‘For me, a boundary has always been that moment when I taught, I *really* don’t like this. So when I really, really felt like, “I don’t want this” ‘They just assumed like, oh if she doesn’t want to than she will speak up, you know so yeah, than you really have to act like that. ‘It is expected that you do not only say no, but that you say no tree times’ ‘I was thinking like, am I the one who is wrong here because I went to his place? Maybe I should have gone to my own place instead’

‘I Would not Say Violence, but Intimidation: I *gave* him a “free pass” eventually’

Sorority Women’s Definitions and Experiences about Sexual Violences and Negotiations of Sexual Consent in the Context of the Dutch Sorority System.

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To my sorority “sisters”, for being an inspiration, giving me the support, sharing your critical thoughts, but most of all for being my “stand-in” family and lifelong friends.

and

To my “true” family, for believing in me and giving me the courage and the space to believe in myself.

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The voices on the title page of this thesis belong to those women who told me their stories.

Note on the Transcriptions

In this thesis I include both the original Dutch transcriptions of my interviews and my English translations. With the in-text references to parts of the interviews however, I use the English translation. In the cases I was unsure about the way to translate a word and/or phrase I put the Dutch word and/or phrase in brackets behind the English translation. In this way, I attempted to do justice to the sorority women's narratives and minimise that which gets lost in translation.

The following conventions are used in the transcripts that have been included in this study:

[…]	indicates material that has been omitted from the transcript
[ ]	author's explanatory comments, contextual notes, and nonverbal actions
/	indicates (self) interruption
…	indicates a short pause

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Table of Contents

Introduction

On a winter evening in March I thankfully accepted the invitation from two friends to get together and enjoy some good food and wine before making our way to a club in town. I had gone through a difficult time, and this was definitely a good distraction and a way to take my mind off the less pleasant things in life. After having arrived in the club and having talked to some of my acquaintances, I spotted him. There has always been "something" between us, but now I was not only single, I had an enormous amount of confidence (probably due to the equally enormous amount of drinks I had), and therefore "allowed" myself to make a move. I initiated a conversation, or something that looked like it, and succeeded in meeting him in front of the club at closing hour. I mumbled something about really needing to go to the bathroom, which lead us to stroll to his house together. Eventually we ended up in his bed where we started kissing, but I told him that this was as far as I was willing to go. He was totally fine with the decision and even agreed that it was probably for the best to not continue our adventure. Still high on alcohol I fell asleep.

I did not anticipated to wake up as early as I did, neither did I expected that it was because I felt a hand moving into my underwear. I pushed him away, once, twice, the third time annoyed me enough to turn my back towards him and move myself over to the other side of the bed. I did not leave straightaway, neither did I confront him afterwards with what happened. In fact, I went home with him once more and again I awoke because he touched me sexually in ways that I told him not to. Again, I did not leave or confront him directly, nor did I felt that he was to be taken accountable for his actions. Rather, I started questioning my interpretation of the situation. Was this really such an inappropriate situation? Maybe I should not exaggerate it to something that is most definitely not, "nothing *really* happened". After all,

not only was I drunk, which might have altered my perception of things, but I went to his place voluntarily, and chose to spend the night there. Maybe I should have been more explicit in communicating my sexual boundaries to him? He was drunk too, so probably he did not mean to transgress my boundaries as he did. Maybe he was asleep?

Confused about my own experiences, and because I had a sexual adventure to share, I turned to my fellow sorority members to discuss the contradictory feelings the encounter had left me with. Over the six years that I have been studying at college, I have been actively involved in fraternal and sorority life. I became a member of a sorority during my second year in college and since then these girls have become my closest friends. We tell each other all our sexual adventures, and my story and my confusion about this instance, triggered my friends to share some of their stories as well. One of these stories in particular left me angry, confused, amazed, and raised more questions than it answered. One of them described how one night she had been drinking way too much and that one of her colleagues at the time said that he would take her to her place. She continued by telling that he went inside the house with her and that they ended up kissing on the bed. Eventually they had sex. She says that she thinks she told him 'no', but she did not '*really* resist him'. She tells me that the sexual encounter was really 'one-sided', that she was completely drunk, and that she did 'not really wanted' to have sex with him. She goes on by sharing that she was not very clear in verbalising her unwillingness though: 'I did not tell him, "no don't touch me" or "go away"'.

If these men should be taken accountable for their actions or what their intentions were is not the point of this thesis, nor is my intention to accuse the men who are part of the stories that I am going to lay bare here. However, the similarities in the stories that we told each other that particular day left me wondering and I decided that they do not only deserve, but need further attention. How do we, sorority women, decide what is sexually acceptable and how do we negotiate these boundaries? Why do we seem to be critical about ourselves, but "fail" to hold these men accountable for these sexual encounters that leave us uncomfortable, angry or ashamed? Are we even considering these behaviours to be sexual violence or which meanings *do* we attribute to it? How does sorority life, with its sexual culture, group-identities, and high level of alcohol consumption contribute to our experiences? In my struggle to answer these questions and get a fuller understanding of our experiences of sexual violence and consent as sorority women, there is a need to put these questions in a larger context of how sexual violence towards women is able to persist. Building knowledge from

women's lived experiences has become crucial in analysing women's issues[1] such as sexual violence[2]. By examining definitions and experiences of sexual violence and the negotiations of sexual consent, through interviews with Dutch sorority women and personal observations throughout the years I have been actively involved in this life, I will answer the main question that drives this study: 'How do Dutch sorority women understand and experience sexual violences and negotiations of sexual consent with regards to their hetero-relational encounters?' By hetero-relational encounters I mean what Lynn M. Phillips has coined as:

> 'the interactions, both sexual and seemingly non-sexual, that women have with men and masculinities. Hetero-relations may include serious love relationships, casual sexual encounters, nonsexual/non-romantic interactions across gender that involve elements of domination, exploitation, or coercion based on gender, and interactions that one person intends to be nonsexual/non-romantic but into which others introduce elements of uninvited sexuality or romance' (2000, x).

These hetero-relations are suggested to include both interactions that are sexualised explicitly and encounters between women and men that are seemingly non-sexual, but that are facilitated by actions such as flirting (Phillips 2000, x). I would say that defining hetero-relations as such, allows one to take notice of the 'malestream' society that has constructed numerous complex (often conflicting) messages about, in this case, gender and sexuality (Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). In this way, I am able to explore the ways in which women construct their understandings and experiences of their negotiations of sexual consent and sexual violence with men in de midst of a male-centred culture (Phillips 2000, xi). This is, according to Phillips, why to adopt the term "hetero-relational" rather than "hetero-sexual" (ibid.). Despite the way one defines their sexual orientation, all women (and men) are imbricated in these male/hetero-centred relations because this is how society is structured (ibid.).

In order to understand the context from which I "speak" and to be able to critically

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[1] Producing knowledge from women's lived experiences is a significant aspect of feminist theory. Grounding knowledge in women's lived experiences offers an alternative perspective on the world than that of dominant groups in society (i.e. white males). Historically, white males have defined what counted as "truth" and therefore other knowledges have been supressed and invalidated. Women's experiences however, revealed that issues such as sexism were not only personal, but carried a structural character. Hence, these issues were introduced in the political debate and showed how society has been structured by oppressive (e.g. racist and sexist) structures. For a thorough elaboration on the importance and complexity of building knowledge from women's lived experiences, see chapter 2 of this thesis.

[2] This is not to say, however, that women are solely considered "victims" and men are only "perpetrators" with regards to sexual violence. While I think that there is much to explore in the field of sexual violence against men, the continuous high numbers of sexual violence against women make clear that further research is far from redundant. The heterogeneousness of women as a group makes clear that there is still need for further research because, as will become clear in this thesis by focussing on women in sororities, each context where women immerse themselves in brings along different complexities that might influence their experiences in a variety of ways.

engage with the narratives of these sorority women, I outline the key concepts that have been guiding me in my understanding and I provide a glimpse into the world of sororities in the first chapter. After this I will discuss the methodological considerations that I have taken into account in order to collect and explore these women's narratives. In the third chapter, the ways the understandings of my participants of sexual consent and sexual violence are influenced by the mainstream sexual violence prevention strategy that urges women to "just say no" is analysed. In line with existing studies, as the texts of Melissa Burkett and Karine Hamilton (2012), Anastasia Powell (2008) and Phillips (2000) demonstrate, I argue that sorority women's definitions of sexual consent are permeated by seemingly neo-liberal "ideals" that are evident in this model. However, I nuance the prevalence of these ideas in the understandings of sexual violence by discussing the ways sorority women define this concept. I continue by discussing the important role of reconceptualising sexual violence by using Liz Kelly's (1988) concept of the "sexual continuum", but at the same time I question whether this is applicable in practice.

In chapter four, I explore how sorority women negotiate sexual consent and talk about sexual violence in their actual experiences. By applying some of Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about 'symbolic violence' (2000; 2001), I will argue that women's negotiations of sexual consent and their experiences of sexual violence are more complex than the "just say no" approach is tempting us to believe. Hence I show how this influences their ability to effectively name abusive experiences, which complicates the applicability of the "sexual continuum" in practice. I will use the texts of Burkett and Hamilton (2012), Powell (2008), and Phillips (2000) to strengthen my arguments theoretically.

Chapter five will explore the ways this sorority system - with its "family-like" structures, and a phallocentric sexual ideology[3]- complicates the experiences of sexual consent and sexual violences of sorority women even further. I will argue that sorority women's experiences cannot be detached from the fraternity and sorority system and I show that they incorporate its unique dimensions in complicated and contradictory ways. Starting from Peggy Reeves Sanday's analysis (1990) about fraternity gang rape, I will demonstrate how sorority women construct multiple "family-like" structures that influence their experiences and understanding of sexual consent and sexual violence. I will use the texts of Jacequaline Chevalier Minow and Christopher J. Einolf (2009) and Jeanette Norris, Paula S. Nurius, and Linda A. Dimeff to support my argument. I continue by revealing how these

[3] See footnote 12 for a thorough definition of this concept.

experiences become even more complex because sorority women do not incorporate the inherent sexual ideology in this environment as merely passive subjects. By discussing these women's attitudes and various sorority practices I will argue that these women reproduce and simultaneously adopt the inherent sexual discourse, however, this adopting might only create an illusionary feeling of empowerment. I will apply some of Sanday's concepts (1990) to strengthen my argument further. Finally, in the conclusion it will become evident how all this connects to the questions that have been raised in this introduction and I hope to contribute to a fuller understanding of women's experiences of sexual consent and sexual violence that are imbricated in the unique social environment of sorority life.

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Chapter 1

Contextualising the Study

An Interpretive Framework for Understanding Sorority Women's Definitions and Experiences of Sexual Violences and Sexual Consent

The sorority women in this study are entering adulthood in a social environment were explicit sexuality appears to be everywhere. I recall that engaging in sexual activity was celebrated within sorority life by bringing cake or cookies to the weekly gatherings. Every other week in our meetings there was a specific topic on the agenda that dealt with our sexual adventures over the past week. Once, we even made a list that highlighted all fraternity men that we had been sexually engaging with and how many of our sorority had been sexually active with the same men. It felt like a "celebration" of our sexuality and I perceived myself as a free sexual subject – I could do whatever, whenever I desired it. While I certainly do not want to discredit valuable contributions that feminists researchers, theorists and activists have made in problematizing violence against women, today, I do question this apparent sexual freedom. Am I as sexually "liberated" as I experienced myself to be during my years as an active member of the sorority and fraternity community? My experiences tell me otherwise now. So do the stories of my fellow sorority members. Or is it possible that my "vision" has been blurred since I have been studying Gender Studies for the past two years?

The continuing high numbers "speak" clear though. Incidents of sexual violence show no decline. According to a Dutch study, as many as 31 per cent of the women aged between 15 and 25 had experienced physical sexual violence in their lives and 20 per cent reported to

have experienced non-physical sexual violence (Haas 2012, 139-141)[4]. Women aged between 15 and 25 are at higher risk to experience physical sexual violence (Haas 2012, 139) and statistics from studies in the United States report that women who were members of sororities are at a heightened risk of being victimised (see for instance, Belknap and Sharma 2014; Chevalier Minow and Einolf 2009; Norris, Nurius and Dimeff 1996; Copenhaver and Grauerholz 1991; Kaloff and Cargill 1991).

As alarming as these numbers sound, they do not account for the ways sexual violence has been able to persist. According to Judith Butler, youth is pivotal in the negotiation and maintenance of gendered hierarchies and hegemonies, both within and between genders (cited in Hlavka 2014, 340). Young people are socialized into a culture where male domination in heterosexual relationships is encouraged by normative discourses about female and male sexuality (Tolman et al. cited in Hlvaka 2014, 339)[5]. These discourses consistently teach us[6], amongst other things, that male sexuality is inherently aggressive, dominant and desiring (ibid., 339). Instead female sexuality is (seemingly) passive, submissive and vulnerable (Butler cited in Hlvaka 2014, 339). Since young women are subjected to these heteronormative discourses and it takes up a lot of space in how they figure out their identity, their understandings are 'critical sites for the reproduction of inequality' between women and men (Hlvaka 2014, 340). This process is suggested to be intensified in peer groups (ibid., 346). Trying to live up to the 'prerequisites' that are necessary to become a successful sexual male or female in this hetero-relational society, young people might encounter pressure from their peers to gain such experience (Chung 2005, 447). As stories reveal in the introduction, peer dynamics, amongst others, play an important role in sorority life and might therefore be one of the dimensions that complicates understandings and experiences of these women further. With this study I would like to enrich contemporary scholarship on sexual violence and consent and contribute to a fuller understanding of the experiences of sorority women.

[4] While de Haas does not apply the term "sexual violence" in his research, I prefer to use this term in this study. I will elaborate on my choices for this in the following section of this chapter (*Thinking from Rape towards the Continuum*).

[5] A lot of feminist research has been done on this issue. For an informative account on how society is (re)structured through these heterosexual conventions that sustain male domination and maintain the 'absence of choice' for women to define their own sexuality, see for example: 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1980) by Adrienne Rich.

[6] When I use terms such as "we", "us", and "our", I refer to myself, the participants in this research, and the readers of this thesis. Since I understand all subjects to be imbricated within the dynamics of ideological systems that produce and (re-)construct who we are in the world, I prefer to speak about "we", as in all subjects in the world. For more on the ways these systems (re-)construct who we are in our lived realities, see the sections *Theorising Sorority Women's Sexual Subjectivities* of this chapter and *Problematizing Thinking from Women's Experiences* of chapter 2 in this thesis.

In my own attempt to comprehend how my participants make sense of their understandings and experiences, I have drawn on insights from theory across a variety of disciplines such as sociology, law and criminology, women's studies, and psychology. In the remainder of this chapter I work through some of the key concepts used in this study and lay out a contextual framework. This is needed for a critical understanding of sorority women's definitions and experiences of sexual consent and sexual violence in their hetero-relational lives.

Thinking from Rape towards the Continuum

Over four decades feminist researchers, activists and theorists have led the way in challenging the social acceptance of violence against women (Phillips 2000, 13). One of the most fundamental feminist contributions has been to reconceptualise sexual violence and think of the concept as a "continuum" rather than a notion with rigidly defined boundaries (Kelly, 1988). Challenging the mainstream definition of rape, which is still commonly understood as 'sexual intercourse accomplished either by direct force or a threat of force' (Sanday 1990, 15), the "continuum" allows to account for the 'multifaceted nature of violence' (Morgan and Thapar Björkert 2006, 444). I will elaborate on this Kellian understanding of sexual violence in the following chapters, but how I define sexual violence throughout this study is derived from this notion. When I speak about "sexual violence", I refer to a full range of predetermined conceptual definitions that have appeared in academic literature (e.g. "sexual assault", "rape", "sexual coercion", "unwanted sex", "pressured sex") *and* to the forms of abusive behaviours experienced by women that are, also by the women themselves, commonly normalised[7] (e.g. seductive behaviours such as "flirting", "verbal harassment", and indirect social and cultural pressures). In line with the understanding of sexual violence as a continuum, I therefore decided to utilise the broad term "sexual violences" throughout this study. In this way, I attempt to do justice to the wide spectrum of sexual violent behaviours that women in this study, partially unknowingly, experienced.

As will become clear in the third chapter, it is impossible to speak about sexual violences without talking about sexual consent. From Beres's study it becomes evident that there is no consensus about the ways to conceptualise sexual consent (2007, 95).

[7] By normalised I refer to behaviours, actions, attitudes etcetera, that have come to be perceived as "normal" and "natural". For example, one of my interviewees described how she is used to men finding it 'necessary to slap your bum' when being in a bar (see chapter 3, *The Struggle of Defining "Real" Sexual Violence*). The fact that this woman says she is 'used to it' and therefore she does not define it as violence is a good example of the ways women (and men) normalise abusive behaviours. For more about the ways this mechanism operates see chapter 4, *Symbolic Violence and the Gendered "Habitus"*.

Predominantly, scholars tend to rely on implied understandings and assume a shared view about the concept with their reader (Beres 2007, 95). As a feminist scholar, I do not want to universalise concepts and disregard the influence of structures of power that are inherent in their meanings (ibid., 105). For me, "sexual consent" is a term that covers the process of both the absence of consent and the affirmation of it. Since I do not set out to get to the bottom of things once and for all and make clear statements about the ways this process should be conceptualised, I choose to define and utilise "sexual consent" in a broad way. As I do with "sexual violences" I would like to define the process of "sexual consent" as a continuum as well. It allows me, as a researcher, to avoid analysing the narratives of my respondents through predetermined theoretical frameworks about these concepts (Kelly, 1988). I want to prevent that predetermined categories and my assumptions about "sexual consent" blind me from the lived experiences of sorority women. Therefore thinking about "sexual consent" as a continuum assists me in keeping an open mind and allows the narratives of these women to not only inform this study, but to *drive* this research.

Theorising Sorority Women's Sexual Subjectivities

Much of the theories discussed in studies about adolescent women and their understandings and negotiations of sexual consent and sexual violences rest on the conception that (sexual) subjectivities (i.e. who we are) are effects of historically constructed discourses[8] (i.e. messages and meanings) that are in continuous tension with each other. For example, various discourses about what it means to be a "normal" female sexual subject are inherent in the ways adolescent women negotiate sexual consent. While these scholars do not intent to generalize their findings in any way, the heterogeneousness of social contexts women might find themselves in remains relatively unexplored here (see for instance, Burkett and Hamilton

[8] Debates that focus on the construction of (sexual) subjectivities through discourses are highly complex and many influential scholars, including feminist writers, have contributed with prominent works on this topic. While I do not have the space in this thesis to do justice to the complexity and scope of the body of these works, I would like to highlight some of these prominent scholarly contributions: Michel Foucault was amongst the first scholars that showed 'how individual realities are shaped by constant shifts in power' and that this power is accessed and created through discourse (i.e. language, both in spoken form and unspoken "language" such as signs, symbols, and acts) (cited in Frost and Elichaoff 2014, 44). Many feminist writers have used these Foucauldian ideas on the relationship between power and discourse to 'confront and deconstruct' meanings and understandings of women that have been taken for granted (ibid., 44). See, for example, Judith Butler's influential text, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (1999) and Susan Bordo's work: *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (2003). In the light of this thesis, Foucault's historical analysis of the ways sexual behaviour is produced by power and is expressed through language is also particularly relevant. Sexual behaviour should, according to Foucault, not be understood as a 'stubborn drive' but rather as a 'dense transfer point for relations of power' (1980, 103). Thus, how we should behave sexually and the nature of our sexual desires is communicated and taught to us by dominant discourses (i.e. messages and meanings) that we take for granted. For example, discourses have informed us that hetero-sexuality is "natural" and that female sexuality is inherently passive, submissive and vulnerable.

2012). As I have mentioned in the introduction, the context of sorority life brings along various unique dimensions that influence the construction of our (sexual) subjectivities. These social and cultural "rules" that tell us how we should behave and who we are, might be significantly different for a sorority woman or for a female in college who is not a member of this community. Being based on the idea that subjectivities are developed from cultural discourses that are available to us in a specific place and time, not all women internalise discourses in the same way or to the same extent (see for example, Foucault 1980; Scott 1991). Women differ in the cultural spaces, institutions and practices they immerse themselves in and all these social and cultural spaces carry their messages and meaning from which identity[9] is formed, so who we are and how we experience things[10]. While all discourses 'seep into our consciousness' to a certain extent, some will take up a larger part of our (sexual) identity than others (Phillips 2000, 18). In case of sorority life for instance, 'kissing equalled doing nothing' and had become such a "normal" part of social interactions that it was not really considered to be part of sexual encounters during the years I was actively involved in sorority life. Today, however, this norm has shifted for me and now I find it "abnormal" to kiss as many men as I did then, even though in both cases I am/was not in a relationship. Thus, the messages and therefore our understanding and experiences of ourselves are not static, but they are constructed through space and time. As the example shows, I understand sexual encounters differently during active sorority life compared to how I do today. At the same time, I am also aware of the fact that all of my interviewees were in a relationship when I interviewed them; something which might have influenced their understandings of sexual encounters today as well. However, what is important here is that how much space these women grant to certain discourses constructs "rules" for how they experience sexual encounters, for example. This is not to say that sorority women can simply choose which messages they internalise and which not, however, when fraternal and sorority

[9] When I refer to identity I mean our understanding of who we are through recognition and conformation by others (this process can be both formally or informally) (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 1997, 101-102). This differs from subjectivities because our subjectivities are *constantly* constituted through discursive systems(ibid., 218 my emphasis). They are instable and carry unconscious aspects and therefore parts of our subjectivities are unrecognisable to others (ibid., 218). Hence, subjectivity and identity never fully 'coincide' (ibid., 218).

[10] Here I draw on the notion of 'intersectionality' that was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Starting from the experiences of Black women, she argues that women's subordination has been primarily viewed through a single-axis framework that erases the experiences of women that have been discriminated on multiple factors of their identity (e.g. Black women are being discriminated against on the basis of their 'race'/ethnicity *and* gender) (ibid.). An intersectional approach thus takes into account how identity (and one's social position) is mutually co-constructed and functions simultaneously through factors like gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, age and other factors of difference (Wekker 2007, 63). In other words, one's identity is never determined by gender alone, it always carries the significance of for instance, sexual orientation, class, age and one's ethnicity.

life is very present, they will be highly confronted with the cultural and social "rules" of that context. Hence, these "rules" will most likely have a large effect on what is defined as a "normal" sexual encounter, for example, in that particular place and time.

Anthropologist Sanday, amongst others, wrote extensively on the influence of fraternal life on women's experiences of sexual violence (1990)[11]. By focussing on fraternal gang rape, Sanday argues that the sexual ideology inherent in fraternities is implicitly phallocentric[12] because of its focus on men's 'sexuality and [it] makes sexual conquest the primary goal of sexual expression' (1990, 113). From this, the phallocentric idea that "no never means no"[13] is seen as a "natural" conception and therefore these fraternity members do not see their 'forcing a yes out' as wrong or coercive behaviour (ibid., 132). They are simply acting out their sexual aggressive behaviour and are just "boys being boys". This assumingly "natural" sexual desire turns the responsibility from the "brothers" to the women because the "brothers" cannot help themselves (ibid., 132). These dominant ideas are reinforced and reproduced by using sexual desire for women as a mechanism for "brotherly bonding" because fraternity men want to be socially accepted by the group (ibid.). In result, 'the ideology inscribed in such beliefs legitimates male dominance by assuming that male social and sexual dominance is not only natural but necessary for masculinity' (ibid., 134). In this study thus, fraternities are argued to perpetuate a highly masculine sexual ideology that advocates for prioritising male sexual desires and views sex as a commodity. This results in naturalising male's coercive behaviour and hence positions women as responsible in case of sexual violation.

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[11] Chevalier Minow and Einholf (2009), Norris, Nurius and Dimeff (1996), Copenhaver and Elizabeth Grauerholz (1991) and Kalof and Cargill (1991) developed similar arguments. Their studies suggested that affiliation with sororities heightened women's risk to sexual victimisation. Sorority women's greater alcohol consumption was mentioned in all studies as a significant contributor to being more likely to be victimised. Moreover, the fraternal–sorority context has been indicated to be more likely to be associated with traditional male dominant-female submissiveness attitudes that might have an influence on these women's increased risked of sexual victimisation. While these studies provide valuable insights on the correlation between sorority membership and a heightened risk of sexual victimization, they are also limited in understanding the nature of this relationship: how do women experience and understanding sexual violences and how do they negotiate their sexual consent. As I mentioned before, sexual violence and consent are inextricably connected, but in the before mentioned studies, little attention is given to the process of negotiating boundaries by sorority women themselves. I suggest that when these women's experiences are interrogated a deeper understanding of the presence and often unconscious reproduction of gendered norms might be facilitated and hence add to prevention discourse.

[12] By phallocentric Sanday refers to the way sexual expression (by both men and women) is primarily focussed on the penis (1990). She states: 'The sexual act is not concerned with sexual gratification but with the deployment of the penis as a concrete symbol of masculine social power and dominance (Sanday 1990, 10). The phallocentric discourse 'operates as a strategy of knowledge that sanctions the deployment of male power in acts of sexual aggression (i.e. in her analysis 'pulling trains' are considered one of these acts, see footnote 14) (ibid., 10).

[13] "No never means no" refers to the idea that, for fraternity men in Sanday's analysis, repeated no's are never taken for an answer (1990, 132). This rests on the believe that when a woman is high on alcohol or drugs at a fraternity party, "she asked for it" (ibid.).

While Sanday's arguments are primarily focussed on the context of fraternal life in the United States, they are useful for highlighting the ways sorority women are internalising these predominantly masculine sexual ideologies and how, in result, they affect their experiences of sexual violences and consent. Considering my experiences, I certainly agree with Sanday's arguments about the ways fraternity members reproduce this 'hyper-masculine'[14] sexual ideology that sustains male sexual power (1990). However, I argue that sorority women are part of the same token here. Although I am aware that 'pulling trains'[15] have been the starting point of Sanday's analysis and that she acknowledges that fraternity men cannot be constructed as a homogeneous group, she almost exclusively associates the problematic phallocentric sexual discourse and practices as outsets of the subculture of fraternity students (i.e. male students) (1990, 4). This might lead one to dismiss that sorority women are very much part of the same subculture. Given that sorority women are just as imbricated in these structures of male sexual dominance, they should not be understood only as passive recipients of sexual violence in this context. Instead, I understand these women's experiences as being constructed from these very same discourses. So it might very well be that, in spite of the oppressive ideologies communicated by this sexual discourse, sorority women unconsciously or consciously internalise them as the way they believe their hetero-relational lives should be. As Phillips suggests: '[…] not to say that they [women] are passive recipients of these discourses […] Rather, my point here is to acknowledge that these discourses represent the available materials from which women are able to form their ideas of what is possible, desirable, or inevitable in their hetero-relational lives' (2000, 19). Thus sorority women are, just as their fraternity "brothers", making sense of their identities *through* these available

[14] With the term "hyper-masculinity" I refer to the unique traits of the phallocentric sexual ideology that is suggested to be inherent in the fraternity subculture (Sanday 1990). Fraternity memberships and statuses are based upon "hyper-masculinity" that is 'demonstrated by aggressive behaviour, frequent substance behaviour, contempt for women and gay man, and evidence of multiple casual heterosexual liaisons' (Sanday cited in McCornick 1995, 355-356). In chapter 5, in which I elaborate on this notion further, I will use the terms "phallocentric" and "hyper-masculinity" interchangeably because in the instance of the fraternity and sorority system the phallocentric sexual ideology *is* hyper-masculine.

[15] 'Pulling trains' refer to a situation in which groups of men (e.g. fraternity men) 'line up like train cars' to await their turns to have sex with the same woman (Ehrhart and Sandler 1985 cited in Sanday 1990, 1). This form of "gang rape" is enacted on young women who either seek acceptance or are high on drugs or alcohol (Sanday 1990, 1). It might be the case that a woman accepts to have sex with one man, however, she is unaware of the multiple men that have "lined up" in order to have sex with her (ibid.). In the case of 'pulling trains', a woman is unable to consent because she is high on a certain substance and/or she does not dare to protest (ibid.). These "gang rapes" have been reported in college environments since the early 1980s (ibid.). In her analysis, Sanday argues that "pulling trains" are forms of 'sexual expression that are defined as normal and natural (hence normative) by some men and women' (1990, 10). While Sanday does state that women define these abusive acts as "normal" as well, the role of sorority women is hardly touched upon. As I will show in chapter 5, sorority women cannot be detached from their social environments and hence this context influences them in specific ways.

discourses. The question remains then, how these women are constructing their experiences and understandings through this, and other, gendered discourses and what are the consequences for their experiences of sexual violences and consent.

Exploring Sorority Life in The Netherlands

In applying insights from Sanday's study, I should not disregard that she developed her arguments in a North-American context. I should also not assume that there is a universal understanding in place of what sororities are, or that everybody is familiar with fraternal-sorority life at all. In order to prevent the reproduction of sorority women as a homogenous category, I would like to lay out the context from which the participants in this thesis have told their narratives.

The Netherlands is one of the few countries globally that have a fraternity-sorority like system somewhat comparable to that of the United States (New World Encyclopedia 2013)[16]. In the North American system, the term "fraternity" (often shortened to "frat") refers to an exclusively male or mixed-sex student organisation at college or university (ibid.). The all-female student organisations are referred to as "sororities" (ibid.)[17]. In the Netherlands there is a distinction between all-male student organisations (*herendispuut* or *herengenootschap*), exclusively female organisations (*damesdispuut* or d*amesgenootschap*) and mixed student organisations (*gemengd dispuut*). These student organisations (*disputen*) are usually smaller organisations within a broader student organisation (*studentenvereniging*). All sororities (and fraternities) are not only organisations for students, but they are also run by students. Throughout the text I will utilise the North-American terms "sorority/-ies" and "fraternity/-ies" when talking about exclusively female and/or male student organisations. When I use the term "student association", I refer to the broader student organisation (*studentenvereniging*) where sororities and fraternities are usually part of.

In order to become a member of a sorority, one has to be invited by current members to join drinks and other activities with that sorority. After this, the sorority members decide who might be suitable to join their sorority and live by their particular values and norms. The

[16] Last accessed on 11 September 2014 via http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Fraternity_and_sorority#cite_note-Nuwer-0

[17] Fraternity and sorority are derived from the Latin words "frater" and "soror" which means "brother" and "sister" and are in the North-American context also known collectively as the 'Greek System', 'Greek Society' and 'Greek Organisations' (New World Encyclopedia 2013). Since it is not common practice in the Netherlands to refer to fellow sorority members as "sisters" and to these communities as the "Greek System", "Greek Society, and "Greek organisations", I will not utilise these terms in this study.

candidate members (*aspirant-leden*)[18] are obliged to follow an initiation process that consists of various assignments and differs in duration per sorority[19]. Most assignments and activities during this process have the goal to familiarise the candidate members with existing values, norms, members and other sororities and fraternities in their social environment. Some activities or assignments during this process involve so-called 'hazing' (Inside Hazing 2014)[20]. 'Hazing is a process based on tradition that is used by groups to discipline and to maintain hierarchy (i.e. a pecking order). Regardless of consent, the rituals require individuals to engage in activities that are physically and psychologically stressful' (ibid., para. 1)[21]. Every academic year a sorority aims to install new candidate members, who after they successfully completed the initiation procedure, will be acknowledged as full members, so-called active members of the sorority. When active members graduate they becomes inactive (*reunist*) in the sorority, but these women will always be a member of the sorority. Due to this system, sororities exist of members from a variety of ages who started college or university in different academic years. Since the sorority is run by their members, a new board of directors is also installed every year and they are at the top of "the organisation". The severity in hierarchy, the traditions and the initiation process differ greatly per sorority (and fraternity). Therefore this exploration should be taken in as a broad and subjective account in order to set the scene for a deeper understanding of the narratives of Dutch sorority women. Before their experiences and definitions of sexual violence and sexual consent will be analysed in the subsequent chapters, I will elaborate on my methodological considerations that are underlining this research.

[18] Candidate members are in the Netherlands referred to as "Aspirant-leden" or shortened "A-leden (plural), A-lid (singular)". Most sororities have their own name for their candidate members, however, I will not include these particular names in order to guarantee anonymity. In the North-American context candidate members are referred to as "pledges".

[19] In order to give an idea about this procedure; my initiation process (Aspiranten-tijd) took 4,5 months. This is not a time where you carry out assignments every day, however, I had to join the members of the sorority to parties, activities etc. on average 3 to 4 evenings a week. Every Tuesday there was a joined meeting with the sorority. This was often the day that our assignments were carried out, handed in or evaluated. Sometimes we, candidate members, were given assignments during weekends or activities that covered multiple days.

[20] Last accessed on 11 September 2014 via http://www.insidehazing.com/definitions.php

[21] An example of a "hazing" activity that I had to carry out is that I was "forced" to the consumption of strong liquor like whiskey. Here I use quotation marks since I do not want to express that you have no choice at all, however, due to the fact that you want to be socially accepted within a sorority you engage in activities you would not have done otherwise.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Chapter 2

Building Knowledge From Experience

Methodological Considerations for Understanding Sorority Women's Definitions and Experiences of Sexual Violences and Sexual Consent

Building knowledge from experience has been a significant aspect in the resurgence of Western feminist activism during the 1970s (De Vault and Gross 2012, 177). Insights on the importance of "experiences" in knowledge production came from women's 'consciousness raising' groups; groups in which women collectively talked about 'one's oppression through a process that starts from one's own life experiences' (Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa 2009, 43) which simultaneously revealed their structural character. Due to the structural nature of these experiences, they were recognised and re-interpreted as not only personal, but also as relevant in the broader political debate; namely, patriarchal and racist institutions, structures and interactions were acknowledged to shape and inform women's oppressive experiences (De Vault and Gross 2012, 177). Women came to recognise themselves as sources of knowledge and introduced women's issues (e.g. sexism and the battering of women) in public discussions (ibid., 177). Following these developments, feminist theorists Sandra Harding (1991) and Dorothy Smith (1987), amongst others, urged scholars to 'start thought' from women's lived experiences and this developed in a new theoretical approach that became known as feminist standpoint theory (cited in De Vault and Gross 2012, 177). The principles of feminist standpoint theory are to take into account the lived experiences of less dominant groups in society (e.g. women) as grounds for knowledge claims. As Harding asserts, that which has been counted for as "objective" knowledge and therefore grounded as empirical "truth" in the modern sciences, has primarily been based in the lives of white, middle to upper class men (1991, 121). Feminist standpoint theorists proclaim however, that all research is

always already directed by social and political values and therefore scientific "objectivity" cannot be thought of as a value-free and all-encompassing concept that equals *the* "truth" (ibid., 119 my emphasis). So what historically has been defined by dominant groups (e.g. white, middle to upper class men) to be the "truth", is only one perspective, one understanding of societies and of ourselves in the world. In order to gain less "distorted" understandings of the world then, feminist standpoint theory urges scholars to locate authority and "truth" in previously suppressed knowledges as well – in the lived experiences of women for example (Harding cited in De Vault and Gross 2012, 177). Women's stories can assist better in shedding light on oppressive sexist and racist (and I would add other interlocking discriminatory factors of identity)[22] constructions in society since they are lived realities in women's everyday lives. Interviewing was therefore embraced as a method of making women's experiences 'hearable', and can contribute in coming to view the world from another perspective (ibid., 177). In the case of my research then, building knowledge from women's experiences is valuable in exploring the nature of sorority women's definitions and their actual negotiations of sexual violences and sexual consent. The intention being to facilitate a deeper understanding of these women's issues regarding consensual (or as we will see, seemingly consensual) sexual activities as to add to the discourse on preventing sexual violences.

The interpretive framework in the previous chapter did not only guide me through making sense of my respondents' narratives, it also assisted me in how to think about collecting their stories. In this chapter, I elaborate on the difficulties of building knowledge from experience and I will show that this should not be regarded as a simple task. Then, I reflect on the ways I gathered my data, my position as a researcher, and how I approached the analysis of this research that will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

Problematizing Thinking from Experiences

I certainly acknowledge that women's lived experiences facilitate a fuller understanding of women's issues, such as sexual violence, and can be a valuable contribution to prevention discourses. However, according to Joan W. Scott revealing the 'hidden' world of those being oppressed can be problematic as well (1991, 778). Scott argues that building knowledge from experience is more complex than simply making women's experiences 'visible' for everyone to "see" (ibid., 778). After all, only showing that women's lived

[22] See footnote 10

realities contrast the dominant and "distorted" representations (e.g. those of white males), and therefore suggesting it to be better knowledge, fails to examine the ideological systems that construct and reconstruct these representations in the first place (ibid., 777-778). Scott asserts:

> 'When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subject who see and act in the world' (1991, 777).

Here Scott suggests that when knowledge claims are grounded in experiences one should be cautious in presenting these accounts as 'uncontestable evidence' and as 'originary point of explanation' (ibid., 777). The risk that arises with understanding experiences as "true" and "transparent" accounts of what one has lived through, is that one fails to recognise the 'constructed nature of experience' and therefore how ideological systems are reproduced (ibid., 777-778). These ideological systems rest on the notion that categories of representation are naturally opposed (i.e. dualisms), are considered to be a fact of history, and therefore naturally different (ibid. 778-779). For example, the dualisms man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual are considered to be naturally established opposites, but what these categories mean and how they operate in society is left unscrutinised. Therefore, only making experiences visible 'precludes critical examination' of these supposedly "natural" categories and hence they will be reproduced (ibid., 778). So when women's experiences are claimed to be "authentic", "woman" as the natural opposite to "man" is taken as self-evident and therefore naturalised as a historical fact (which is accompanied by social rules, conventions and stereotypes) rather than contested.

Instead of understanding women's experiences as "authentic" views on reality then, they should be recognised as being fabricated through discourses that are formed across time and place. Scott explains thinking about the discursive nature of experience as follows: 'Subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning' (1991, 793). "Experience" thus, shapes and informs our subjectivities and cannot be separated from established meanings, simply because one cannot understand and see beyond 'what one already knows and is able to articulate' (De Vault and Gross 2012, 178). In this sense, who we are, - *what* we experience and *how* we experience - , is always developed in relation with the messages, meanings, conventions and stereotypes that are available to us in specific

contexts, places and times. It might seem contradictory then that women's experiences form the body of my study; why not abandon the notion of "experience" altogether given the fact that its usage comes with the danger of naturalizing essentialist identities? However, the notion of "experience" is so imbricated in our narrative accounts that, given the 'ubiquity of the term', it seems 'futile' to suggest for its dismissal (Scott 1991, 797). In other words, since experiences are found important- and heavily prevalent in our narratives, its existence can hardly be denied. It appears therefore more useful to scrutinise how its processes function and affect the ways we make sense of who we are in our lived realities.

Collecting Women's Experiences

To answer the research question: 'How do Dutch sorority women understand and experience sexual violences and negotiations of sexual consent with regards to their hetero-relational encounters?', I conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Given this study's emphasis on understanding the individual experiences of women in sororities, interviewing was deemed the most appropriate method of research. In-depth interviewing is a particular valuable method to employ when the researcher is interested in getting an in-depth understanding of the lives of the respondents in a certain situation or their understandings about certain circumstances (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 189). In this way, I was able to gather insights into 'meanings' and 'processes' that individual women attribute to their situation and therefore making generalisations about sorority women is not the purpose of this study (ibid., 192). I conducted semi-structured interviews for which I developed an interview guide with a few open-ended questions and a set of key themes including; public and private spaces, friendships, individual boundaries, intoxication, communication and responsibility of consent and reputation. The open-ended questions that I posed to all of the participants in this study included questions such as; 'What is it like to be female in a sorority and fraternity environment?', 'What do you consider to violence to entail and why?', and 'How do you understand sexual consent?'. In addition, I asked all of the women if they wanted to share personal stories in which forms of consent, boundaries, and violence were addressed. Using this prepared line of inquiry gave me the ability to make sure that the themes that I considered important for this study were addressed, but leaving room for the women's voices so that their stories could be the central focus in this research.

Over a period of two and a half weeks, I interviewed seven women, aged between 20 and 28 who are members of sororities[23]. Interviews lasted between 39 minutes and 78

[23] See appendix I for a list with more information about the women that participated in this study.

minutes. Four of the women were still studying, one pursued a university degree and three a higher education degree (*hogeschool*). Two of the women had acquired their degree and one of them followed higher education, but has not obtained a degree. All the women are currently fulfilling or have fulfilled an executive role within the board of their sorority. The interviews were mostly conducted face-to-face in an one-to-one setting, except for one interview which was carried out in the presence of the daughter of a respondent. Prior to the interview, I obtained informed consent via a form that introduced me, the research and explained their rights as participants in this project. Since I consider the topics of this study to be highly sensitive and personal, I made sure to reiterate the confidentiality and that women were justified to refuse answering questions that made them uncomfortable throughout the interview (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 193). In the light of this discretion then, in this study I use pseudonyms for their names and I left out all other details that could reveal their identities.

The second method that I applied was participant observation. With participant observation the researcher acquires knowledge about 'social relations through social relationships' (Buch and Staller 2014, 129). The aim of the researcher is to develop relationships with people in the field in order to analyse the social context of this particular field (ibid.). Throughout this process, the researcher's roles can vary from a detached observer to an integrated participant (Hesse-Biber and Leavy cited in Buch and Staller 2014, 130). For the purpose of this study, my six years' experience as an active sorority woman and therefore a complete participant served to make sense of my research findings. I was able to revise and analyse my experiences as a member of this community and incorporated them in this study by sharing my stories with the interviewees for example. While I used my own experiences to complement this research, it should be noted that I did not make notes as a researcher during the time I was active in this community because this was six years ago. Therefore, my experiences rely solely on what I am able to memorise and it will be likely that personal stories about hetero-relational encounters during that period lacked some detail. I am aware that employing personal experiences in such a way might raise some ethical questions because people that became part of this research, through my experiences, were (and are) not aware of their inclusion in this project. However, my conclusion is that this practice is not unethical partly because the names from the men in my stories have been omitted, and partly because I understand experiences to be uniquely fabricated in complex relations with the discourses that are available to us. So while my experiences should be viewed as one perspective, it is still *an* understanding of this situation and therefore also relevant.

Power and Authority in the Research Process

Given that conversations about violence, personal boundaries and consent in relation to hetero-relational encounters might be considered as a sensitive and private matter, I intended to find participants via mutual acquaintances and individuals who hold key positions in sororities, student associations and universities. Since I have been, and still am, a member of a sorority myself, I addressed individuals in my own network to gain access to women from sororities other than my own. By interviewing women from other sororities, I anticipated that my 'insider-status', I have been an active member of my sorority while pursuing a higher education degree, would assist to break down notions of power and authority (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 210). In this way, my respondents might have felt more comfortable to open up on such a private topic. At the same time, I presumed that not having prior personal relationships with these women maintained some distance between me as a researcher and them as the researched (ibid., 199). This would balance out notions of power and authority in such a way that my participants were aware that they were researched at all times and therefore it would minimise their vulnerability (ibid., 199). Even though I considered myself to be an 'insider', gaining access to sororities other than my own appeared more challenging than expected beforehand (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 210). I noticed that women were hesitant to participate. For example, three women that I addressed via mutual acquaintances agreed to participate, however, when I attempted to make an appointment for the interview they changed their minds or did not reply on my emails or telephone calls. I became aware that my current position in this community, not being actively involved as a sorority woman, made me more of an 'outsider' than anticipated beforehand, something that might have influenced some women's willingness to participate (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 210). Hence, I decided that I if desired to continue this study in such a "closed" community and on this private and personal topic, I needed to adjust my approach in finding participants. I chose to address my own network in such a way that I also decided to interview women from the time when I was actively involved in this community. Today, I still share a deep personal bond with these women and I noticed that they were less reluctant in sharing personal experiences. This might have revealed experiences that would have remained hidden otherwise. At the same time, however, I also found it challenging to retain some power and authority so that these women did not forget that they were part of a study (Judith Stacey cited in Hesse-Biber 2014a, 199). Judith Stacey argues that 'being too personal with a participant can provide a false illusion that there is no power and authority' between the researcher and the researched (ibid., 199). This makes the participants more vulnerable because they reveal very intimate details of their

lives, but are more likely to forget that you are a researcher and therefore still have the power to analyse and interpret their stories in a specific way (Judith Stacey cited in Hesse-Biber 2014a, 199). While I attempt to make sorority women's narratives not only inform this research but drive it, I constantly had to reflect on the dynamic relations between myself and the respondents. By using a voice recorder, an official form to ask for their consent and reminding them throughout the interview that names and other details were not going to be disclosed, I attempted to balance the dynamic relations that I shared with the women I personally bonded with.

Throughout the entire process of interviewing, I applied the 'participatory model' that feminist researcher Ann Oakley advocated for since 1981(cited in Hesse-Biber 2014a, 199). By applying this model the researcher shares his or her own biography in order to decrease the hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched (ibid., 199). In particular with those women that knew relatively little about me, I reiterated prior to the interview that I was a former sorority woman myself. By sharing narratives about my past sorority life, I noticed that the hierarchal relationship decreased and that I became more "one of them" than before the interview. My personal position as a former sorority woman made it also more straightforward to understand and make sense of "insider'' rules and regulations regarding this community (e.g. rules regarding the initiation procedure and regulations inside sorority bars). While this position might have had a positive influence on creating a bond of trust and therefore increased reciprocity and rapport of the interview process, I became aware that it was also challenging to avoid asking leading questions because of my own experiences in this community. During the interpretation process I noticed that, in particular with those women I had a prior personal relationship with, my experiences might have been present throughout the interview too excessively and could have made me too suggestive towards the interviewees. As a result, this might have affected the research findings in such a way that these women provided me the answers that they thought I wanted to hear. At the same time however, I also noticed that the personal relationship with some of the sorority women in this study made it less difficult for them to counter my ideas when they did not agree. The women who participated in this study and personally bonded with me, are not anxious to voice their opinions in case they disagree with me. This came through in the interviews as well.

The topic of this research is not only very private and personal, the context on which I decided to focus is also a relatively "closed" social environment. These dimensions, as I touched upon above, have influenced the diversity of my research sample. I am aware that this study's sample lacks diversity when it comes to, for instance, ethnicity, sexuality, class and

geographical location. However, in order to have access to this community and to do research on this highly sensitive subject I decided that there needed to be a relationship of mutual trust and comfortableness. Furthermore, from my own experiences in this community I can say that the sorority and fraternity system I am familiar with is a relatively white, high to middle class, and (seemingly) hetero-sexual environment. During the years I was actively involved in this community, I recall that there were only a few (visibly) "mixed"[24] ethnic identities amongst this group and there were only a few persons who were open about their sexual orientation being other than hetero-sexual. This is not to say that I aim to generalise my findings across this community, rather I want to reveal that dominant groups, i.e. of white and- high to middle class people, and heterosexuality seem to be more prevalent in this environment. Being based on the fact that subjectivities and experiences are shaped through spaces sorority women immerse themselves in[25], these dominant groups should be understood as shaping my respondents narratives.

Interpreting Women's Experiences

The purpose of this research is to get insights into the ways Dutch sorority women *understand* and *experience* sexual violences and the negotiation of sexual consent. To assure that their experiences and understandings form the body of this study, I followed what Kathy Charmaz (1995) suggests in the context of Grounded Theory (cited in Hesse-Biber 2014b, 395-397). Namely, that staying close to the data by categorising (i.e. 'coding') and writing elaborative and interpretive notes (i.e. 'memoing') allows a researcher to base her ideas on the meanings of the participants (Charmaz cited in Hesse-Biber 2014b, 395-397). Through this 'grounded theory data analysis' the researcher attempts to make sense of the data by closely reviewing the ways the participants speak of certain issues and topics (ibid., 395). This will make sure that the research is not only informed, but driven by the respondents' narratives.

The recordings that I made of each interview allowed me to transcribe, categorise and interpret the words of the sorority women and find meanings in them. I did not only transcribe what they were saying, but evenly important I paid attention to how the women said things and how my interaction as a researcher might have influenced the situation. The transcripts of

[24] I chose to refer to these individuals' ethnicities as "mixed" since I am not only unaware of their ethnic origins, but I also do not prefer to explicitly define their identities without knowing how they would self-identify.

[25] See also my elaboration on the construction of (sexual) subjectivities in the previous chapter (*Theorising Sorority Women's Sexual Subjectivities*).

the interviews were uploaded in a computerized software program[26] in order to structure, (re)categorise and elaborate on the data more easily. I extracted common patterns of experiences and understandings from the data and compared, strengthened or contrasted my findings with the existing literature.

Throughout the research I was continuously aware of the importance to be self-reflective as a feminist researcher. By practising 'reflexivity', I am thoughtful of the ways my social position and assumptions shape the research process and the knowledge that is produced (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 200). Knowledge production is therefore considered to be a multidimensional process whereby those who are researched (i.e. sorority women), the researcher (i.e. myself) and our different social positions, assumptions and biographies construct meanings about the subject of research (i.e. sexual violence) (ibid., 199-200). Since I consider this study to be a 'coconstruction of meaning' as well, I had to remain critical about the dominance of my own thoughts and interpretations so that the "voices" of the women remained "heard" (ibid., 199). I continuously reminded myself that being a sorority woman myself does not imply that my participants have had similar experiences. I attempted to keep an open mind and be attentive to differences that occurred in our experiences and understandings of the topic. Furthermore, I am aware that I also have the authority of translating their "voices", something which I encountered as a challenge in itself. I decided therefore, whenever I quote extensive parts of the narratives to strengthen my analysis, to add both my English translation and the Dutch part of the transcript. In this way, I anticipated to minimise biases that might occur because of incorrect or incomplete translation.

[26] ATLAS.ti is a qualitative data analysis software program and was used to apply "codes" and make interpretive notes digitally. In this way the transcripts of the interviews became more structured and were more easily accessible for analysis.

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Chapter 3

"Simply" Saying "No" and "Real" Sexual Violence

Understanding Sorority Women's Definitions of Sexual Violences and Sexual Consent

It is impossible to speak about sexual violence without addressing questions about sexual consent. Understandings about sexual violence are inextricably connected to meanings that are attributed to sexual consent (Beres, 2007). According to Melanie Beres, 'the *absence* of sexual consent is most often the defining characteristic of sexual violence (sex without consent)' and therefore plays a pivotal role in the prevention of violence against women (2007, 93 my emphasis). Despite the importance of the concept, sexual consent is an underdeveloped subject and current understandings 'rely largely on assumed and implied definitions' (ibid., 94)[27]. Contemporary models often place attention on 'whether or not, or to what degree, a woman resisted, or demonstrated her lack of consent' (ibid., 103). So current conceptualisations are not concerned with consent, rather they rely on the communication of non-consent (e.g. you "just say no" if you are unwilling and "no means no").

This reliance on the "just say no" approach has also been widely adopted in sexual violence prevention strategies and is partially an offshoot of feminist interventions (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Powell 2008; Phillips 2000, 14). It relies on "neo-liberal" notions that

[27] Traditional models of sexual consent have also been extensively critiqued in the sphere of feminist legal theory. These scholars critique the application of existing models of consent in current law and policies and claim for a reconceptualization of the concept (Burmakova 2013). Instead sexual consent should be understood as a 'clearly and positively expressed (affirmed and communicated) agreement to a sexual act based on sincere (enthusiastic) desire' (ibid., 2). See for example, Lois Pineau 1989. While I acknowledge that adjustments in law and policy might be helpful in sexual violence prevention strategies, I do not focus on legal reform. Rather, my focus here is on how social and cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality continue to pressure sorority women to consent to unwanted sexual encounters and in what ways mainstream contemporary prevention strategies and sorority life play their role in this. For a detailed analysis of current sexual consent literature see Beres 2007.

focus on the 'at risk individual' (Carmody and Carrington 2000, 347) and urges women that they are entitled to (and must therefore achieve) full equality (Phillips 2000, 47). These neo-liberal "ideals" promote 'total autonomy, self-direction and entitlement to sex and relationships without personal responsibility' (ibid., 47). In order to be a "good" woman then, these messages suggest that a woman should be "together"[28], that is: 'free, sexually sophisticated, and entitled to accept nothing less than full equality and satisfaction in her sexual encounters and romantic relationships' (ibid., 47). Relying on these ideas, "just saying no" in sexual prevention strategies suggests that women are autonomous agents, responsible for- and totally capable of managing their own sexual encounters. In this way, women are personally in charge of the communication of their sexual consent (and non-consent) in their hetero-relational encounters and hence responsible for avoiding their own victimisation (Carmody and Carrington 2000, 347-348).

In this chapter I explore the ways my participants' definitions of sexual consent and sexual violences have been permeated by the mainstream prevention strategy that encourages women to "just say no". In line with existing studies (see for instance Burkett and Hamilton, 2012), I will argue that sorority women's definitions of sexual consent and sexual violences are largely influenced by the seemingly "neo-liberal" ideas that are evident in this model. I will nuance the prevalence of these mainstream ideas however, by discussing the ways my respondents showed a certain awareness about multiple forms of violence in how they, in particular, conceptualised sexual violence. In an effort to understand sorority women's definitions and experiences better, I discuss their definitions (i.e. ideas or conceptions), actual experiences (i.e. lived realities), and their actual experiences in the context of sorority life separately. These dimensions should not, however, be understood as sitting neatly in isolation in these women's stories. As will become evident in the subsequent chapters, these facets could (and most likely will) merge and are entangled with each other.

Sexual Consent as 'Just Saying No' and 'A Matter of Respect'

Throughout the narratives of the sorority women in this study, it became evident that most of their definitions of sexual consent were noticeably influenced by the "just say no" prevention strategy. This dualistic approach (i.e. saying "yes" or "no") promotes individual

[28] Phillips refers to this seemingly neo-liberal discourse as the 'together woman discourse' (2000, 47) and Burkett and Hamilton describe it as, what Rosalind Gill has termed, a 'postfeminist sensibility' that is underpinned by a 'compulsory sexual agency' (2012, 817). In this study however, I refer to the characteristics inherent in this discourse or I will describe it as "neo-liberal" discourse. By using quotation marks I would like to indicate that I question whether (and for whom) this discourse is really liberating. Since I believe that no subject can be entirely free of structural power, I also use quotation marks for terms such as, "free" and "choice".

responsibility and women's capability 'to assertively communicate their sexual choices' and was present in the definitions of my participants (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 819). For example, Sofie elaborated on how she defined the negotiation of sexual consent after she told me that her sorority girls often regretted their sexual encounters with boys afterwards. She said:

> 'Kijk als jij zoiets hebt van, "ik wil het niet", dan moet je dat gewoon kunnen aangeven en dan is het toch beter dat je even die moed op neemt om te zeggen van, "nee ik wil het niet" dan dat je later in je bed ligt en denkt van, "oh waar ben ik aan begonnen" of dat je wakker wordt met […] grote spijt en schuldgevoelens.' […] Maar ja ik merk […]dat ik zoiets heb van, ja waar slaat dit op, "ik durf geen nee te zeggen" of "ik heb het al zover laten komen dat ik niet meer terug kon". Ja dat kun je toch zeker wel! (Sofie)

> 'Look if you think like, "I don't want this", than you just have to say it and it's better that you find the courage to say "No I don't want it" than when you're in bed and thinking, "oh where have I gotten myself into" or that you wake up with major regret and feelings of guilt.' […] But yeah I notice […] that I think a lot like, yeah this is ridiculous, "I didn't dare to say no" or "I had let it come this far so I didn't felt I could get out" [of the situation]. Yeah, I think you surely can! (Sofie)

Sofie defines the negotiation of sexual consent as a straightforward verbal process that involves a woman's assertive communication of her unwillingness. Although she sees this process as relatively straightforward, Sofie also understands this negotiation to take a certain amount of strength (i.e. you have to 'find the courage' to say no). Nonetheless, she seems to criticize her fellow sorority girls when they "failed" to get out of the situation by referring to their explanations as being 'ridiculous'. It appears then, that Sofie has incorporated the "neo-liberal" notion that a "strong" (i.e. "together") woman is perfectly capable to be self-directive in controlling hetero-relational encounters and therefore able to prevent getting into coercive situations. This is also evident in the way she positions herself as an autonomous agent by saying that she thinks 'you surely can!' and in how she seemed to be intolerant towards her fellow sorority women. If you are unable to assertively communicate your non-consent, than that is considered a failure on these women's part. Similarly, other sorority women also emphasised self-determination and explicit verbal communication as crucial dimension in the communication of non-consent. Kris stressed that she is 'really straightforward' ('*heel recht door zee'*) in order to 'prevent miscommunication' and Keet said that 'you have to trust yourself' in communicating your boundaries because 'you are an adult and you are strong enough'. All these elements seem to suggest that these women strongly belief that they are both responsible and perfectly capable of explicitly verbalising their unwillingness in sexual encounters. Here, the negotiation of sexual consent seems to entail the explicit

communication of a lack of consent.

Sorority women's conceptualisations about sexual consent are also inextricably linked to their ideas about respect. Both Sofie and Kris described that if a woman communicates her refusal than a man should respect that decision:

> '[…] dat vind ik gewoon een kwestie van respect, ik bedoel als jij aangeeft wat je grenzen zijn dan moet [hij] zich daar maar aan gehouden worden en [als] ie dat niet leuk vind, ja dan moet ie zich maar een meisje zoeken die daar wat makkelijker in is' (Sofie)

> '[…] I think that's just a matter of respect, I mean if you point out [to him] what your boundaries are than [he] just has to stick to those and [if] he doesn't like it, yeah, than he just has to find himself a girl who is easier in these things' (Sofie)

Similarly, Kris said; '[…] you also need to show respect to one another, if one says "no" than it's done'. This emphasis on deserving respect refers to the idea that women are entitled to an equal treatment that is inherent in the "just say no" discourse. They deserve to be respected, are equal to men and therefore entitled to nothing less than full equality (Phillips 2000, 47). While the insistence on respect can be viewed as encouraging, it fails to acknowledge the power structures that often complicate the situation and does not move beyond promoting the approach to "just say no" (ibid., 51). Again, notions about total autonomy and self-direction are internalised in their understanding of consent (or should I say non-consent) since they view women (and themselves) as totally "free", capable and with sufficient determination, able to make and effectively communicate decisions about their hetero-relational lives. These understandings point to the internalisation of the "neo-liberal" concepts that are embedded in the approach that urges women to simply "say no".

Burkett and Hamilton problematize neo-liberalist notions of the sexual consent model that tell women to "just say no" to unwanted sexual encounters (2012). They argue that this approach is highly problematic due to the ways 'in which women view themselves as empowered, yet continue to reproduce the terms of sexuality set by heteronormative discourses' (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 817). As mentioned before, inherent "neo-liberal" notions inform women that they are "free" to make their own sexual choices, however, these seemingly egalitarian conceptions go hand in hand, Rosalind Gill suggests, with anti-feminist elements of 'surveillance, discipline and the vilification of those who make the "wrong" "choices" (cited in Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 817). This becomes evident in the ways this strategy relies on the assumption that women find it hard to refuse unwanted sexual encounters and therefore should be taught to "just say no" (Kitzinger and Frith 1999, 293). When women experience coercive encounters, this model attributes it to women's

'undercommunication' whereby men simply misinterpreted or misperceived a women's willingness (ibid., 295). Women are seen as autonomous agents and are not only held fully responsible for managing their own risk, they are also assumed to be "weak" individuals when they "fail" to do so (Phillips 2000; Carmody and Carrington 2000). Adherence to this discourse, creates the illusion that women can be protected from violent practices when they are "strong" and "self-choosing" enough to do so (Phillips: 2000; Burkett and Hamilton, 2012).

At the same time, by putting the onus on women to regulate sexual contact, men's responsibility is denied. In this way, oppressive norms about, what Wendy Hollway has termed the 'male sexual drive discourse', are reproduced (cited in Phillips 2000, 58). This discourse teaches us that men possess a natural drive for sex 'that is inherently compelling and aggressive in its quest for fulfilment' (Phillips 2000, 58). It assures both women and men that sexualised male aggression is not a crime nor an act of violation, it is simply 'boys being boys' (ibid., 58). Women are the objects of this compelling arousal in men and are therefore the ones who are responsible for clearly verbalising their non-consent because it is not in a men's nature to being able to control himself (ibid., 57-61). Thus, women's marginalised status, responsibility for her own abuse, and objectification are almost positioned as something which is an inevitable part of her identity (ibid.). In particular when you, as a woman, are not self-determined enough to handle the risk of your own victimisation.

Consenting to Sex: 'You Just Know'

Although the sorority women in this study are strongly adhering to the "just say no" approach that promotes assertive communication as the way to prevent coercive or unwanted sexual encounters, their ideas about consenting to sexual interactions were considerably different. In line with existing studies, sorority women have been found to describe *consenting* to sex instead as something that they do not explicitly verbally articulate (see also, for instance, Powell 2008; Burkett and Hamilton 2012). Rather, consenting to sex is understood as a 'process of bodily communication' (Powell 2008, 177) and sexual intentions between two people are judged according to one's physical behaviour and 'what is felt in the moment' (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 821). Burkett and Hamilton's study shows that, in contrast to what the prevention model teaches us about the importance of assertive verbal communication, this way of communication was not considered to be "normal" amongst women in agreeing to sexual encounters (ibid.). Women's ideas about sexual consent as something that should be assertively verbally communicated at the one hand, seemed to be

incompatible with how they described sexual consent as an unspoken process in their everyday sexual encounters at the other hand (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 821). Thus, while women appear to conceptualise non-consent in line with contemporary prevention models that urges them to "just say no", their ideas about consent do not fit into the tenets of this model.

When I asked the women in my study how they understood consenting to sexual encounters, most of the interviewees emphasised that it had to do with physical acts or other bodily signs and therefore 'you just know'. Kris described how she thought this process of consent included several physical acts and bodily signs:

> 'Ik denk dat dat [toestemming geven] dan toch wel meer fysiek is, een keer glimlachen of even oogcontact zoeken of toch even weer naar iemand toe lopen of bij hem staan of uuh ja even een keer aanraken van een hand op de schouder of uuh even arm even iets ja even knijpen of zo.' (Kris)

> 'I think that it's [consenting] more physical, a bit of smiling or seeking a little eye contact or just walking towards him or standing with him or uuh yeah, touch him shortly, like putting a hand on his shoulder or uuh shortly arm, shortly something, yeah shortly pinching or something.' (Kris)

In addition to understanding consent as this 'process of bodily communication' (Powell 2008, 177), Sofie and Eef also emphasised that when you are both consenting to 'something more', 'you will just know' it, Eef said: 'if I also want, I think yeah, […] that he will know that I also want more'. Here the women seem to understand the concept of consent sharply different than how they defined non-consent. It seems evident that the women in this study also define consent as a process of bodily signs and physical touch whereby they make clear that when both people want to enter a sexual encounter, 'you will just know'.

At the same time, not all of my interviewees explicitly defined consent as a 'process of bodily communication' (ibid., 177). When I asked Keet how she would define what constitutes consent and how she would go about that, she replied:

> 'Dat is wel een ding, dat als ik er nu over nadenk, denk ik dat het niet zozeer, niet zozeer uuh toestemming geven was maar meer inderdaad aangeven op het moment dat je, dat je iets niet wilt of dat iets niet oké is, en ik denk dat daar, uuh die grenzen inderdaad vervagen.' (Keet)

> 'That is something, that when I think about it now, I guess that it is not like, not like uuh consenting to something, but indeed more indicating at that moment when you, when you do not want something or that something is not okay, and I think that this is where, uuh those boundaries indeed fade.' (Keet)

Keet's reply shows a certain awareness about the one dimensional way in which sexual consent is being viewed. She describes that the process is not about communicating your consent, rather it is about saying that 'you do not want something', about giving an indication

of your lack of consent. Here, Keet does not only seem to incorporate the "just say no" discourse in her definition of sexual consent (i.e. the whole process is about indicating the boundaries of your consent), she also appears to be aware of this. She acknowledges the challenges that arise from this focus on the boundaries of sexual consent by saying that she believes that 'this is where those boundaries indeed fade'. Keet's awareness about the narrow definition of consent points to the fact that women are not just passively "accepting" discourses that promote their marginalised position. Her description shows that there is a complex form of individual agency at play here. However, Keet is one of the women who was not actively involved in sorority life at the time of our interview because she already graduated from college. Her pointing to the negotiation of consent as restricted to the indication of your unwillingness, might also be attributed to the fact that she finds herself in a totally different context nowadays by having a partner and a child.

The Struggle of Defining "Real" Sexual Violence

The incorporation of the "neo-liberal" tenets of the "just say no" model by the sorority women in this study does not only influence their conceptions of sexual consent, it likewise impacts their definitions of sexual violences because these two are, as I have argued, inherently linked. This approach is said to create narrow distinctions between what counts as sexual violation and therefore what constitutes a "legitimate" (female) victim and an "abusive" (male) perpetrator (Phillips 2000).

Kelly and Jill Radford were among the first scholars who started to problematize the constitution of "real" rape in discussions about sexual violence (1990). Constructed and retold by male dominated 'institutions such as the law, medicine, psychiatry […] and by the media', "real" rape was commonly understood (and I suggest partially it still is) as 'an attack at night, in a public space, by a stranger who uses force (preferably a weapon)' (ibid., 40-41). These ideas suggest that there is a clear distinction between what counts as "legitimate" rape and what does not (Kelly and Radford 1990, 40-41). In this way, a sharp line is drawn between what is considered to be sexual violence: non-consensual sex (i.e. rape), a forceful attack (often at night and in public spaces) by a stranger (ibid.). This seemingly clear conception 'constrains and constructs the framework through which women have to make sense of events' (Kelly and Radford 1990, 41). This has led to the fact that women have struggled to articulate, and therefore minimised, abusive behaviours since most of their experiences cannot be made sense of through the dichotomous conceptual framework of sexual violence that is currently in place.

Prevention strategies that encourage women to "just say no" continue to uphold these dichotomous ideas about women's sexual violation. According to Phillips "just saying no" is a 'unidimensional notion' that does not do justice to women's complex experiences and understandings of their hetero-relational encounters (2000, 136). Relying on this discourse implies that a woman's sexual violation is able to be judged according to whether she has had consensual (i.e. "normal") or non-consensual (i.e. "rape") sex (ibid.). This suggests that consent and coercion, agency and objectification, and pleasure and danger are mutually exclusive as opposing positions and situations (ibid., 147). Abuse is seen as something which is uncomplicated: a woman is either coerced or not, she is either seen as a powerless victim in a dangerous situation *or* as an agent who "freely" chose to engage in a pleasurable encounter (ibid.). Fuelled by these dominant assumptions that "real" rape includes a forceful physical act, women are left without a way to articulate other forms of non-consensual sex as coercive (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 820). Burkett and Hamilton's study showed that women adopt a clear viewpoint regarding women who do 'submit to unwanted sex in a context lacking physical force' (ibid.). While they acknowledged that there are other forms by which a woman can be pressured into sexual encounters, these young women did not classify these forms as a violation of women's sexual autonomy at all (ibid.). Their attitudes about what constitutes sexual violence are described in a very assertive and clear manner and are drawn from the problematic approach that urges women to " just say no" (ibid). Thus, Burkett and Hamilton revealed that adhering to the "just say no" approach, fails to disrupt these oppressive ideas about women's sexual violation and continues to install seemingly "natural" and narrow beliefs in how women define and make sense of sexual violences.

Although young women are argued to internalise the straightforward views about what counts as sexual violence by adhering to the "just say no" discourse, the narratives of my respondents revealed that defining sexual violence for them was a much more complex process. Most of my interviewees did not translate the 'malestream' ideas inherent to this model into clear conceptualisation of sexual violence without any form of hesitation (Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). Rather, some of these women's definitions showed how they struggled to come up with precise descriptions. On the one hand, they acknowledged that there is more to sexual violence than solely the belief that it comprises a forceful physical act. On the other hand however, their descriptions reveal how some of these women were unable to explicitly name these other abusive forms sexual violence. One of the interviewees shows this "struggle" in defining other abusive behaviours as sexual violence very well. When Anne

told me a story about how boys in bars 'find it necessary to slap your bum or something', I asked her if she considered that to be violence. She responded[29]:

> 'Yeah I think that's, yeah, no I think it's more like violence when something is really forced, you know. But this is like, when somebody touches you somewhere you don't want it's more just like, yeah just unwanted and it's just something annoying I think…' (Anne)
>
> *'Yeah and, and what do you mean with forced? Do you mean…' (me)*
>
> 'Yeah if somebody does things with you that you absolutely do not want you know, against your will, I think that's more than with, than it's more like, yeah than it's more like violence.' (Anne)
>
> *'[…] I don't want anybody to slap my bum you know, […] why is that not considered violence than, you know? (me)*
>
> 'Yeah I think why I don't consider that to be violence is also because it is like, you are a bit used to it you know. I doesn't surprise you that it happens. […] but uuh no I think it's more like, yeah to be forced, if somebody really does something against your will, just uuh yeah I don't know. Sometimes you hear that somebody kisses someone else all of a sudden or uuh or putt his hands somewhere where someone doesn't want them, and then it's more forced and then with violence just that somebody/than it is indeed, than it is physical. But yeah, of course it can also uuh, mentally you can of course also uuh, things that are said via whatsapp, or via/ that can also go too far' (Anne).

At first Anne seems to normalize male aggression by describing that these forms of harassment (i.e. slapping someone's bum) are 'things she is used to' and that she is not taken by surprise when something like that happens (Hlavka 2014, 344-346). She assigns this behaviour as 'unwanted' and 'something annoying' rather than naming it sexual violence. Instead sexual violence is constructed as acts where you are 'absolutely' opposed to, but you are forced to do them anyway. When I asked Anne to elaborate on what she meant, she appeared to struggle in providing me with a clear-cut definition. In the last paragraph of the fragment above, she moves from describing sexual violence as something that she is not sure of, to a physically forced encounter, to nuancing her definition by acknowledging that 'things that are said via whatsapp can obviously also go too far'. Anne's ideas about "normal" male aggression appear to be reproduced through, amongst others, adapting to the "just say no" approach because this model assures that it is a woman's responsibility to "say no" since a man cannot stop himself once he is aroused. Her struggle to define sexual violences and her acknowledgment of non-physical acts that 'can be out of line' reveal that there is a certain awareness about the multiple ways sexual violences are able to manifest. Despite of this awareness however, Anne seems to be hesitant to explicitly name other abusive behaviours as

[29] See for the Dutch translation of this part of the interview with Anne appendix II.

sexual violence. This reveals that some of the sorority women do not appear to adopt the "just say no" discourse without any struggle, they are still left without a way to articulate and explicitly name other forms of violence as sexual violences. This might explain why she is holding on to the more established definitions, for instance, that sexual violence entails a coercive forceful physical act.

In contrast to this, other sorority women did clearly define sexual violences to encompass more than merely physical violence alone. Three of the participants explicitly named other forms of abusive behaviour such as "verbal harassment" and "sexual intimidation" to be sexual violence. All of them also said that sexual violence for them is understood as an act that transgresses your personal boundaries. Keet, for instance, described sexual violences as:

> 'Geweld is alles uuh, he dat kan fysiek maar dat kan ook verbaal zijn of wat dan ook, uuh dat is gewoon alles wat op dat moment over jou grens heen gaat.' (Keet)
>
> 'Violence is everything uuh, yeah it can be physical but also verbal or whatever, uuh it is everything that crosses your boundary on that moment.' (Keet)

For Keet, sexual violences are defined as a broad concept where individual boundaries play a central role. She is not only aware of the multiple ways in which violence can manifest itself, she also explicitly names "verbal" abuse as violence. By indicating that she understands something 'that crosses your boundary' as violence, she seems to believe that women are autonomous agents who are always able to indicate when their boundaries are transgressed. Something is therefore only defined as violence when it transgresses their individual boundaries. As was shown in the definitions women attribute to non-consent earlier, these women seem to overemphasise "free" choice since they have been learning that everybody is capable of choosing what they do or do not want, something which is prevalent in the "just say no" model of this mainstream prevention strategy. This implies that women are capable to exert total control over their own situation and surroundings, disregarding social and cultural structures that deny women's equality (Phillips 2000; Burkett and Hamilton 2012). Thus for some of these women, violence is defined within a broader spectrum than which the "just say no" model is argued to construct, however their emphasis remains on individual choices in sexual decision making.

Thinking about sexual violence in this way is comparable to what Kelly has coined as the "sexual continuum" (1988). In order to prevent the invalidation of women's experiences of sexual violences and account for the complexities of this issue, she suggests that a shift should occur in the way sexual violence is conceptualised (ibid.). To think of the concept of

sexual violences as a "continuum" rather than a concept with a clear-cut definition allows for an understanding of the multifaceted nature of violence (Morgan and Thapar Björkert 2006, 444). The concept of the "sexual continuum" can be seen as a way 'of including rather than excluding the "normal" actions of men which women experience as abusive as well as those which are currently criminalised' (Kelly and Radford 1990, 51). So rather than focussing on explicit forms of sexual violence such as physically forced intercourse by a stranger, the continuum recognises that there are different categories of violence underpinned by patriarchy (Morgan and Thapar Björkert 2006, 444). These categories of violence should not be understood as occurring independently from one another or assessed according to severity and extremeness of the violence that occurred (ibid.). Instead, the "sexual continuum" allows one to analyse sexual violences without using hierarchal predetermined categories of men's abusive behaviour. What counts as sexual violences then, transcends what men have historically defined it to be (i.e. a forceful physical assault by a stranger in a public space). In this way, women's experiences of men's abusive behaviours are not "silenced" or invalidated, but instead they can be perceived as unjust.

I understand the "continuum" to rest on the notion that women's articulations are confined to dominant "malestream" discourses but that they, through their own experiences, are able to recognise abusive situations to a certain extent (and sometimes in complicated ways). For Kelly, thinking about sexual violence as a continuum could assist women to name their experiences and therefore challenge contemporary (masculine) frameworks (1988). However, as I touched upon in this chapter, sorority women continue to incorporate seemingly "neo-liberal" discourses and position themselves as autonomous agents whom are in charge of their own sexual choices. Women are simultaneously fuelled by various existing gendered discourses about female sexuality in hetero-relational encounters and therefore they might continue to struggle in naming their own abusive situations (Burkett and Hamilton 2012). Hence, the applicability of the " sexual continuum" for sorority women in this study will, despite their awareness about the concept, likely be complicated in practice. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In line with existing studies (see Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Phillips 2000), in this chapter I have shown how sorority women's ideas about sexual consent are permeated by the "neo-liberal" tenets inherent in the contemporary prevention model that urges women to "just say no". The participants in this study, view sexual consent foremost as entailing an assertive

communication of their unwillingness. Their strong reliance on this prevention approach also became evident when I asked sorority women about their ideas of consenting to sexual encounters. While they defined consenting to sexual actions instead, as a 'process of bodily communication', they continued to emphasise their individual decision-making with regards to their hetero-relational encounters (Powell 2008, 177). Although sexual consent and sexual violences are interconnected, the interviewees did not simply translate their narrow views about sexual consent into the way they defined sexual violences. My respondents' concepts about sexual violences revealed that they understood it within a broader spectrum than the "just say no" model is argued to construct. While this is closely related to the idea of thinking about sexual violence as a "continuum", their overemphasis on individual choice could pose problems for the applicability of this concept in practice. I will elaborate on this in the following chapter when sorority women's lived experiences are discussed.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Chapter 4

Getting Out, Around and Naming Complex Experiences

Understanding Sorority Women's Lived Experiences of Sexual Violences and the Negotiation of Sexual Consent

It has been shown that sorority women continue to internalise some aspects of the prevention model that urges them to simply say "no". In this lies the danger that women's sexual agency is taken for granted and that they are perceived to be inherently "free" to "choose" in their hetero-relational encounters (Burkett and Hamilton 2012). This thought fails to address and therefore obscures a variety of oppressive structures that 'deny women's equality and punish them for expressing their own sexualities' (Phillips 2000, 51). While prevention strategies are acknowledged in becoming more important, they should not uphold problematic gendered and heteronormative discourses about sexual violence and the negotiation of consent (Powell 2008). Even though sorority women in this study accepted the neo-liberal tenets inherent in the "just say no" approach to a great extent, I will show that this model does not do justice to women's actual experiences (see also for instance Powell 2008; Burkett and Hamilton 2012). Oppressive discourses about female sexuality continue to "pressure", sometimes unconsciously, women into unwanted sexual encounters (Powell 2008; Burkett and Hamilton 2012). As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, while women positions themselves as agentic[30] sexual subjects by saying that they will "just say no" in unwanted sexual encounters, their actual experiences will tell us that the negotiation of sexual consent, and hence experiencing sexual violences, is a much more complex process.

[30] By agentic I refer to agency and the way these women view themselves as being able to freely make their own (sexual) choices with regards to their hetero-relational encounters.

In this chapter, I explore how sorority women negotiate sexual consent and speak about sexual violence in their actual experiences. I examine the extent to which my participants are capable of translating their strong adherence to the "just say no" discourse into their hetero-relational encounters by applying some of Bourdieu's ideas about 'symbolic violence'(2000; 2001). I will show that this contemporary prevention model does not do justice to sorority women's actual experiences and we will see that their complex experiences effect the way these women are capable to apply the idea of the "sexual continuum" in practice.

Symbolic Violence and the Gendered "Habitus"

With symbolic violence Bourdieu referred to structures of domination and power that do not 'arise from overt physical force or violence on the body' (cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 443). Instead symbolic violence has an 'invisible' form and is exercised upon someone with their complicity (ibid.). However, Bourdieu asserts: 'the state of compliance is not a voluntary servitude, and complicity is not granted by a conscious deliberate act; it is the effect of power, which is durably inscribed in the bodies of the dominated, in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions (to respect, admire, love etc.)' (2000, 171). Masculine domination is, according to the sociologist, what typifies the workings of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001). Gendered normative ideas about, for example, the ways a woman should behave sexually, have come to be accepted as - '"normal", "natural", "that which is expected"', and "the way things are" (Powell 2008, 173). These norms are taken on in our bodily practices, 'in the way we think, feel and respond to others', this is the so-called 'habitus' (Bourdieu cited in Powell 2008, 172). It is important to note that symbolic violence is precisely so powerful because women see these norms as 'legitimate' as well, thus they do not recognise them as acts of domination (Bourdieu cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 447). Let me exemplify this further by providing a personal example. During my previous relationship, I did not refuse unwanted sex with my ex-boyfriend because I *believed* (through these normative discourses) that having sex on a regular basis is a prerequisites for a "good" and "healthy" relationship. Otherwise I felt that because of his seemingly "natural" drive for sex he might have searched for it somewhere else. So I felt "responsible" for providing him with sex unless I wanted to "lose" him to another woman. This complicity in my actions happened at a 'pre-conscious level' (Powell 2008, 173) and while I felt that I "consented" to the sexual encounter, gendered normative ideas through which I make sense of my hetero-relationships caused that there was little to no room for alternative possibilities.

One of my respondents described this lack of 'a clear alternative course of action' that characterises symbolic violence (Powell 2008, 175), Femke said:

> 'dat is misschien ook wel weer het opdringerige dat je denkt, oh ja shit nu ben ik hier [bij een jongen thuis] en nu verwacht ie iets dus nu moet het wel want ja wat anders?' (Femke)

> 'maybe that is, again, that it is the intrusiveness that makes you think, oh yeah shit, I am here now [at a guy's place] and now he is expecting something so now I have to because yeah what else?' (Femke)[31]

The question that she poses at the end of this excerpt captures the powerfulness of symbolic violence and the way Femke is to a certain extent 'contributing to her own domination' (Bourdieu 2001, 38). By stating that she feels she has to because 'what else' shows that there is no room for alternatives in her mind: she accepts the limits that are imposed upon her. She also describes that his intrusive behaviour made her think that there was no alternative course of action. This seems to indicate that Femke experienced his behaviour in a way that made her anxious and resulted in the feeling that she could do nothing else than 'something'. Anxiety is, according to Bourdieu, one of the bodily emotions that shows that women 'often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly' are accepting limits imposed upon them and therefore 'contribute to their own domination' (ibid., 38). While a person can only feel these bodily emotions when they are 'predisposed to feel it', countless discourses teach women that there is a high risk of abuse when they do not follow the 'safety rules' (Bourdieu cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 446-448). In this instance, going home with someone without following through with sexual activity creates the fear of a possible abuse.

However, by arguing that women are complicit in their dominations is not to say that they are merely passive agents who are submitting to their structural domination and that there is no possibility for change. According to Powell, Bourdieu's work attempts to merge the binaries of structure versus agency and objectivity versus subjectivity (2008, 171). Rather than relying on the idea that women are passively imbricated within structures of power, Bourdieu suggest that there is 'a margin of freedom' (ibid., 172). This possibility for change arises when the "habitus" (i.e. our bodily responses, how we think, feel and respond) engages in social fields or interactions with little or no prior experiences (ibid., 172). In this way, new bodily practices might be encouraged into our habitus which 'may then be carried over into other fields of interaction' (ibid., 172). In my case for instance, the fact that I study Gender

[31] The idea to exemplify Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence with a quote from one of my respondents was brought to me after engaging with Powell's study (2008, 175). In her analysis, she explained this concept in a similar way.

Studies at the university encouraged new practices in my "habitus" that do not conform with traditional ideas about femininity. In turn these ways of thinking and feeling might be carried over into other social interactions, for example, in how I interact within my hetero-relational encounters or in my interactions with my fellow sorority women. At the same time, feminists such as Lois McNay[32] have called attention to how transformations in power relations are likely to be uneven and therefore 're-negotiations' of contemporary gendered norms 'may represent old norms in disguise' (cited in Powel 2008, 172-173). Thus, as I have shown in the previous chapter and in line with other studies (e.g. Burkett and Hamilton 2012), these new norms such as the apparent sexual freedom of women might not be so empowering after all.

So why including symbolic violence in this study rather than focussing solely on the more tangible forms of violence such as sexual coercion that is enacted 'deliberately (e.g. physical coercion) by young men upon young women' (Powell 2008, 170)? Symbolic violence i.e. structures of domination that do not arise in physical force, Bourdieu suggests, will become the way to keep exercising power over the dominated (cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 444). By referring to the logic of practice, he suggests that when direct forms of domination such as physical punishment become more disapproved of by a group that is dominated, symbolic violence will be more likely to be seen as a way to keep exercising domination (Bourdieu cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 444)[33]. For example, Morgan and Björkert suggest that while feminist resistance against women's abuse has been empowering for women's position in society, it simultaneously could have subverted masculine domination into symbolic violence (ibid., 444). I would not say, however, that it is a matter of subverting in the sense of overcoming/transforming completely, the physical forms of violence because I understand structures of domination such as patriarchal structures to be always in place. Nevertheless, it might be that through feminist resistance against the physical abuse, the patriarchal oppressive structures that are already in place are increasingly (and deliberately) taken advantage of. Hence, I suggest this asks for an interconnected approach in fighting women's sexual abuse because merely focussing on physical and deliberate sexual violation will not address the more insidious forms of violence. In fact, following Bourdieu,

[32] See for example, McNay's text on 'Gender, Habitus and the Field: Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity' (1999).

[33] This can be connected to Foucault's ideas about disciplinary power (cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 447). Foucault argues, 'if power is exercised to violently, there is the risk of provoking revolts' (cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 447). An answer to prevent the uprising of the dominated was, according to Foucault, to move from the more brutal physical forms punishment to disciplinary punishment because it was more 'regular, more effective, more constant, and more detailed in its effects' (1991, 80). This move to a more subtle way of exercising power is how I understand Bourdieu's argument about symbolic violence becoming *the* way the exert power over another group.

focussing on these physical and deliberate forms of violence will most likely only enhance them. Considering the interconnection of sexual consent with sexual violence, the various forms of sexual violences might also be hard to discuss separately. To further explore the complexity of sorority women's negotiations of sexual consent and their experiences of sexual violences, Bourdieu's concepts provide a useful tool in recognising the way oppressive discourses operate and sustain sexual violences.

Complex Negotiations of Sexual Consent

In contrast to their strong adherence to "just saying no", sorority women's actual experiences revealed that sexual consent does not seem to be about the communication of non-consent. Rather it is about a process whereby consent is assumed through particular actions such as going home with a man. All the sorority women in this study experienced that they 'implicitly consent to sex through particular actions, such as going home with a man' (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 822). Once these action were carried out, "just saying no" became extremely difficult and did not always seemed to work when it was indeed verbalised. Various ingrained assumptions about female (and male) sexuality however, constrain most of my participants in freely (and effectively) negotiating their sexual choices which made them reflect on their experiences afterwards as if they were individually responsible for the unwanted situation they had found themselves in. Reva, for instance, told me about an encounter with a fraternity member that she had brought to her place one night. She described that the guy was 'quite aggressive' in the way he 'kissed' and 'touched' her, something that she did not like, but at the same time doubting whether she should continue:

> 'hij was wel agressief uuhm in het nemen van actie in de zin van zoenen en aan mij zitten en dat soort dingen […] dat is inderdaad een moment waarop je je realiseert van, oké dit wil ik niet, maar dat is ook een moment waarop je met je gedachten zit van ja maar ik heb hem wel mee naar huis genomen en uuh wil ik dit, of wil ik dit niet mmm ik weet het nog niet, ik vind het niet fijn maar ik durf ook niet helemaal te zeggen van nou ik wil het niet want ik weet niet of dat zo is. […] waarom zou je hem anders mee naar huis nemen?' (Reva)

> 'he was kind of aggressive uuhm in taking charge in kissing and touching me and that kind of stuff […] that is indeed a moment when you realise, okay this is not what I want, but at the same time it is a moment when you think, yeah but I took him home and uuh do I want this, or do I not, mmm I don't know yet, I don't like it but I am kind of afraid to say that I do not want it because I don't know if that's the case […] why would you otherwise take him to your home?' (Reva)

Here Reva's quote shows that her actual experience of the negotiation of sexual consent contradicts the view that women are perfectly capable to "say no" in unwanted sexual encounters. Even though she realises that this is not a situation that she wants to be in, at the

same time she describes the difficulty of communicating her unwillingness. Reva's question about why she would otherwise take a man home, points to the idea that taking someone home is consenting to the fact that 'things' happen. It seems that her decision to take someone home leaves her torn about the fact whether she can reconsider her initial interest because it is assumed that it "naturally" leads to sexual intercourse. Reva continued by telling me that eventually she did not have sexual intercourse. She also said that it 'takes time' to say that you are not willing to continue with sex and then 'you probably already did things that you probably do not want to do at all' but 'it (*'de daad'* - i.e. sexual intercourse) goes too far'.

Eventually Reva ends up "choosing" to engage in several sexual actions, but going ahead with actual intercourse is something she decided not to do. 'Doing everything but' has been denoted to be one of the strategies that young women adopt to 'experience and act on their sexual desires' (Phillips 2000, 120). Constructing their hetero-relational identities from a variety of contradictory discourses that oppress women, young women rely on 'individualized strategies […] to express their own needs' (ibid., 140). With these individualized strategies, they try to negotiate amongst countless (often contradictory) messages about female sexuality (ibid.). For example, according to mainstream cultural messages and ideas, women should be both pleasing and sexually submissive towards a man and they should appear sexually sophisticated (ibid.). Here, I would argue, 'doing everything but' (ibid.: 120) might be used as a way *to get out of* an unwanted sexual encounter whilst retaining some form of agency.

Thus, a particular action, such as taking someone home, seems to be equated with consenting to at least some form of sexual activity. When a sexual encounter turns into an unwanted situation, women still *feel* that they have no choice but to follow through with at least some form of sex because of their choice to take a man home. This points to the operation of several discourses about women's hetero-relational lives. Being based on the principles inherent in the "just say no" approach, Reva appears to adopt the "free" sexual persona that allows for an 'uninhibited female sexuality', as it was her individual choice to bring a guy to her place and initiate this sexual encounter (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 822). At the same time, her struggle to verbalise her non-consent might be facilitated by the 'male sexual drive discourse' (Phillips 2000, 57) and 'the pleasing woman discourse' (ibid., 39). As I discussed in the previous chapter, discourses on the male sexual drive teach us that men have this "natural" urge to have sex which, once aroused, cannot be controlled. The "pleasing woman" promotes that women should adopt a passive servitude attitude towards a male's sexual desires, but not 'be a desiring sexual subject herself' (ibid., 39). The internalisation of these discourses might explain Reva's struggle to "simply say no" since they work to make

her believe that when a woman has been sexually suggestive she should 'finish the job' (Phillips 2000, 58; Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 823). In short, in Reva's case, she has been sexually "suggestive" to this fraternity man by taking him to her house and therefore she might feel that she is unable to renegotiate her initial consent.

Femke's experiences, likewise, highlighted that deciding to go home with a man makes the process of negotiating non-consent more complex than simply being able to verbalise a clear assertive "no". Here, it becomes clear that even though a woman *explicitly* verbalises her unwillingness, going home with someone seems to complicate the situation to the extent that initial rejection is able to turn into consenting to unwanted sex. Femke described how she went home with a guy after she was done working in a bar and that, despite the fact that she initially rejected him, it resulted in a situation where she consented to sex:

> 'toen [ze bij hem thuis was] zei hij opeens van, ja nee maar ik heb gedronken en ik kan je niet meer naar huis brengen, en toen dacht ik, ja shit […]toen had ik eerst ook nee gezegd, toen is het uiteindelijk toch gebeurd, maar het was gelukkig echt twee minuten en het was klaar [lacht] […] ja ik had zelf ook gedronken en ik dacht, weet je wat, laat het ook maar en oké kom maar [lacht]. (Femke)

> 'then [when she was at his place] he suddenly said, "yeah no but I have been drinking and I can't take you home anymore", and then I thought, yeah damn […] then I also said no first, but eventually it [sexual intercourse] happened, but fortunately it [sexual intercourse] took only two minutes and [then] it was done [laughs] […] yeah I had been drinking myself and I thought, well just leave it and all right go ahead [laughs]. (Femke)

This quote demonstrates how Femke describes that she entered into a confronting situation when the man said that he was unable to bring her home because he had been drinking. But even as she describes that she initially said "no" to having sex with him, she agreed to let it happen anyway. Interestingly, when she tells me the story, she seems to downplay the whole event by laughing about it. It appears that she suggests that she *chose* to 'just let it happen' because of the alcohol that made her decide 'just leave it and alright go on then'. As we have seen before, this feeling of being responsible might be informed by "neo-liberal" ideas that are embedded in the prevention strategy that urges women to "say no" and that these sorority women have strongly been adhering to. Due to this individualistic discourse, women perceive men's coercive or manipulating behaviours 'as an issue related to their own individual choice-making as opposed to gendered forms of coercion' (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 824). I would say that this is, again, simultaneously facilitated by the discourses that teach us about 'the male sexual drive' (Phillips 2000, 57) and 'the pleasing woman' (ibid., 39). These messages reinforce women's accountability because men supposedly cannot help themselves when they

have been aroused and therefore women should bear the consequences when they have been sexually suggestive towards them.

The pressure to implicitly consent to sexual encounters after my interviewees had gone home with a man was even evident in situations that involved 'distinctly unpleasant sex' (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 824). Anne, for instance, described the sex with a guy as 'really really painful', but she consented to it anyway:

> 'een jongen die was gewoon bezig met mij en dat deed gewoon heel veel pijn, maar uiteindelijk heb ik heel stom het nog gewoon de volgende ochtend nog een keer toegelaten[…] ik zei [tegen een vriendinnetje] "het lijkt wel of hij me gewoon met z'n hand verkracht heeft van onderen". Het was gewoon niet normaal, het deed zo ontiegelijk veel pijn, maar ook gewoon op dat moment dan ja…dan toch op één of andere manier dan de volgende dag niet zeggen, "hé jo stop man niet het moment", erna niet zeggen, "ik ga slapen" maar toch ja oké dan laat je het maar gebeuren' (Anne)

> 'a boy was just doing his thing with me and that just hurt really really bad, but eventually I just, really dumb, let it happen again the next morning […] I said [to a friend], "it seems like he raped me with his hand down there". It just wasn't normal, it hurt immensely, but also just at that moment than yeah… than still, at one way or another, not telling [him] the next day, "right stop it dude, not the right time", afterwards not telling him, "I am going to sleep", but still yeah okay than you just let it happen' (Anne)

Here it is evident that Anne consents to sex despite the physical pain she described to endure. She cannot really explain her reluctance to verbalise her unwillingness to this hurtful encounter. However, she does refer to herself as being 'very stupid' to allow him to have sex with her again the following morning. Again, this points to the internalisation of the individualistic "just say no" approach by accounting herself to be responsible for allowing this hurtful encounter, twice.

Thus, it is evident that the communication of sexual consent is far more complex than most of these women's definitions (e.g. it is easy to say no) are making us believe. Sorority women's actual experiences reveal that there are implicit "rules", such as going home with a man, about the process of consent that are fuelled by oppressive assumptions about female (and male) sexuality in hetero-relational encounters. These gendered assumptions, often unconsciously, influence and even constrain sorority women in the ongoing negotiation of sexual consent. They women do not experience their own hetero-relational encounters within the binaries (e.g. a women is either an agent or a powerless object) about women's sexual violation. Hence, this might influence how they speak about sexual violence in their own experiences, something which I will explore further in the next section.

'I would not say Violence, but Intimidation'

Earlier studies have denoted that the ability to name an incident as unjust is important for the "victim" to perceive the situation as unjust (for instance, Fine 1982 cited in Phillips 2000, 158)[34]. This suggest that the process of naming something as a wrong doing, and therefore acknowledging one's own victimisation, is an empowering way to make sense of the situation one has endured (ibid., 158; Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). Naming, and the complexity of naming, women's experiences has been (and still is) an important theme in feminist theory. Naming and defining, and therefore speaking, depend on the available language because one can only name something what one is able to articulate. This focus on language that feminist writers such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, 'have developed is based on the premise that there is an inextricable link between language (or knowledge, expressed through language[35]) and power' (Frost and Elichaoff 2014, 45). Language, for example social definitions about "legitimate" sexual violence, that is used to describe the reality of our lived experiences have been developed by dominant groups (e.g. white men) and hence accepted as normal. For example, terms like "sexual harassment" and "domestic violence", which are well known concepts in today's realities, did not exist (i.e. they were not defined as such by institutions) if feminist activism had not intervened (Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). As Kelly denotes: 'names provide social definitions, make visible what is invisible, define as unacceptable what was accepted; make sayable what was unspeakable' (cited in Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). So naming can be understood as an important action in making formerly invalidated and suppressed experiences visible and therefore challenge social definitions that have been considered normal.

Challenging the dominant 'malestream' linguistic frameworks through which women make sense of their experiences is precisely what Kelly's "sexual continuum" sets out to do (Kelly and Radford 1990, 40). As I discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter[36], thinking about sexual violence as a continuum allows us to recognise that there are different and

[34] I am aware that the feminist movement initiated to use the term "survivor" instead of "victim" for women who endured instances of sexual violence. Because I aim to show how, amongst others, these dominant conceptions about women's victim-status influence sorority women's ideas and experiences of sexual violences and sexual consent, I decided to use the dominant term (i.e. "victim") instead. However, by using quotation marks I attempt to show that I do not agree with how this notion positions women (e.g. as passive women that are awaiting their own victimisation).

[35] Here it should be noted that the term knowledge also refers to experiences, and that language thus should be regarded as constitutive of experiences. This has been elaborated on by, amongst others, feminist historian Scott in her influential article 'The Evidence of Experience' (1991). For more on the discursive construction of experiences see the methodological chapter, pages 16-18 of this study.

[36] See for a more elaborate engagement with the concept of the "sexual continuum" and the questions that I raised about its applicability page 33-34 of this thesis.

multiple forms of violence that are sustained by patriarchy (Kelly cited in Morgan and Björkert 2006, 442-444). Thinking in terms of the continuum allows women to define their abusive experiences so that they are not "silenced" or invalidated, but can be perceived as unjust. The question remains however, whether sorority women are able to recognise their personal violation from their experiences despite the fact that contemporary dominant frameworks do not allow them to effectively name the variety of abusive sexual experiences.

Although some of the sorority women's definitions seemed to demonstrate a certain awareness about the "sexual continuum"[37], in their actual experiences they appear to uphold the narrow definitions of sexual violence that have been informed by various gendered discourses. As I showed in the first part of this chapter, sorority women's experiences do seldom fit into the gendered dichotomous structures that are promoted by, for instance, the "just say no" approach (see also Phillips 2000, 149-189). Their experiences represent struggles which are fuelled by the internalisation of a variety of complicated and contradictory discourses (ibid., 153). In this way, the women end up reluctant and/or unable to name their own victimisation because their experiences cannot be grasped in simple terms as, for example, "rape" (ibid., 153-154). The majority of the women I have interviewed told me at least one story about violence, pain, or humiliation, but *only* one of them actually referred to this instance in a way that suggested her own victimisation. In this case, the woman explicitly used the label "rape" to denote how she experienced this situation. Other women were largely unwilling and/or possibly unable to apply terms as "rape", "(sexual) violence", "abuse". Femke for instance, described her experience with the man she eventually agreed on having sexual intercourse with despite having said no[38], as intimidation rather than violence. When I asked her whether she would define this experience as sexual violence or how she would describe it, she said:

> 'Geweld niet maar wel, intimiderend, ik denk dat ik me te geïntimideerd voelde erna dat ik het daardoor heb gedaan. Hij was/ik was toentertijd achttien en hij was zessendertig, zevendertig, oud in ieder geval. […] Ja ik denk dat ik me alleen al door zijn hele voorkomen geïntimideerd voelde en als hij dan ook nog semi dwingend, dat gaat proberen dat ik dan uiteindelijk sneller heb toegegeven' (Femke)

> 'Not violence, but more intimidating, now I think [that] I felt intimidated [and] that that is why I did it [sexual intercourse]. He was/I was eighteen than and he was thirty-six, thirty-seven, old at least. […] Yeah I think that because of his whole appearance I felt intimidated and then he was also kind of coercive trying to get it [sexual intercourse] which made me eventually give in more easily' (Femke)

[37] See chapter 3, section *The Struggle of Defining "Real" Sexual Violence.*
[38] See page 42 for Femke's description of this complex situation.

This quote demonstrates how Femke is reluctant to define her coercive experience as sexual violence and she rather conceptualises it as feeling intimidated. Even though she told me that she felt 'disgusted' and 'almost like a whore' after the situation happened, it seemed that she attributed the bad encounter more to her own responsibility than to the man's by implying that the intimidation got to her. Later on in the interview, she reinforced this herself by saying that she considered this situation to be her own fault and that she was the one who eventually gave him 'the free pass'. Similarly, Reva emphasised that she made her own "conscious" choice when she reflected on a situation in which she was drunk and ended up having sexual intercourse with a guy[39], she told me:

> 'ja *ik* was dronken, *ik* heb hem mij naar huis laten brengen, *ik* heb hem binnen gelaten, *ik* heb niet tegen hem gezegd dat ik iets niet wilde dus dan is het iets wat uuh aan mijzelf te verwijten is en niet aan hem' (Reva)
>
> 'yeah I was drunk, I let him take me home, I let him come inside, I did not tell him that I did not want something so than it is something that uuh I only have myself to blame and not him' (Reva)

While Reva shared this situation because, I assume, she considered it to be significant enough in the context of this research, like Femke she did not explicitly name the situation as sexual violence (or any other form of abuse). Rather she referred to it as shown in the quote above and did not really name the situation in any particular way.

In both scenarios, the fact that these sorority women do not name their individual victimisation, but instead attribute it to personal responsibility might be, amongst others, attributed to the power of dominant definitions about what constitutes "real" sexual violence. That is, "real" sexual violence is still promoted through various discourses as something which is uncomplicated and judged according to whether a woman has had non-consensual sex or not[40] (Phillips 2000, 136). Contemporary models such as the "just say no" framework, suggest that 'abuse is a violent event' and in situations of "real" abuse the "perpetrator" is always the agent and the "victim" is always a 'powerless object' (ibid., 159). This suggests that consent/coercion, agent/object (i.e. "victim"), and pleasure/danger are not only opposites, but also that a woman cannot simultaneously be, for instance, both an agent *and* a "victim" (ibid., 147). As we have seen in the first part of this chapter, sorority women do not experience their abusive and coercive situations within such a binary framework of sexual violence. These women's experiences 'blurred the victim/agent' and consent/coercion dichotomies (ibid., 157). In their stories, Reva, Femke and Anne all describe how they made

[39] For a thorough description of this experience see the introduction of this thesis, page 2.
[40] See the pages 27-28 and 31 for more on the ways the "just say no" prevention model is sustaining these ideas.

several conscious choices within the situation; accordingly, they do not see themselves as 'powerless objects' because there were moments in which they could have made other choices, such as not going home with a man (ibid., 159). In this way, they could feel that there was a form of female agency (i.e. making their own conscious choice) and therefore these women might be reluctant or feel unable to place their experiences within a narrow framework that would read them solely as either "victims" or agents.

The complexity of ascribing women's personal experiences to sexual violences, was even evident with those sorority women that have defined the concept as including more than physical violence alone[41]. Keet, for example, defined sexual violence as clearly encompassing multiple forms of violence, however, when she reflected on her personal experiences she did not apply the definition as such. Keet described an incident where a fraternity man entered her house after they cycled home together from a night of drinking in town. She said that she told him not to come in, but he did it anyway and eventually he spent the night with her. Keet did not elaborate on whether she engaged in forms of unwanted sexual action, but she did tell me the story knowing the context of this study and described the event to be 'uncomfortable' rather than 'insuperable' ('*onoverkomelijk'*). Likewise, she described that her 'first time' i.e. the first time she had sexual intercourse, was 'not voluntarily at all' so her sexual life did not start very 'spotless' (*'vlekkeloos'*) to begin with. Keet said:

> 'Mijn ouders die weten dat dit bijvoorbeeld ook niet hoor en heel veel andere mensen ook niet uuhm maar die uuh uuh dus toen ben ik met hem mee naar huis geweest en uuh nou ja dat dat gebeurde gewoon en die deur zat op slot en hij zegt ja we moeten wel oppassen dat mijn vriendin niet thuis komt en hij was toen uuh ik denk 25/26 of zo dus dat was gewoon heel heftig weet je wel' (Keet).

> 'My parents for example, don't know this and neither do many other people uuhm but he uuh uuh so then I went home with him and uuh well that [i.e. sexual intercourse] just happened and the door was locked and he said yeah we need to be careful that my girlfriend is not coming home and he was I guess twenty-five, twenty-six at that time or something like that, so that was just really heavy you know' (Keet).

While her descriptions show that she acknowledges that her first sexual encounter was coercive and abusive, she did not explicitly define the situation as "(sexual) violence(s)", "abuse" or "rape". This is in line with studies that have revealed that young women do not easily present themselves as 'being scarred' by such events (Chung 2005, 452-453; Phillips 2000, 149-189). Furthermore, Keet emphasises that she had not even told her parents about this experience and, considering this secrecy, it might be very likely that she did not press any

[41] See chapter 3section *The Struggle of Defining "Real" Sexual Violence.*

charges against this man. Similarly, Sofie who named her unwanted sexual experience as 'almost rape', presented herself as having been 'toughened up' by the whole situation. She said that it made her extremely aware and capable to defend her boundaries in the future. It seems therefore, that these sorority women are unwilling, rather than only unable, to position themselves as "victims" by naming their abusive experiences.

Besides the fact that these sorority women do not name their abusive experiences because they are *unable* to fit their complex experiences into the binary sexual violence frameworks, they might also not *want* to suggest their own victimisation by naming their experiences in this way. I suggest that this does not only point to the operation of "neo-liberal" characteristics, but also to 'the inadequacy of existing social support' (Phillips 2000, 162-163). First of all, these women might not desire to position themselves as "victims" by naming their experiences since they appear to comply significantly with this "neo-liberal" discourse which I showed in the previous chapter. In this discourse, based on notions of individualism, self-direction, and sexual agency, women are seen (and see themselves) as self-choosing agents. Hence, if she is victimised, a woman is either a "true victim" (i.e. one that fits the binary framework about sexual violation, as I discussed above) or she is considered a "weak" individual because she "failed" to sufficiently protect herself (Phillips 2000, 51-52; Carmody and Carrington 2000, 347-348; Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 819-821). Since these women's experiences mostly do not fit the narrow understanding of "true" victimisation, acknowledging their own victimisation would mean seeing themselves as "weak" , "failed", and 'naïve' individuals (Phillips 2000, 160). In this understanding, victimisation and agency are 'inherently separable' phenomena and a woman cannot be an agent and a "victim" at the same time (ibid., 160). Once she "accepted" the "victim" status, that is all there is to her personhood (ibid., 162). Given the importance to be an active sexual self-choosing agent then, it seems that women like Keet and Sofie refuse to assign themselves to the position of being a "victim" because it leaves them with little to no agency. Hence they present themselves as not that scarred by the events by saying that it 'toughened her up', that it was not something that was 'insuperable' ('*onoverkomelijk'*), and by keeping it secret.

Secondly, the secrecy that was revealed in Keet's quote above might also point to her being unwilling to name her abuse because of inadequate social support systems. Women might prefer to leave their experience unnamed rather than position themselves as "victims" and risk that they do not get any support (Phillips 2000, 163). In Keet's case, keeping her experience private might indicate that there is a certain fear that she will be blamed and lose the respect of her friends and family (ibid., 163). This fear of being stigmatised was also

described by some other participants. Anne emphasised for example: 'maybe these [i.e. coercive/unwanted situations] are things that you won't tell a friend […], because you feel ashamed', and Kris described that she could imagine that 'someone was afraid to be open about it' when a situation transgressed their boundaries. She continued by telling me that someone might 'fear […] that people do not totally understand so'.

In reflecting on these women's experiences, it can be said that despite a certain awareness about the "sexual continuum" in their definitions, sorority women do not translate these ideas in order to name their own victimisation in their actual experiences. They experience abusive and coercive situations far outside the gendered dichotomies that they continue to internalise, and that are simultaneously promoted by contemporary prevention models. In this way, they are reluctant and/or unable to name their actual experiences as unjust. So, while the "continuum" might be an empowering way to allow women to perceive their own sexual violation on a broader spectrum (something which they appear to be doing in their definitions), the sorority women in this study did not apply this concept to name their own victimisation. It remains questionable if the "continuum" is (in itself) able to challenge the implicit gendered pressure these women continue to feel in experiences of sexual consent and sexual violences in their hetero-relational encounters.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter it became evident that sorority women experience the process of sexual consent and therefore their own sexual violation in a significantly different way than their definitions in the previous chapter have suggested. Being fuelled by implicit gendered assumptions about female sexuality in hetero-relational encounters, sorority women communicate their sexual consent through particular actions. The internalisation of the gendered connotations of these actions constrain sorority women in effectively negotiating their own sexual choices and, thus, they position themselves as personally accountable for the situation. These women do not experience the process of sexual consent in the dichotomous ways that are promoted by the "just say no" model and therefore it will be unlikely that this model prevents the ongoing sexual abuse amongst these women. In this way, sorority women end up reluctant and/or unable to effectively name their own sexual violation. While naming is considered to be an important way to make formerly unknown (or untranslated) experiences visible and therefore challenge "natural" definitions, the applicability of the "sexual continuum" is showed to be difficult in practice by the women in this study. Hence, through the persistence of implicit gendered structures in their experiences it remains questionable in

what ways the “continuum” is able function as a form of empowerment for sorority women in their hetero-relational lives.

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Chapter 5

Phallocentric Sisterhood

Understanding Sorority Women's Complex Experiences of Sexual Violences and the Negotiation of Sexual Consent in a "Family-Like" and "Hyper-masculine" Sexual Culture

As stories have shown in the introduction of this thesis, sorority women find themselves in a social environment which carries unique dimensions. Explicit sexuality appears to be everywhere and sorority women "celebrate" their sexuality as autonomous agents. The question remained whether they really were "liberated" since these women's stories told me otherwise. Because it is impossible to detach sorority women (and all subject in general) from their social contexts because they construct their sexual subjectivities in hetero-relations from these environments. We make sense of who we are through 'one's personal engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance to one's daily life' (Sanday 1990, 36). Every social environment produces its own 'expected social and sexual identities' (ibid.). In this way, sorority women's sexual subjectivities, how they believe, think and act, in their hetero-relational lives are formed by the environments they immerse themselves in. Fraternal-sorority life has been problematized for perpetuating traditional male dominant/-female submissive attitudes (see for instance Sanday 1990). Simultaneously, the high level of alcohol consumption and peer norms related to attracting a man and engaging in sexual play are perceived to be increasing sorority women's risk of being victimised (see for example Norris, Nurius and Dimeff 1996). Although I acknowledge that these are valuable insights for an explanation of the correlation between women's increased risk of being sexually violated and their affiliation with a sorority, they do not

scrutinise the nature of this relationship[42]. If these women's identities and experiences are constructed from these social environments, we, as scholars, must also ask how these unique dimensions might complicate their experiences and their understandings of sexual violences and sexual consent even further.

In this chapter, I attempt to shed greater light on the influence of this social environment by examining how these women experience sexual violences and negotiations of sexual consent in the context of a "hyper-masculine"[43] sexual culture where "sisterhood" is highly valued. I will show how group-identity becomes part of sorority women's individual identity and I explore how various "family-like" relationships in the sorority and fraternity context influence the ways sexual consent is negotiated and hence how sexual violences are experienced amongst these women. I will complicate their experiences further by arguing that sorority women incorporate the inherent sexual ideology in this social environment in contradictory ways that might create an illusionary feeling of empowerment.

From Personhood to Sisterhood and "Family-Like" Bonds

The sorority and fraternity system has been investigated as a source of influence on college students' behaviours and attitudes (Scott 1965 as cited in Kalof and Cargill 1991, 418). College students' values are vulnerable to the influence of such a primary living group (ibid., 418). Sanday has focussed her research on fraternities in particular and suggests that, by belonging to a group, these men find reassurance in a college environment that is frequently perceived as a hostile environment (Sanday 1990). The initiation process is key in strengthening the emotional bonds amongst the group members (i.e. the fraternity members). This procedure is designed to victimise "pledges" (i.e. candidate members) so that 'group identity and attitudes become personalized' (ibid., 135). Through this process, individual personhood is reconstructed and defined in terms of 'brotherhood' (ibid., 137) instead. This 'group-defined identity' carries its values and traditions, which are considered as guides for their social behaviour (ibid., 135). Being chosen for a fraternity, and I would argue for a sorority as well, creates a sense of self-esteem and it confers an identity status to those who cannot stand on their own (ibid., 139). While, as I will show in the following paragraphs, my participants do not seem to have joined sororities because they 'cannot stand on their own'

[42] This is also why I did not choose to focus on a discussion on the high levels of alcohol consumption in this chapter. Although my interviewees did clearly describe that they thought the high level of alcohol consumption influenced their experiences, I would suggests that focussing on this influence would merely suggest that the cultural context these women live in is fine. Rather, as I will show, it is the fraternal and sorority environment's unique constraining hetero-relational assumptions that influence these women's experiences in particular ways.

[43] For a thorough definition of the notion "hyper-masculinity" see footnote 14.

(ibid., 139), it does seem to create a sense of self-esteem and confers a secure identity status. Joining this system creates the feeling of an alternative, or as Sanday typifies it, 'stand-in' family (ibid., 141).

These 'family-like relationships' (Minow and Einholf 2009, 838) that are formed within a sorority were clearly present in the narratives of my respondents. While the women interviewed did not explicitly state that they felt insecure at the beginning of their college life, their need for a sense of belonging did come through in some of their narratives. Reva described that she greatly desired to get to know new people because she did not know anybody at the time she started college in a city different than where she grew up. Kris emphasised a similar feeling when she described sorority life, and its group-identity, as something that can cause pressure, but at the same time it can create a sense of feeling 'really strong because you do not have to do it alone'. Others revealed these strong "family-like" bonds with their sorority by describing the importance to look out for each other. This became clear when Sofie, for instance, described how they prevented that 'one of their girls' went home with a guy. She described that her fellow sorority girl was too drunk one evening and did not really wanted to go home with him, but did not know what to do:

> '[…] en dat ze ons eigenlijk een beetje zo aankeek van ja moet ik nou meegaan [naar zijn huis]? Moet ik nou niet meegaan, en dat wij er eigenlijk voor moesten zorgen dat die jongen gewoon weg ging en dat wij/als wij er eigenlijk niet geweest waren dat zij gewoon mee naar huis was gegaan of hij mee naar haar en dat dan inderdaad dingen gebeurd waren, maar je merkt ook dat uuh wat ik dan heb gemerkt dat heel veel meiden niet dusdanig sterk in hun schoenen staan dat ze ook echt hun grenzen aangeven, dat ze ook echt "nee" durven te zeggen' (Sofie)

> '[…] and that she looked at us like, yeah should I go with him [to his house]? Should I not go with him, and that we really needed to make sure that that guy just left and that we/if we had not been there then she probably went to his place with him, or he went with her and then indeed things would have happened, but you also notice that uuh I notice that a lot of girls are not strong enough to really indicate their boundaries, that they really dare to say "no"' (Sofie)

Here Sofie describes how one of her fellow sorority girls almost seems to "ask" whether she should go home with a guy and that they, as fellow sorority mates, prevented that she did and that 'things happened'. It appears as if these women function as some sort of "safety net" towards one another because not everybody is 'strong enough to say no' or dares to do it. While this indicates women's sense of taking care for each other, one could say almost like a family, it likewise shows the complexity of the negotiation of consent. Again, the excerpt demonstrates that "saying no" is not an easy task for these women. This might be, as I have shown in the previous chapter, due to the socio-sexual norm that 'flirting naturally leads to

sex' (Gavey as cited in Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 823). In this case then, these "family-like" relationships seem to assist these women in effectively negotiating their unwillingness. If one of these girls is "unable" or does not "dare" to indicate their non-consent, "sisterhood" appears to function as some sort of additional safety measurement that makes it easier for these women to show their rejection.

The importance of "sisterhood" or this feeling of "togetherness" as a group was in particular prevalent for the women that were still actively involved in the community at the moment of the interview. This 'group-defined identity' also came to the fore in the ways these actively involved sorority women continuously referred to 'my girls', 'our girls' and 'we' when they spoke about sorority life (Sanday 1990, 135). Femke, for instance, described how she wanted to protect *her girls* against guys that only want to have sex and 'nothing more'. Similarly, all the interviewees enacted this "thinking in groups" when talking about their experiences with other sororities and/or fraternities as well. One of the women told me, for example, that their sorority was in a fight with another sorority, so all the women from that sorority 'were on bad terms' (*lagen in de clinch*) with the women from their sorority. Similarly, another interviewee spoke to me about the guys of fraternity *X* who were 'really arrogant'. I can also still recall how my sorority was identified as a group since we were called the "whores" or as we would like to call ourselves, "women with testicles" (*vrouwen met ballen*). Just as Sanday has suggested for fraternity men, it becomes evident that because of the bond sorority members have together, group identity appears to be valued above personal identity (1990, 113-134). Not only are these women's identities constructed *through* their sororities, it appears as if they employ them as an additional safety measure when it comes to negotiating sexual consent in their hetero-relational encounters.

Sororities do not simply produce these 'family-like relationships' (Minow and Einholf 2009, 838) however, they are also constructed throughout the entire sorority-fraternity system (Norris, Nurius and Dimeff 1996, 131-132). This historically stable social system has many aspects that 'increase feelings of comfort and conformity among its members: established charters and bylaws, longstanding traditions involving highly scripted events and family-like referents […], and social and economic similarity among members' (ibid., 125). A feeling of security is therefore likely to be established *between* sororities and fraternities as well (ibid. my emphasis). This was evident specifically with the interviewees whose sororities were part of a larger student organisation. This is likely to be attributed to the fact that, in this case, multiple sororities and fraternities are attached to a broader student organisation. This student organisation has its own bar where members from the various sororities and fraternities go out

to drink a couple of nights a week. In this way, the sorority-fraternity system remains interconnected. Keet described this feeling as becoming 'more friendly' ('*amicaler'*) because you are drinking with each other four to five times a week, for over four to eight years in a row. Likewise, Reva explained this bond between her and the men in the fraternity as a sphere in which everybody knows each other ('*sfeertje van ons kent ons'*) which makes it also 'easier' to take someone home. She said:

> 'Weet je een wildvreemde ga je niet zomaar mee naar huis nemen […]. Als je in een sociëteit staat waar je iedereen kent en je weet wie je wel en niet interessant vind en je gaat daar een keer een praatje mee maken, je kent diegene. Dus het is makkelijker in het aanspreken en het is ook makkelijker om tegen iemand te zeggen, "ga je met mij mee naar huis"' (Reva)

> 'You know, you are not just taking home a random stranger […]. If you are in the bar [i.e. fraternity-sorority bar] where you know everybody and you know who is and who is not interesting and you go and chat with someone, you know them. So it's easier to talk to someone and then it's also easier to say "are you going home with me" (Reva)

Both Keet and Reva seem to emphasise that their bond with fraternity men becomes tighter due the fact that you spend that much time together. Reva in particular asserted that 'you know them', which appears to denote this feeling of security that is established between these groups. Thus it seems that there is a bond of trust between fraternity men and sorority women because they spend enormous amounts of time together, which gives these women the feeling that they are acquainted with each other. I would not say, however, that this bond is identical to the relationship that the women described within their sorority. As Reva seems to assert, the bonds with these men appear to be based on the exchange of sexual favours. The ability to engage in these casual forms of sex represents the "liberal" idea that women are not only entitled to sex without personal responsibility, but they can also be self-directive in taking the initiative (Burkett and Hamitlon 2012, 816-817; Chung 2005, 449-451; Phillips 2000, 47). This sexual exchange, though, becomes easier through the engagement with men you are familiar with because as a woman 'you are not just taking home a random stranger'.

I would suggest that this framework points to the internalisation of gendered discourses that construct very sharp distinctions between what counts as "normal" hetero-relations and what as "abnormal" ones. Besides the discourses that teach us how a woman should act in hetero-relations, cultural discourses about what constitutes "normal" hetero-sexual behaviour also imbued our sexual subjectivities[44] (Phillips 2000, 52). Essentially, there are two types of men, the "good guys" and the "bad guys", and these two categories are

[44] For more on the discourse about "normal"/"abnormal" sexual behaviour, see page 30-31 of this study.

clearly distinguishable and do not overlap (ibid., 52). This dichotomy creates the illusion that victimisation mostly occurs by the act of a stranger since the men who are your acquaintances cannot be considered as the "dangerous" type (ibid., 54-55). "Dangerous" men are distinct from the "normal" guys with whom we, as women, share our everyday lives (Phillips 2000, 55). So besides the incorporation of these seemingly "liberal" ideas, in the behaviours Reva performed and described, she incorporated also norms that suggest that nothing "bad" will happen when she goes home with an acquaintance. This could be plausibly the case because she (and most likely other women as well) has not been taught that sexual violences might happen at the hands of "friends" and/or family. In this way, sorority women could have more difficulties in naming abusive experiences and in effectively negotiating their sexual consent in this environment. Hence, the "family-like" bonds that these women suggest to have with fraternity members might complicate the negotiation of sexual consent, and the notion of whether they consider themselves as having been sexually violated, even further. This is, I would argue, because these women continue to internalise gendered norms about their hetero-relationships, including what men are to be considered "normal" and non-dangerous.

Thus, while there seems to be some form of "family-like" relationship amongst sororities and fraternities, this can be interpreted as a bond in which women nonetheless continue to accept the different social and cultural "rules" that are appointed to them in these hetero-relation encounters. Sanday argues that these "rules" inherent in the sexual ideology of this environment privilege men's sexual needs and desires (1990). The complicated ways sorority women construct their sexual experiences from within this sexual discourse, which marginalises women's desires and choices, will be reflected upon in the following section.

Sex as "Commodity" and the "Hyper-masculine" Sexual Ideology

As women's stories throughout this study have revealed, an explicit sexual ideology appears to be everywhere in the social environment of sorority life. All the sorority women in this study emphasised the presence and importance of engaging in sexual activity and they felt that everybody in their environment was really concerned with 'who had done who' and 'who they were going to take home tonight'. Inherent in this sexual ideology is that 'sex is treated as commodity' and that it is implicitly phallocentric[45] (Sanday 1990, 56). In this "commodity-model", sex is a substance, like a ticket for a concert, and it can be 'given, bought, sold, or stolen, it has a value and a supply-and-demand curve. […] women have it and men try to get it' (Macaulay Millar 2008, 30). Sanday's analysis on fraternities suggests that the more men

[45] See the thorough explanation of this concept on page 11 of this thesis.

can "get it", the higher their personal credit (1990). This "hyper-masculine" sexual ideology, as Sanday calls it, normalises male sexual aggression and reproduces female sexual passivity and submissiveness (ibid.). Women students are affected by this because they assume that they can only enter the heterosexual social order in this environment by accepting, or at least tolerating, the passive role that is allocated to women in this setting (ibid.)[46]. As discussed in the previous chapter, it should be noted that this "tolerating" and/or "acceptance" is not a matter of 'voluntary servitude granted by a conscious deliberate act' (Bourdieu 2000, 171). These (and other) messages about female sexuality in hetero-relationships are inscribed in our bodies to a certain extent and have come to be seen as "normal". Therefore, it might not always be a matter of a conscious "acceptance" and/or "toleration" of this role, rather this process is likely to happen at a preconscious level and hence not amenable to reflexivity by the individual (Powell 2008, 179). While Sanday's analysis provides valuable insights on the "hyper-masculine" norms inherent to this social environment, she does hardly discuss how sorority women, who are a significant part of this very same environment, internalise these norms[47]. Women appear to be merely discussed as 'victims' of this phallocentric discourse, but sorority women's narratives in this study show that being part of a sorority might make the incorporation of this phallocentric discourse more complex.

Some of the sorority practices and attitudes that these women described, denote how they appear to adopt certain 'male-identified attitudes' (Sanday 1990, 189) from this "hypermasculine" sexual ideology in order to grant themselves the space for negotiating a more active female sexuality. It seemed that sexual conquests were utterly important for these women as well, and men were discussed in an objectifying and sometimes denigrating way. In this way, they appear to use the contemporary discourse in order to account for a more active female sexual subject than the passive/submissive role that is available to them in this ideology. Femke, for instance, described how every Wednesday they discussed every detail about their sexual conquests from the night before, which had been their weekly sorority gathering. She said that it was 'all fun and games' (*lachen, gieren, brullen*) and Reva explained that 'the gossip about who kissed who was always the fun part'. As I described in the first chapter, I recall how my sorority had a specific topic on the agenda during weekly gatherings in which we "presented" our sexual conquests. This often resulted in that we thought of terms to replace these guys' names, such as "the fist-fucker" and "the huge

[46] For an elaboration on my understanding of how society is structured according to the "heterosexual order" (i.e. in this thesis I have referred to hetero-relational rather than heterosexual), see page 7 of this study.
[47] For an elaboration of this argument see the pages 11-13 of this research.

scrotum", in order to ridicule them. While fraternity men are suggested to degrade women not only to achieve a 'sense of social and sexual dominance', but also to transform feelings of sexual dependency on women (Sanday 1990, 37), I would say that this might count for sorority women as well. By belittling the sexual partners, it could be that traditional female subordination inherent in the phallocentric discourse is to a certain extent transformed, or "used" to their advantage. The sense of sexual and social dominance that sorority women might to some extent achieve could possibly pave the way for a more active female sexual subject. For instance, Anne described how she believed that some people overreact when a woman engages in an 'one night stand' and Eef told me that when, during a night of drinking, she had not come across 'anyone that grabbed her attention' she always turned to a particular guy just for 'cuddling', 'chatting', 'cosiness' (*gezelligheid*) and 'warmth'. She described that she explicitly chose not to have sexual intercourse with him because it was not something she desired from him. Here, there appears to be some space for a more dynamic female sexual subject than merely that woman who is submissive to her fraternity man's sexual needs in their hetero-relational encounters. Since we make sense of who we are through the discourses that are available to us, these women can only "use" these cultural contexts and implement them in such a way so that there is some space for an agentic female sexuality. Thus, by adopting attitudes that are normally assigned by our culture to men, such as objectification of sexual partners and the value that is given to sexual engagement, sorority women grant themselves a way to become a more active female sexual subject.

At the same time, sorority women's narratives showed that they were maintaining and reproducing the phallocentric discourse as well. Most of the women in this study were excusing themselves when they spoke about the amount of men they had sexually engaged with. Anne referred to the number of men that she had had 'sex with' as 'quite a lot of guys' and she described that there were definitely a few that she should not have had sexual intercourse with. Moreover, when I spoke with Keet about how men often assume sexual consent instead of explicitly asking whether you are willing to engage in sexual practices, she also excused herself for the amount of boys she had engaged with sexually by saying:

> '[…] ik heb ook echt wel uuh, ik klink nou alsof ik een heel leger bij mij thuis heb gehad maar, dispuutsjongens over de vloer gehad [ik: je hoeft jezelf niet te verdedigen], jawel ja maar dat dat weet je wel dat komt dan/[na deze zelf-onderbreking, veranderede ze van onderwerp]' (Keet).

> '[…] I really have had uuh, I sound as if I have had a whole army at my place but/ fraternity men I interacted with [at her house][me: you do not have to defend

> yourself], yeah, but yeah you know that that just happens than/[after this self-interruption she changed the subject]' (Keet).

This quote demonstrates how Keet, during our conversation about the ways men often assume consent, appears to apologize for the amount of men she has been sexually involved with. The fact that she changes the subject after I replied that she did not needed to defend herself might indicate that she rather does not want to talk about this. Similarly, all women applied the terms "self-respect" and "dignity" when discussing their engagement or that of other women in sexual activities with, what they thought, were too many men. Several women even made numerous references to the fact that 'you don't want to become the mattress of town' (*'matras van de stad'*). All these examples seem to imply that there is little room for women to engage in hetero-relationships in a sexually active way. Women's sexual conquests are not something that a woman should be proud of, at least not with too many men. This appears to be in line with the 'phallocentric discourse' inherent in fraternities because these sorority women seem to divert the attention from them being sexually active by excusing themselves and instead are focussing on the importance of "dignity" and "self-worth" for women (Sanday 1990, 113-114). This maintains and reproduces the phallocentric sexually ideology because it focuses on men's sexual desires and conquests. In this way, male sexual aggression and female's sexual submissiveness are continued to be normalised.

The reproduction of this "hyper-masculine" sexual ideology by sorority women was also clearly prevalent in some of the practices during the initiation process for candidate members. Some of the practices were implicitly "punishing" female sexuality and objectifying female bodies. In this way, the "phallocentric" sexual ideology is maintained because men's "relentless sexual drive" is taken as something which is "natural", and can therefore not be "punished". This was evident, for example, when I, as a candidate member, followed the initiation procedure to become a full member of my sorority. There were rules that we (i.e. candidate members) needed to follow during this process. These rules were given to us as part of the first assignments and they were constructed like the ten commandments from the bible. They needed to be memorised and lived by until you were considered a "full" member of the sorority. One of these rules was that, as a candidate member, you could not kiss any boys when you went with the sorority to parties and other activities (as mentioned in the introduction, this was four to five times a week and sometimes in weekends). When one of my fellow candidate members indeed did kiss during this process, she was publicly punished for it. She had to gather 100 autographs all over her body with a permanent marker. This gives the impression that by degrading this woman in public, she is punished for acting out her

sexual desires. Acting on your sexual desires as a woman is therefore denoted as a wrong doing. This simultaneously reproduces the phallocentric sexual ideology because men are seemingly the only ones who are credited for their sexual escapades. Thus, sorority women seem to adopt the phallocentric framework not only as "passive female victims", but in much more complex ways. This discourse appears to be internalised in a way that could grant these women some space to negotiate a more dynamic sexuality, rather than being "passive women". Simultaneously however, they continue to excuse themselves and are disciplined by sorority practices for acting sexually. This points to a complex negotiation between these gendered discourses, that, as I have been showing, are inherent in the ways women experience sexual violences and consent, and construct these women's individual agency. While sorority women implement this discourse in attitudes that might seem promising for creating an alternative sexual subjectivity, which in turn could make them less vulnerable for sexual violences[48], entrenched cultural "rules" also continue to persist. The question then remains: to what extent this adopted phallocentric discourse is really able to effectively challenge the existing gendered norms that continue to "pressure" sorority women into unwanted sexual encounters? The adoption of this phallocentric sexual ideology might capture what Sanday refers to as the 'illusory safety and self-sufficiency' of joining a sorority (1990, 188). The seemingly empowering environment of hetero-relational sexual activity and "family-like" structures may *feel* for these women as providing a safe and self-sufficient social environment, however, simultaneously the phallocentric "hyper-masculine" sexual structures are being upheld. In this way, sorority women continue to incorporate the gendered connotations that are assigned to them in their hetero-relational lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has become clear that women's social environments matter and have a tremendous influence on the way sorority women experience sexual violences and sexual consent. The interviewees in this study demonstrated that joining this system creates a secure identity status that is based on the group-identity of an entire sorority. In this way, multiple family-like structures are constructed that complicate these women's experiences because of the implicit presence of gendered connotations assigned to hetero-relations. This is not to say that these sorority women should be understood as "passively" accepting a marginalised

[48] Following Foucault, Moira Carmody proposes that an alternative ethical sexual discourse which moves beyond the dichotomy of active male sexuality and passive female sexuality holds potential for sexual violence prevention strategies (2003). While this is a complex and huge debate in itself, I wanted to point to the development of alternative prevention strategies that might offer more than merely the reproduction of existing gendered norms about female sexuality in hetero-relational encounters.

status in this college environment. The narratives and practices of these women show that they internalise the 'phallocentric and hyper-masculine sexual ideology' in complex and even contradictory ways (Sanday 1990). By adopting 'male-identified attitudes' (ibid., 189) these women attempt to use this explicit discourse to their advantage so that they grant themselves space for negotiating a more dynamic female sexual subject than the passive and submissive role. At the same time, female sexuality is excused by these women and "punished" by traditional sorority practices. This points to further complexities in women's negotiation of sexual encounters which, through the gendered structures and instances of individual agency in their hetero-relational lives, maybe even more complex amid sorority and fraternity context.

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Conclusions

In this thesis I have unravelled and analysed some of the complicated ways in which sorority women construct their definitions and experiences about sexual violences and negotiations of sexual consent. Being based on the idea that experiences are discursive events that shape and inform (sexual) subjectivities in our lived realties (see, amongst others, Foucault 1980; Scott 1991), I attempted to answer my research question; "How do Dutch sorority women understand and experience sexual violences and negotiations of sexual consent with regards to their hetero-relational encounters?"

All of my respondents defined processes of sexual consent in line with what the "just say no" approach is making us believe. Sorority women strongly relied on notions of total autonomy and self-direction in their sexual decision making. However, this was translated in contrasting views about sexual consent where non-consent is defined as something that entails a clear indication of your boundaries and consent as something 'you just know'. Although this prevention model is also argued to construct sharp boundaries about what counts as sexual violence, sorority women's ideas about this concept were complicatedly defined within a broader spectrum. In their definitions some struggled to clearly indicate what they meant when talking about sexual violence, however, all of these women were aware about the multiple forms in which violence is able to manifest itself.

Despite women's reliance on this prevention model, I have shown that sorority women's actual experiences cannot be understood in the binary categorisations that this model constructs about women's sexual violation. Their complex experiences indicate that the negotiation of sexual consent is not only assumed through particular actions, it is also ingrained with gendered connotations about what "natural" female sexuality in hetero-relational encounters should consist of. Fuelled by notions of female passivity, men's

relentless drive for sex, and adhering to notions of individualism, total autonomy and self-direction, sorority women position themselves as being accountable for unwanted and coercive situations. This can be ascribed to their strong reliance on the approach that tempts us to believe that "simply saying no" is all what is needed in such situations. In these ways, sorority women end up unable and/or reluctant in the process of naming their own sexual violation. While their ideas about sexual violences closely relate to thinking about sexual violence as a "continuum", the interviewees' lived experiences demonstrated that they went to great lengths not to name their own experiences as sexual violences. Any moment of female agency (i.e. conscious decision-making) was used to refer to their victimisation as a personal "failure", however this should not be understood as simply being a case of blaming themselves. Besides that these women's experiences cannot be placed in the contemporary narrow categorisations of sexual violence, sorority women might not want to position themselves "victims". Given the importance that is ascribed to being an active sexual self-choosing agent, recognising their sexual violation will position these women as nothing else than "victims" which leaves them with little to no agency.

Sorority women find themselves in a unique social environment which has been problematized for perpetuating traditional male dominant/ -female submissive attitudes (see for instance Sanday 1990). As I have argued, their environments influence these women's experiences and understandings of sexual violences and sexual consent in complicated and often contradictory ways. By joining this social system the group-identity of an entire sorority is personified which creates a multitude of family-like relationships that, in turn, function as an illusionary safety measure in their experiences of sexual violences and sexual consent. Due to the incorporation of norms such as what are considered "normal" and non-dangerous men, sorority women's strong bonds with fraternity men complicate their negotiation of sexual consent and experiences of sexual violence, even further. The women in this study demonstrated that they believe that sexual violation does not happen at the hands of an acquaintance and therefore they might not consider themselves as having been sexually violated. While the sorority and fraternity environment is considered to promote a "hyper-masculine" sexual ideology, these women should not be understood as passive "victims" of their marginalised status in this social system. By adopting 'male-identified attitudes' such as belittling sexual partners and promoting the importance of sexual conquests, sorority women grant themselves the space to negotiate a more active female sexual subject than the traditional passive role. While sorority women revealed to implement this "hyper-masculine" sexual ideology in promising ways, they continued to internalise gendered assumptions about

female sexuality. All the women described their sexual encounters in ways that they excused whenever they thought their sexual conquests were too outrageous, for a woman at least. Terms as "dignity" and "self-respect" were often referred to when talking about the amount of sexual encounters they, or other sorority women, have had. Thus, while this can be considered as using the "hyper-masculine" discourse in their advantage, the question remains how promising this adoption really is and whether it can make these sorority women less vulnerable for sexual violences. They continue to internalise entrenched gendered assumptions about gender and sexuality and even though these women seem to have some form of agency, it also appears as if their agency is constituted *through* oppressive discourse about female sexuality from which they shape their experiences of sexual violences and sexual consent. In this way, seemingly empowering attitudes in the context of sorority life might merely create an illusionary effect and obscure how the persistence of gendered norms continue to constrain these women in becoming agentic sexual subjects in their hetero-relational lives. Hence, the prevention model that teaches these women to "just say no" does not justice to these women's experiences and the "sexual continuum" is difficult to apply in practice.

Importantly, the experiences described in this study must be situated by the context in which they were told and with whom they were shared. It has never been my intention to generalise these women's experiences, and this thesis should therefore not be understood as such. Instead, sorority women are all positioned uniquely in relation to complex and sometimes contradictory cultural discourses from which they shape their hetero-relational experiences. Yet, we should not distance ourselves from these stories because even though they all carry their own peculiarities, these experiences also reveal constraining cultural textures and social conventions that inform and shape how we give meaning to our (sexual) experiences and to who we are, in our hetero-relations. This shows that feminist scholarship is still much needed. I would call for a critical interrogation of the ways social environments, such as the fraternity and sorority system, function to create (seemingly) empowered ways for women to experience their sexuality while at the same time endorsing implicit gendered norms that constrain women in how they experience their sexual violence and negotiations of sexual consent. With this thesis, I hope to have contributed to a deeper understanding of how women experience the negotiation of sexual consent and sexual violences, being imbricated in the unique social environment of sorority life, so that we can start to understand these women, ourselves, and the gendered structures from which we try to make sense.

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Appendices

Appendix I

List of interviewees that participated in this research:

Fictional Name	Age	Relationship Status	Membership Status in Sorority
Anne	21	Steadily Dating	Active member
Eef	27	Living together	Old member
Femke	23	Steadily Dating	Active member
Keet	27	Living together	Old member
Kris	23	Living together	Old member
Reva	28	Living together	Old member
Sofie	21	Steadily Dating	Active member

Appendix II

Original Dutch transcript of the interview with Anne where she "struggled" to define sexual violence:

> 'Ja ik vind dat ook, ja nee geweld vind ik meer echt als het echt iets gedwongen is… zeg maar. Maar dit is zo, als iemand je aanraakt waar je dat niet wil vind ik meer gewoon, ja gewoon ongewenst en het is gewoon iets vervelends vind ik dan meer…' (Anne)
>
> *'Ja en, en wat bedoel je dan met gedwongen? Bedoel je dan…' (ik)*
>
> 'Ja als iemand dingen met je doet die jij absoluut niet wil zeg maar, tegen je wil in, dat vind ik meer dan met, dan komt het, ja dan is het meer geweld van' (Anne)
>
> *'[…]Ik wil ook niet dat iemand mij op m'n reet slaat zeg maar, […] waarom is dat zeg maar dan geen geweld […]?'(ik)*
>
> 'Ja ik denk waarom ik dat geen geweld vind, is ook omdat het een beetje zo, je bent er toch een beetje aan gewend zeg maar. Je kijkt er niet meer raar van op dat het gebeurd. […] maar uuh nee ik denk dan meer van uuh, ja om gedwongen, als iemand echt iets tegen je wil in doet, gewoon uuh ja weet ik veel. Je hoort wel eens ooit dat iemand in één keer iemand gaat zoenen of uuh met z'n handen ergens zitten waar diegeen hem niet liever wil, en dat is meer dan gedwongen en dan met geweld gewoon dat iemand/ dan is het inderdaad dan is het wel fysiek. Maar ja, het kan natuurlijk ook uuh, mentaal kun je ook natuurlijk uuh, dingen die worden gezegd via whatsapp of via, dat kan natuurlijk ook ver gaan.' (Anne)