuality with *female* partners for fear of people's reactions 'while on a break I was so much less likely to have an opportunity to explore that side with another woman because of the attitudes' (Orla).

Within the interviews, several of the participants go on to explain that this fear of being spoken about is intensified by the fact that Irish towns and cities are small and there is a high likelihood

that, even in the case of one night stands, you may have friends or acquaintances in common with your partner. Rah, in her interview, describes this situation, particularly within University towns and cities as ‘very incestuous or you end up sleeping with somebody and then you sleep with their friend and then another drunken night and you end up sleeping with their cousin or somebody that they know’ (Rah). This is further supported by Laura’s interview in which she highlights the feeling on the part of young Irish women that, because of this small-town social structure, not only will your partner and his friends know and discuss your sexual behaviour, prowess and sexiness, but that *everyone* will hear about it; ‘whenever you’re just starting to become a sexual person, I think it’s a big peer pressure thing more so than a personal thing, its like, you know ‘who had sex with this person’, ‘is this person good?’, ‘is this person not good?’. It’s very open and everyone kind of knows about it’ (Laura).

This notion of ‘*everyone*’ being privy to even your most private sexual acts, along with incurring self-regulating behaviour such as consenting to unwanted sex and refusing sex that *is* wanted, encourages a self-imposed silencing among women who engage in and consent to sex that they want and find pleasurable. This is true in the cases of both Daisy and Erica, whose self-imposed silences have been discussed in the previous chapter. Having experienced judgement by partners, friends and family members in the past for their sexualities, Erica explains that she is more likely to enjoy illicit relationships such as affairs due to the fact that both she and her partners *must* not disclose any details of their sexual relationships while Daisy keeps her casual sexual encounters a secret for fear that she will be judged by them in the future.

This notion of ‘boy talk’ is also concurrent with the trend within Raunch Culture for the public rating of women by men that has been the subject of a number of recent controversies in Irish public life over the past decade including (as mentioned in Chapter One) the scathing comments made by male TDs about the looks of their female counterparts and the ranking of female employees of Price Waterhouse Coopers according to ‘hotness’ by their male colleagues in 2010.

Fear of negative labelling

The fear of being talked about among these women, then, is heavily tied to the notion of being negatively labelled according to their sexual history, action and behaviour. This labelling comes

most frequently, according to the participants, in the form of two dichotomous categories; the 'prude' and the 'slut'. The first of these, the 'prude' label, although regarded as less aggressive and damning a category as that of 'slut', is equally and sometimes *more* feared by those participating in the interview process. Both Erica and Orla, for example, claim that they would rather carry the 'slut' label than that of 'prude' due to a widespread belief that 'people who are prudes are really repressed' (Erica).

This is reflected in the interviews of Rah and Ann who both agree that this fear of being seen as 'prudish' can also lead to self-regulating dress and behaviour. In support of this, Rah says that women engage in overtly sexual behaviour, in nightclubs for example, because of this fear; 'They're going to think I'm dry' (Rah), while Ann describes her own experiences of consenting to *unwanted* sex as a direct result of this type of labelling; 'You had a choice in that situation but you know why...well sometimes I say 'Well why *couldn't* I say no?'... Because you seem a bit of a prude if you do' (Ann). Within these unwanted encounters, Ann says 'In situations like that, you're not really thinking about pleasure' (Ann) and goes on to say that, often, she 'can't wait for this to be over' (Ann). It is significant, however, not only that Ann would endure this kind of encounter that she did not want to engage in, but that she views the repercussions of *not consenting* as less desirable than those of *consenting* i.e. that being labelled a 'prude' is less desirable than engaging in sex which is devoid of pleasure and that she can not wait to be over.

The opposite, but equally stigmatic label of 'slut', then, poses a similar threat to autonomous female sexual choices, agency and behaviour in that it can result in a woman refusing sex that she actively desires or feels would be pleasurable. Daisy, for example, describes her experiences of having been judged by a male partner for having had sex with him the night they met and suggests, that even in the case of a woman actively desiring sex, she should wait in order to avoid this type of label or judgement; 'I think, it probably sounds like a contradiction, but I think if you feel that you might like something long-term with somebody, it's always better to wait, even though its hard to...even if you really want to have sex' (Daisy).

Daisy's feelings on the subject suggest that, once again, the repercussions of this self-regulating behaviour (i.e. *not consenting to or not engaging in sex that is wanted*) are more desirable or are to be feared *less* than the 'slut' label. This is, perhaps, as discussed in Chapter 3, due to the

fact that this label is perceived as one which is extremely resilient and can be attributed to a particular woman for her entire life. This is supported by Orla who states that a woman who is overtly sexual even once is 'labelled for life as a slut like. You know she might never have sex again, she might never do anything again but because of this one experience...and you know it's a label that's impossible to shake really once you have it' (Orla).

Within this dichotomous system of labelling women according to their sexuality, then, an obvious double standard exists of which the female participants of the study are extremely aware. Daisy for example, summarises this standard as follows 'we all know the double standard exists right? If a girl sleeps with loads of guys she's a slut if a guy does it he's a hero and that's always the way it was' (Daisy) while Laura describes it in the words of one of her male friends '...a key that can open up loads of locks is a master key but the...a lock that can be opened up by many keys is a cheap lock' and that's what he was describing girls that have a one night stand as' (Laura).

The study's interviews have highlighted an acknowledgement on the part of these female participants that this attitude, among young men in particular, is widespread, as is an acceptance by them that, however unjust, this is the way it is. As a result, the internal conflict that exists within these young women between the benefits of being seen as sexually 'empowered' and as 'embracing sex' and the stigma of being negatively labelled was palpable within the transcripts. Ann, describes this conflict as follows 'you know it's kind of hard, we're expected to be one thing and we're expected to be another' (Ann), while Orla discusses the importance of discretion and the delicate balance that exists between the 'slut' and 'prude' labels; 'I think it's harder, much harder for girls and I think they have to be...I think they're forced to be more discreet like they're expected to be open about sex, but not too open you know, there's this kind of grey area and it's really tricky to kind of to get that balance right. You know, to nearly 'appear' to do it but not actually do it' (Orla). Within this grey area, then, and the balancing-act that these women feel they are forced to perform, there is no room *for* or discussion *of* female sexual pleasure, choice, agency or autonomy. In fact, throughout the study's findings, this 'line' that the participants felt they needed to tread was of greater concern to them than their own sexual pleasures, desires, behaviour and choice.

Relationships and Intimacy

Within these interviews a broad range of experiences and attitudes were reported in relation to relationships and intimacy. Most strikingly however, given the proliferation of casual, commitment-free sex within Raunch Culture, was the apparent mutual exclusivity of intimacy and casual sex within these accounts. In fact, the ways in which the women conceived, on the one hand of sex in an *established relationship* and on the other hand of sex in a *casual encounter* (e.g. one night stands) were vastly different, as were the ways in which they situated themselves therein. What emerged from the transcripts, therefore, was an acceptance by participants that, along with each of these situations, comes a different set of expectations and preconceptions.

The term 'intimacy' plays a central role in this differentiation and refers, in this context, not to a deep emotional connection or the presence of love within a relationship but a level of comfort with which the women feel that they have the space, freedom and power to discuss their own needs and desires and to communicate openly and freely without judgment or fear of being spoken about or negatively labelled by their partners. Within the women's accounts of casual sex, however, descriptions of intimacy and of its related comforts and freedoms were almost completely absent. As a result, many of the participants reported a reduced capacity within these encounters to discuss their own pleasure or desires; 'To be honest I think in situations like that I think...God, I don't know if pleasure really comes into it' (Ann) and often the acceptance that, while their male partner would receive pleasure, they would not expect that same pleasure for themselves; 'I don't think a woman is thinking that they're going to get pleasure. I think it might be more like the thrill or like something like that more than the actual pleasure' (Laura).

What was most striking about these reported accounts, however, was the resignation on the part of many of the women, not only to this fact, but also to their diminished status and comparative lack of power within their casual relationships; 'it's not even consent because by putting yourself in that situation I suppose you are consenting' (Ann); 'you'd be like fine to fake it because its just the one time and you're never going to see them again and what's the point in getting into 'Well if you did this or that or the other...'' (Orla). These reports are similar to those discussed by Powell (2008) in her investigation of the impact of gender habitus on the young people's consent to or refusals of unwanted sex. Powell describes this resignation on the part of

her female participants as tragically capturing Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (Powell 2008) in that the female in question 'believes, feels and experiences herself to be less capable of acting differently than perhaps she is' (Powell 2008, p175). Within the context of this study it demonstrates the women's complicity in their own domination and highlights, not just a de-prioritisation of their own pleasure and their own importance in these encounters, but their perception that they are in some way removed from the situation and lack power therein and that what happens within their casual sexual encounters will take place regardless of their preferences or desires.

The overwhelming findings of the interview data therefore point to the fact that, in the majority of these reported experiences, casual sexual relationships were regarded as incompatible with intimacy and therefore less likely to result in a sexual experience that is pleasurable and in which the women felt like they held equal status, power and control over the situation. Within the experiences of sex within established relationships, however, the women reported much more freedom of communication, a greater sense of ownership over the situation and an increased prioritisation of their own pleasures and desires.

Within these longer-term or more established relationships (e.g. between a girlfriend and boyfriend), the women demonstrated an increased capacity, freedom and inclination towards discussing their sexual likes, dislikes and preferences with their partners; with my boyfriend, we know each other and we know what each other likes so there's kind of that flow' (Orla) which in turn led to an increased prioritisation of their own pleasure and an increased likelihood of the women feeling like equal contributors and power-holders within the dynamics of these relationships. The definition of sex applied by participants within established relationships was also slightly more fluid than that applied to casual sex (which revolved almost exclusively around coitus ending in male orgasm) and included elements such as greater variation and experimentation in foreplay and the sharing fantasies with partners, 'I think its more about mutual pleasure' (Orla).

Further to this, the general perception within the interviews was that women in long term or established relationships are usually afforded a certain amount of protection from being spoken about or being negatively labelled by their male partners, a fact that lends itself to intimacy and

to the reduced capacity for symbolic violence. This is evident, for example in Laura's interview in which she describes the regularity with which her male friends ask each other in explicit detail about their respective casual sexual encounters and partners but points out the decreased likelihood these men would speak about sex with a girlfriend or established partner in the same manner; 'boys that are in casual relationships at the moment, they're not in any relationships...you know the next day, they would always say, they'd always be like...one of the boys would say 'Did you get the ride?'' (Laura).

However, it is important to note, bearing in mind the dominant discourses at work within Raunch Culture and the pre-conscious influence of gender habitus, that even *within* long term or established relationships some participants, such as Erica, reported extremely negative experiences. In Erica's case this included being told by her partner that she was suffering from a clinical condition known as 'inorgasmia' due to the fact that she found it difficult (like the vast majority of those surveyed) to orgasm through penetration alone. She also felt, within this sexual relationship, that if she suggested sex acts other than coitus that her partner would get angry or upset that his penis was not sufficient to pleasure her; 'I'd feel, if I tell my partner during penetrative sex that he has to stimulate my clitoris as well, it kind of feels like, well your penis isn't enough...you're not doing a good enough job' (Erica), and as a result she would consent to acts that did not give her as much pleasure in order to appease him and to ensure that his needs were met above her own.

These findings are also extremely significant in the context of female sexual autonomy in that they provide evidence, even within a highly sexualised and supposedly empowering Raunch Culture, of a gendered habitus that continues to propagate traditional visions of female sexuality that are passive and reactive and that endorse women's role as the gatekeepers of male sexuality and male sexual confidence. They also expose the extent to which this gendered habitus contains women and highlights the presence of symbolic violence through which these women become complicit in their own containment

6.4 Barriers to Autonomy posed by Raunch Culture

This line and the resultant self-regulation of sexual behaviour discussed in the previous section, poses obvious barriers to the sexuality 'free from pressure or coercion' that is of central concern

to this thesis. Within the previous five chapters of this study, the prevalence of Raunch Culture and its propagation through the mainstream media and popular culture is evident. One need only pick up a 'woman's' magazine, turn on the television or log on to the internet to be bombarded with pornified images and sexualised language. As mentioned previously, however, processes of sexualisation, like all other social processes, are in a constant state of change and development. Therefore 'sexualisation', whether in the media or other facets of social life should not be seen as inherently 'wrong' or 'dangerous' in and of itself. It is when they actively limit sexual agency, choice, control and autonomy, however, that these processes become problematic.

Linking the prevalence of Raunch Culture to the lived sexual experiences of young Irish women

For the purposes of this study, the prevalence of Raunch Culture and its influence on female sexual autonomy is evident in the findings of its research methods. Both the questionnaire and interview methods of inquiry exposed the pressure imposed by this culture to adhere to the socio-sexual rules it reinforces. This was evident in the number of survey participants who, for example, said that they had experienced pressure to be 'good at sex' and in the self-regulating behaviour discussed within the study's interviews that revealed the ways in which they altered their dress, look, sexual responses and sexual behaviour in order to meet these standards.

In order to link Raunch Culture's influence with this self-regulation of sexual behaviour on the part of these women, however, and to infer its capacity to pose barriers to the development of an Irish female sexual autonomy, two important pieces of evidence from the findings of this study need to be discussed. The first of these involves a direct link made by the study's participants between the sexual pressures they have experienced and the media. In the questionnaire data, for example, it was found that of those who said that they experienced pressure to be 'good' at sex, over one third cited facets of the media such as 'TV programmes', 'Erotica' and 'Women's magazines' as the primary source of that pressure.

Secondly, a similar link is made by the interview participants. Erica, for example, attributes the focus on coitus as the ultimate (hetero)sex act, and the resulting pressure to adhere to that standard, to the ways in which sex is portrayed by the media; 'that's what society says we should do and I don't know if that, is it from TV...that's what happens on TV' (Erica) while Orla

feels that these pressures are imposed at a larger society-wide level and finds it very difficult to transgress from them or to challenge them 'I don't want to be so general as to just say 'society' but you know that's kind of how I feel like, that it is...that it is kind of society that's given me that reaction. It's myself that's trying to challenge it but it's still very hard to challenge it at times' (Orla).

Aside from these direct references made by participants to the pressures imposed upon their sexual lives by the media, however, there is also further evidence within the findings of the study that connects the self-regulating behaviour discussed above with Raunch Culture's influence on society. This pertains to the fact that almost 44% of the questionnaire's participants cited facets of the media ('TV', 'Erotica' and 'Magazines') as the place they learned *most* about human sex and sexuality. This figure is further supported by the interview findings which suggest that although the majority of participants had received some information about the biological aspects of reproductive sex from authoritative sources such as parents or teachers, none of them received further sexual education from these sources that pertained to the issues of pleasure, desire, relationships or the emotional aspects of sexuality. For this information, they instead looked to media such as women's magazines (e.g. *Cosmo/ More* etc) and television programmes (e.g. *Sex and the City/ Friends* etc) as a source of information and advice regarding the non-biological non-reproductive aspects of sexuality.

From the findings, it can therefore be deduced that the primary sexual messages being communicated to these young Irish women have been mediated within the popular media by Raunch Culture. These messages include, for example, the notion that adherence to the culture's sexual rulebook results in pleasure and gratification for women, that female sexuality can be commoditised and that female sexual pleasure is something which is easily accessed through coitus and should be enjoyed by all women. They also include conflicting messages, evident within the interview data that simultaneously damn the woman who is a 'prude' and the woman who is a 'slut'.

Evidence of the potential damage that these messages can incur can be found in the experiences of Daisy, the oldest interview participant who, despite enjoying a pleasurable sex life *now*, describes a significant period of her sexual life in which she was not sexually satisfied

because despite 'embracing sex' and attempting to be 'sexually empowered' by listening to the advice given in glossy magazines, she did not particularly enjoy sex; 'I wasn't able to have an orgasm until I was in a committed relationship where obviously I was able to relax enough ...so you know I think I was great at getting the magazine and about this position, that position and the best blow job and you know whatever, all that stuff. When actually it was just being relaxed in myself and kind of switching off and thinking you know this is nice, keep going with that or whatever. I was constantly, I don't know, putting on some kind of porn-star show' (Daisy).

She goes on to explain that 'I used to read women's magazines and I used to take them as Gospel like, it didn't occur to me that that was just one person's view so that was just someone writing an article...and any time they seem to interview guys on what was good in bed that was always the thing 'Oh a girl's confident in bed' or 'a girl who loves sex' you know...So yeah I think I got *all* my knowledge from magazines' (Daisy). Now, however, in her early thirties, Daisy feels that these media damaged her sexual life and capacity for sexual pleasure and believes that these types of magazines are 'toxic' (Daisy) and focus more on what men want than what will benefit its female readership '(In) *Cosmo*, every article was about sex 'How to be good in bed', 'how to do this', 'how to drive him wild', blah, blah, blah, blah. Like now I'm like who gives a fuck you know? Like do I need to drive every man wild? How about I just drive myself wild? Or how about just accept myself? Or how about just be happier? You know, think about what I actually want to do as opposed to go on some rule to...you know I even find that concept so ridiculous now. You know I often have like...like em why are we constantly talking about what men want from us. You know what they want us to look like, what they want our bodies to look like, what they want in bed, you know and this constantly searching for information of what men want like' (Daisy).

Within her interview, Daisy provides evidence that media such as women's magazines impose a sexual rulebook upon its readership that focuses on male pleasure, on female sexuality as performative and on the notion that women should 'be hot', should 'embrace' this form of sex and thereby become 'empowered'.

Self-regulating sexual behaviour and how it impacts sexual autonomy

Daisy's interview also highlights the negative impact for women of regulating their sexuality in accordance with media-led sexual standards. The agenda and priority of these media, after all is to generate a profit, not to educate and the messages communicated therein are transmitted with the ultimate goal of making money and *not* to provide these young women with the tools and language necessary to negotiate their own sexuality and sexual desires with a view to maximising their sexual satisfaction and pleasure, whether in a sense that is wider than the physical or which pertains expressly to orgasm.

Within Daisy's interview and that of the other participants, there exists a recurring theme that suggests, not only that these young women are *influenced by* and experience pressure at the hands of these mediated sexual messages but that they do not feel that alternative sexualities or sexual choices are always available to them. This is evident in Orla's discussion of how difficult these sexual rules can be to challenge and her internal battle, through self-correction, *not* to conform to them (e.g. by calling other women 'sluts').

Further to this, however, and perhaps *more* problematic is the feeling, on the part of participants such as Ann, that within certain sexual situations the element of choice is completely removed by the presence of fear, pressure and convention. For Ann, this extends to her capacity to refuse unwanted sex and in her explanation of why she has consented to unwanted sex in the past she says 'it's not even consent because by putting yourself in that situation I suppose you are consenting' (Ann). This is significant because it suggests that young women like Ann feel that simply by engaging in activities such as kissing or by going home with a man, she can no longer decide to refuse sex. This is concurrent with the pressures experienced by other interview participants such as Emer and further highlights the notion that these young Irish women, when it comes to casual sex in particular, deprioritise their own sexual pleasure and are instead more concerned with what they *should* do, what *their partners* will think and what *other people* will think if they do or don't engage in sex.

Raunch Culture's impact on the development of an autonomous Irish female sexuality

Within the above chapter, several issues have been discussed which threaten the development of an autonomous Irish female sexuality. This includes the prevalence and influence of Raunch

Culture's sexual rulebook which imposes a set of rules and standards that are rigid in their definitions of sex, sexuality, empowerment, femininity and masculinity and which are enforced through the social stigmatising, labelling and judgement of those who do not adhere to them. The pressure that exists to adhere, then, is palpable throughout both the questionnaire and interview findings of the study and has manifested itself, as previously discussed at length, in the self-correction and self-regulation of the female participants whose sexual choices are often dictated by forces that are external to them such as the media, their partner, peers etc.

In fact, even where the presence of sexual choice *is* perceived, the choices available to many of the women interviewed have been subject to coercive and restrictive social standards propagated through media messages by Raunch Culture. In these cases, the young women involved have been forced to make sexual decisions which are based not on their own sexual gratification, satisfaction or pleasure, but on achieving the least damaging outcome of a sexual situation e.g. in consenting to unwanted sex to avoid being labelled 'prudish' (e.g. Ann) or to ensure that a sexual partner will not be angry or upset (e.g. Emer).

This perceived coercion and restriction of sexual choice, then, suggests that Raunch Culture and its pervasive influence over sexual attitudes and standards has had a significant impact on the sexual identity, decisions and behaviour of the study's participants and, consequently, their sexual autonomy. As a result, the central research question of this thesis has been affirmed in that it can be said that Raunch Culture, through its implementation of a set of socio-sexual rules and standards that have shaped the Irish sexual habitus and imposed a set of pressures and fears of social rejection, labelling and judgement, has impacted the development of an autonomous female sexuality in Ireland to the extent that young Irish women are basing their sexual decisions not on what *they* want or that which will give them greatest satisfaction, but on an adherence to the rules set out within this oppressive and restrictive culture.

Conclusion

This research is the first of its kind in Ireland in that it, not only explores Raunch as a cultural phenomenon and its presence in Irish society, but also makes an explicit empirical connection between the proliferation of this phenomenon and the impact that it has had and continues to have on the lived sexual behaviours, attitudes and identities of young Irish women. Using both quantitative and qualitative research strategies, the thesis provides substantial evidence of the taken-for-granted gender habitus that acts as the 'rules of the game' for Irish female sexuality and that frames the sexual decision making of the study's participants.

Further to this, by highlighting the participants' reported experiences of engaging in unwanted sexual behaviour, despite their perceived status as agentic social beings, the study argues for the inextricable links that exist between this gendered habitus and the prevalence of symbolic violence in which young Irish women are complicit in their own domination. In this way, and unlike many other studies within the emergent field of 'sexualisation', it offers empirical evidence of the long-term ideological impact of cultural representations and discourses on women's sexual self-esteem and autonomy.

The data generated over the course of this study has provided sufficient information to support the discussions of the previous chapter which argued for the impact of Raunch Culture on Irish female sexual autonomy. However, the large quantity of the data collected, resulted in a number of issues being raised over the three year period of the study for which there was no room within the scope of the research question at hand to explore in detail. These are issues which could form the basis of future research topics in the area of Irish sexuality and are discussed below in brief.

One such issue pertains to the dramatic changes in the Irish religious landscape over the past fifty years and within the study's questionnaire data, for example, when participants were asked the question; 'Is religion an influence on your sexual behaviour?' almost 62% said 'No influence at all' and a further 19% responded 'Almost no influence'. This marks a profound shift in attitudes towards religious dogma within the Irish social and cultural landscape.

This revolutionary change has been explored and discussed at length by academics such as Tom Inglis and Diarmaid Ferriter over the last two decades. What has *yet* to be researched, however, is Irish *reaction* to that change. Within this study's questionnaire, for example, only one open-ended question was given 'If you were raised within a particular faith, church or religious group, please give details below'. Within the responses given, what was significant was not the (predicted) high number of respondents who cited 'Roman Catholicism' as the religion within which they were raised, but the number who chose to qualify this response with further information.

This information in many cases involved a distancing of the participant from the religion in which they were brought up³⁶, and could warrant a discussion or further research into the fact that Irish people, despite their perceived indifference when it comes to Catholicism, are eager to be seen as *actively* distancing themselves from it. Researching this act of distancing and the reasoning behind it could possibly lead to a successful exploration of Irish society's reaction to and experience of the rapid changes that have occurred within its social, cultural, moral and sexual 'norms' over the past four decades.

Further to this, as already discussed within this thesis, is the notion that Ireland has not broken free from the kind of sexual repression explored within the thesis' first chapter, but has simply moved from one sexual regulator; the Catholic Church, to another; Raunch Culture. The study has already established the ways in which both of these regulators have imposed, implemented and regulated a form of sexual rulebook in Ireland but further exploration of the subject could provide a solid basis for future inquiry.

Despite the perceived distance in the twenty first century between Irish sexuality and the Catholic Church, however, its legacy is still found within the area of sex education in Ireland both in the home and in schools. This is an issue which warrants extensive research and in-depth discussions and consultation with young Irish people regarding their needs in this area. As highlighted by this study, young Irish women are increasingly looking to the media as a source of information about sex, and particularly about sexual pleasure and desire and are therefore

³⁶ 'Catholic but no longer practising', 'Raised Catholic...casual sex very much frowned upon but I have not considered myself religious for years' 'Raised Catholic but consider myself an atheist now

susceptible to false, glamorised or eroticised messages about female sexuality that are created, not for educational purposes but to generate profits but those who mediate them. Although these issues have been discussed by researchers such as Feona Attwood, Rosalind Gill and MG Durham, no studies have been carried out that pertain specifically to *Irish* sexuality and the inheritance of twenty first century Irish women of a legacy of sexual silence and morality that continues to inhibit their sexual identity, pleasure and development.

This concept of *pleasure* in particular is one which has recurred and been discussed at length throughout this thesis. The ambiguous nature of this concept and its capacity to be interpreted differently by different people makes it notoriously difficult to define. Within the context of this thesis, however, it can be seen to pertain, not only to physical pleasure in the form of orgasm, for example, but instead involves sexual satisfaction that *incorporates* physical pleasure but also extends to a satisfaction on behalf of Irish women with their sexual decisions, choices and behaviour.

Several findings within the study lend themselves to the development of further discussion on the topic of pleasure. These include a tendency among the interview participants to disregard and deprioritise their own pleasure and their focus instead on issues of consent, performance and the pleasure of their partner (including a belief that male orgasm is commonly regarded as the 'natural' end to sex and intimacy). This pornified vision of heterosex requires further investigation in the context of Irish female sexual autonomy with a view, as discussed above, to begin to equip young Irish women with the tools and language necessary to negotiate their sexualities safely, pleasurably and knowledgeably.

This study, therefore, acts as a solid springboard for action on the issue of female sexual autonomy. The dominant discourses and linguistic repertoires that emerge within the interview data in particular lend themselves to this and serve to highlight, in the words of young Irish women themselves; 'that the transformation of gender relations is uneven, and that recent celebrations of the de-traditionalisation and re-negotiation of gender may fail to acknowledge the ways that so-called new gender norms, such as young women's apparent sexual freedom, may represent old norms in disguise' (Powell 2008, p172/3).

The research provides substantial evidence of the presence of these 'old norms' within Raunch Culture and their capacity to reinforce archaic gendered assumptions that relegate female sexuality to a passive, reactive, submissive state. The study succeeds, in fact, in highlighting the potential for these 'norms' to become so engrained in the Irish female sexual habitus that young Irish women, in turn, become complicit in limiting their own sexual status and the amount of choice, freedom and autonomy that they enjoy within their heterosexual relationships. In this way, it also directly challenges the postmodern notion of the 'active audience' and ideological resistance in that it provides evidence of the fact that, although Raunch Culture might offer young women a number of thrills, options and freedoms, these are consistently limited by the pervasiveness of its libidinal and gaze which, as the thesis proves, serve to inhibit and impede any development of an autonomous female sexuality in Ireland.

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Appendix A: Self-Completion Questionnaire

1. Sex

- Male
- Female

2. Age

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35+

3. Are you a student or staff member at NUIG?

- Yes
- No

4. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- Exclusively Heterosexual
- Mainly Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Mainly Homosexual
- Exclusively Homosexual

5. Which of the following best describes your relationship status?

- Single
- Single but engage in 'casual' relationships
- In a relationship
- Co-habiting
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

6. Were you born in Ireland?

- Yes
- No

Appendix A continued

7. How long have you lived in Ireland?

- At least 90% of my life
- Less than 90% of my life

8. How sexy do you believe you are?

- Not sexy at all
- Not sexy
- Moderately sexy
- Very sexy
- Extremely sexy

9. Which of the following MOST influences your perception of how sexy you are?

- Romantic/ sexual partner(s)
- Intended romantic/ sexual partner(s)
- Friends or peers
- Family
- Media influences
- Celebrity images
- Pornographic material or other media showcasing sexuality/ nudity
- This view has been formed independently of any of the above factors

10. Think for a moment about the way female sexuality is represented in the media and then indicate to what extent you agree/ disagree with the statements below:

These representations are:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know/ neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Empowering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Entertaining/ fun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relevant to my own sexual life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Realistic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offensive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Degrading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix A continued

11. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (please select one option from the dropdown menu provided³⁷)?

Media Representations of Female Sexuality:

- Mirror the everyday lives of all women
- Realistically portray women's sexuality
- Are achievable for all women
- Mirror the everyday lives of some women
- Realistically portray some women's sexuality
- Are achievable for some women
- Mirror the everyday lives of other women but not mine
- Realistically portray other women's sexuality but not mine
- Are achievable for some women but not for me
- Do not mirror the everyday lives of all women
- Unrealistically portray women's sexuality
- Are unachievable for women

12. How often do you enjoy sex?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

13. How often do you masturbate?

- Never
- Several times a year or less
- Several times a month
- Once a week or more

14. When you masturbate do you achieve orgasm?

- Yes
- No

³⁷ A dropdown menu was provided online for each of these statements that included the following five options: 'Completely disagree', 'Disagree', 'Uncertain', 'Agree', 'Completely Agree'

Appendix A continued

15. When engaging in sexual intercourse (i.e. vaginal penetration by penis) how often do you experience orgasm?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

16. When engaging in sexual intercourse (i.e. vaginal penetration by penis) how often do you experience orgasm when the clitoris is stimulated as well?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

17. How important is your orgasm in a sexual relationship with a long-term partner?

- Extremely important
- Important
- I don't know/ neutral
- Not important
- Not important at all

18. How important is your orgasm in a sexual relationship with a casual partner?

- Extremely important
- Important
- I don't know/ neutral
- Not important
- Not important at all

19. How important is your partner's orgasm in a long-term sexual relationship?

- Extremely important
- Important
- I don't know/ neutral
- Not important
- Not important at all

Appendix A continued

20. How important is your partner's orgasm in a casual sexual relationship?

- Extremely important
- Important
- I don't know/ neutral
- Not important
- Not important at all

21. What sexual act do you engage in most frequently?

- Sexual intercourse (vaginal penetration by penis without clitoral stimulation)
- Sexual intercourse (vaginal penetration by penis with clitoral stimulation)
- Oral sex
- Anal sex
- Manual masturbation

22. Does the sex act you engage in most frequently lead to orgasm?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

23. Does the sex act you engage in most frequently give you the most pleasure even if it does not lead to orgasm?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

24. Do you feel pressure to be good at sex?

- Yes
- No

Appendix A continued

25. If you answered 'yes', what is the main source of this pressure?

- Peers
- Friends
- TV programmes
- Erotica (magazines/ films)
- Women's magazines
- Current partner/ lover (if in a sexual relationship)
- Intended partner/ lover (if not in a sexual relationship)
- Other

26. Where did you learn most about human sex and sexuality?

- TV
- Erotica (magazines/ films)
- Teen magazines
- Women's magazines/ men's magazines
- Friends
- Parents
- Partner/ lover
- Books on human sexuality
- Teachers
- Pastor, minister or priest

27. Who influenced most the way you think about sexuality?

- TV
- Erotica (magazines/ films)
- Teen magazines
- Women's magazines/ men's magazines
- Friends
- Parents
- Partner/ lover
- Books on human sexuality
- Teachers
- Pastor, minister or priest

28. If you were raised within a particular faith, church or religious group, please give details below:

--

Appendix A continued

29. How often do you attend religious services (in a synagogue, mosque, church etc)?

- I do not attend religious services
- Only on special occasions (weddings, religious holidays etc)
- Less than once a month
- More than once a month
- Weekly
- Daily

30. Is religion an influence on your sexual behaviour?

- Very high/ enormous influence
- High influence
- Some influence
- Minimal/ almost no influence
- No influence at all

For the next stage of this study, I will be carrying out one-to-one interviews to discuss these topics in greater detail. If you would like more information about these interviews or would like to take part, I would be delighted to hear from you.

You can contact me directly at s.stokes1@nuigalway.ie

In order to protect your anonymity you do not have to use your own details, but can contact me instead with a codename of your choosing which will be used throughout the study.

Appendix B: Advertisement for Questionnaire

Let's Talk About Sex

I am a PhD student researching the influence of Raunch Culture on Irish female sexuality and need YOUR opinions about and experiences of sex and sexuality in Ireland.

So if you are an Irish female student or a member of Staff in NUIG aged between 18-34, take this opportunity to have your say about sex.

For full details of the project and a direct link to the questionnaire log on to: *(link to be inserted once online survey has been activated)*

For further information please email me at: s.stokes1@nuigalway.ie

Complete Anonymity Guaranteed

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

The purpose of this questionnaire is to learn more about what Irish women, like you, aged between 18-34 think about sex. Within this survey you will be asked questions about your sexual attitudes, experiences and behaviour. Your answers will be anonymous, so your confidentiality is completely guaranteed.

Your contribution to this study is voluntary and you are free to leave any of the questions blank if you do not want to answer them but I would encourage you to answer as many questions as you possibly can. Always remember that your answers are anonymous and that they will be dealt with in utmost confidentiality. The questionnaire itself is very brief and comprises of 30 tick-box questions. Your attitudes, experiences and knowledge are extremely valuable so take this opportunity to have your say by answering the following questions.

Complete anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed to all participants. This study is being undertaken through the School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI, Galway. Should you wish to contact the researcher Sara Stokes directly, do so at s.stokes1@nuigalway.ie or the project supervisor Dr. Vesna Malesevic at Vesna.Malesevic@nuigalway.ie

Thank you for your participation

Appendix D: Letter of Intent

Dear *(Insert Code Name)*

Thank you for expressing an interest in this study of Irish Female Sexuality and for recently taking part in its online survey. As explained within the survey, the next phase of this research project is a series of one-to-one interviews with female students/staff members of NUIG aged between 18-34. These interviews will take place on campus at a time convenient to the interviewee and will focus on the story of their own sexuality as well as their experiences of Irish sexuality in general.

If you wish to participate in this interview process, I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss these issues. First of all, however, you will need to read and sign the enclosed 'Informed Consent Form' which outlines the aims of the study, its procedures and your role in this research project.

Any information you volunteer during this study will be treated with the utmost care, confidentiality and discretion and you will not be identified at any stage during the process. Your participation in the project is completely voluntary; you are under no obligation to continue with the process and may withdraw at any time.

If you have any concerns or issues that you would like to discuss prior to taking part in the interview process, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. On the other hand, if you have any queries or issues with the way in which this process has been conducted at any stage, you may contact NUIG's Research Ethics Committee at 091-495312

Kind regards,

Sara Stokes
Doctoral Student
Tel: 085 1528585
Email: s.stokes1@nuigalway.ie

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

National University of Ireland, Galway

Title of Project: The Impact of Raunch Culture on the Development of an Autonomous Female
Sexuality in Ireland

Principal Investigator: Sara Stokes

Participant's Code Name: _____

Purpose of the Research

You are invited to participate in this study investigating how young Irish women experience sex and sexuality in the twenty-first century. The purpose of this research is to explore the sexual attitudes, experiences and behaviour of women in the context of Raunch Culture. Raunch Culture is looked at as an increasing influence and presence of sexualised images in the media.

Procedures

This second stage of the study will comprise of a one-to-one interview where we will discuss similar themes to those raised in the online questionnaire you recently completed. This interview will take place at NUI Galway at the following location and time:

Location: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

This time and location were chosen to facilitate a familiar, comfortable atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. Only you and I will be present at the interview which will be recorded on an audio tape. You can stop the tape/ interview at any time and I would encourage you to tell me if you feel discomfort at any stage. You will not need to disclose your real identity.

Time Duration of the Procedures and Study

If you agree to take part in this study, your interview will take approximately one hour. However, interviews can be made longer or shorter to suit you. You are also invited to contact me directly regarding any questions you might have about the project, its procedures or the interview itself at any time throughout the study and following your interview. You can also contact the project supervisor Dr. Vesna Malesevic (Vesna.Malesevic@nuigalway.ie) for any clarification.

Appendix E continued

Discomforts and Risks

There are no known risks associated with this research. However, some interviewees may experience some level of discomfort or some negative emotions while discussing personal, and particularly sexual, experiences. If you experience any discomfort during the interview process, please let me know so that we can pause the tape and take a short break from the interview setting. If you do not wish to continue, you can choose to stop the interview completely at any stage.

If you experience any distress as a result of participation in this study, you can contact the following services who, although not directly associated with this study, are available free of charge to all NUI, Galway students and in emergency cases to the staff members:

Chaplaincy Services	chaplains@nuigalway.ie	091-495055
Counseling Services	counseling@nuigalway.ie	091-492484

Potential Benefits

While there are no benefits guaranteed to you in this study, your experiences can help researchers to further understand the ways young Irish women experience sexuality today. This in turn will hopefully provide a better understanding of Irish female sexuality and the factors that contribute to and hinder its development. You are also invited to contact me at a later date if interested in results of the study.

Statement of Confidentiality

It is important to the integrity of this research process that you remain anonymous throughout. Therefore, the code name you have given yourself _____ will be used in all communication and your real identity (or any personally identifiable information) will not be revealed either in writing or on the audio recording of your interview.

This audio recording will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by me (the interviewer) until it has been transcribed. Once this has been done, all audio files and transcriptions will be maintained securely and confidentially by the project's primary supervisor Dr. Vesna Malesevic for a period of five years.

Please be assured that any information and details you disclose are completely confidential and will be treated and maintained in an ethical manner.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Similarly, you are completely free not to answer any of the questions posed by the study.

Appendix E continued

Contact Information for Questions or Concerns

If you have any concerns or queries regarding this study or the interview process, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at the details below. If, however, you have a query about me (the researcher) or wish to discuss the way the study *is being or has been* conducted, please contact the NUI, Galway Research Ethics Committee at the details below:

Sara Stokes s.stokes1@nuigalway.ie 085-1528585

NUIG Research Ethics Committee eithne.oconnell@nuigalway.ie 091-495312

Participant's Responsibility

I have read and understood the Informed Consent Form above and by signing my name below, I agree to participate in this study. My participation is voluntary and I understand the guidelines and conditions of the project.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Printed Name