

A CRITICAL, THEORETICAL TA ANALYSIS

REPORT WITH REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY

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In this chapter, we publish an abridged version of ‘Sexual ethics and young women’s accounts of heterosexual casual sex’ (Beres & Farvid, 2010), accompanied by several reflexive boxes written by Melanie and Pani. The purpose of this chapter is:

- To provide an exemplar of a particular style of TA (here, a more critical/theoretical example; see [the commentary by Anderson and Clarke](#) for a more experiential/inductive example);
- To show the sorts of decisions and rationales that take place often ‘behind the scenes’ of a formal publication.

The author commentary boxes provide context and a sense of the lived practice of the research, written *after* the research was completed. They provide an intervention into the seemingly seamless published TA article, illustrating not only the craft involved, but also reveal something about the reality of doing TA. [The full version of the originally published paper is also available on the companion website](#) (the reference list can be found in the full paper).

Introducing the Work

Although TA is often carried out from an inductive (or data-driven) perspective (where researchers are not trying to fit the data into predefined categories), this chapter provides another example of how TA can be done – through a theoretically-driven and critical approach. Our project was an unexpected collaboration that brought together two separate studies that examined heterosexual women’s sexuality, carried out in different countries (New Zealand and Canada). Before meeting each other, we had conducted interviews with young heterosexual women about their casual sex experiences. Pani had explored young women’s experiences of heterosexual casual sex (for her Masters; Farvid, 2014) and Melanie how young women view sexual consent to casual sex (for her PhD; Beres, 2010). When Melanie came to New Zealand to research, we realised we had conducted some very similar work. We also soon discovered that we shared an interest in the prevention of sexual violence and in French philosopher Michel Foucault’s theorising of sexuality and sexual ethics. Foucault developed theories related to knowledge and power, including a description of sexual ethics. In what could be described as an ‘opportunistic’ collaboration, we decided to work with both our datasets in relation to these theoretical interests, to see what new insights could be offered when theorising heterosexuality, casual sex, and sexual ethics. The published outcome, excerpted and commented on in this chapter, demonstrates how a theoretical analysis of the data can lead to new and unexpected insights. Through a chance collaboration, we were able to re-use and re-analyse our data from a new perspective, in order to tell a different story of our data.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Foucault’s work on ethics and sexuality has been used to discuss the possibilities for exploring and cultivating an ‘ethical erotics’ (Carmody, 2005, 2009, 2015). Such a focus not only allows space for the multiplicity and fluidity of sexual relations, but can also offer great possibilities for the primary prevention of sexual violence.

When explaining the practice of ethics, Foucault uses the notion of *rapport à soi*, or the care of the self. He defines *rapport à soi* as being the kind of relationship one ought to have with oneself – that is, how individuals are ‘supposed’ to constitute themselves as moral subjects of their own actions within any given society (Rabinow, 1997). The relationship that a person has with him or herself requires not only knowledge of the self but ‘self-reflection’. This reflection requires that individuals reflect not only on how they feel about a particular act, their desires and pleasures, but also reflect on how dominant cultural representations (or discourses) of sexuality have an impact on their own understanding of sexuality. Alongside such reflections, critiques of dominant constructions of sexuality also indicate a particular reflexive engagement with a person’s sexuality that is not only indicative of sexual ethics, but also opens up space for the subversion of dominant heteronormative discourses of sex. So the ‘care for the self’ implies ethical behaviour because to care for the self implies complex social relations. In an abuse of power, an individual is imposing his or her appetites or desires onto another, and thus is not acting freely, but is instead a slave to those desires (Rabinow, 1997). Considering that Foucault sees ethics as the practice of freedom, an act of abuse cannot be an act that has also been ethically practised. To bring Foucault’s reasoning into contemporary western heterosexual relations, a man who coerces a woman into participating in sex is acting as a slave to his desires and is therefore lacking in a practice of ethics.

In the following analysis we apply Foucault’s model of sexual ethics to young women’s accounts of heterosexual casual sex. We explore what is represented as appropriate conduct in relation to women’s casual sex and how Foucault’s understanding of the ‘care for the self’, ‘self-reflection’ and ‘care for the other’ were implicated in the stories we were told.

What a Theoretical Approach to TA Offered

Choosing a theoretically-driven analysis was important to us. We were situating our project at the intersection of sexual violence research (which predominantly discusses women as survivors/victims of men’s sexual violence) and feminist sexuality research (which often highlights the ways that women’s sexual desires are absent within dominant constructions of heterosexual sex or ‘heterosex’; Hollway, 1989). What these bodies of research have in common is demonstrating the degree to which heterosexuality is often centred around men’s supposed sexual needs and desires, and how the normative constructions of heterosex have a hand in shaping rape culture (Gavey, 2005). Our starting point was to envision a world where people engaged in ethical sexual relating and sexual violence was much less common. We recognised that women (and men) were likely already engaging in sexual practices that were ethical and, as such, investigating those practices was a good place to start, in order to build an understanding of the shape ethical heterosexual relations may take. An inductive, data-driven approach had been useful to explore how women were talking about their casual sex experiences but had not highlighted the ways in which they practised sexual and ethical erotics. To understand their approach to ethical relating, we first needed a clearer idea about the contours of ethical relating. We were inspired by the Australian sociologist Carmody’s (2005, 2009) use of Foucault’s discussion of sexual ethics to frame sexual relating and create a primary prevention strategy for sexual violence. We also overlaid this work with feminist theorising of heterosexuality and men’s and women’s roles within conventional (hetero)sexuality.

Eliciting stories

This article presents the analysis of two datasets collected independently by the authors for two separate and unrelated projects. Both projects focused on an in-depth analysis of young adults' experiences of heterosexual casual sex. One project explored young women's experiences of casual sex and focused on understanding how young adults communicated and interpreted their partners' desire to have sex and how they interpreted consent. In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 women (aged 19–25) in 2005.

The second project explored young heterosexual women's ideas and experiences relating to casual sex. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 women (aged 19–25) in 2004. Interviews covered a range of topics, including definitions of casual sex, the women's experiences of casual sex and societal perceptions of casual sex.

In this article we have done an in-depth analysis of the ways in which sexual ethics played out in women's stories of heterosexual casual sex and the meanings ascribed to such practices. In particular, we approached the data looking at how the women talked about 'care for the self', how they reflected on past casual sex experiences, and accounts of 'caring for the other'. We also noted talk that reflected a lack of care for self or that highlighted constraints on women's abilities to care for themselves in more positive ways. We use this analysis to explore the issue of sexual ethics within this specific context to offer insight into some of the ways that women express a form of agency and self-reflection around their sexual desires, pleasures and acts that may disrupt and/or reify traditional heteronormative discourses.

The Process of Developing Theoretical Themes

There were three concepts central to Foucault's theory of sexual ethics: 'care for the self', 'self-reflection' and 'care for the other'. These three key concepts work together to build a vision of what ethical sexual relations can look like. To ensure a focused analysis that caught all instances of Foucault's theory, it was important that we addressed all three components of his theory in our analysis. We went through the data three times. In our first reading, we focused primarily on 'care for the self', which is the main concept in Foucault's theory. After identifying instances of care for the self, we moved on to searching for articulations of self-reflection, and finally care for the other. Throughout our analytic process, we kept these concepts in mind – repeatedly asking of the data: How is this woman caring for herself in this situation? Is she reflecting on her sexual experiences? How is she using those reflections to alter how she relates to casual sex partners in a way that promotes self-care? Where and how is she caring for the 'other'? Such guiding questions ensured we were capturing all aspects of Foucault's theory of sexual ethics.

One important thing to note with regards to our analysis: we weren't necessarily looking for direct expressions of such instances (e.g. women saying "this is how I care for myself"). Rather, we were looking at instances where we, as analysts, could identify underlying (latent) themes of self-care, self-reflection and care for the other. Sometimes the data demonstrated these instances quite blatantly (and a semantic reading would have picked it up), but typically we had to do much more 'interpretive work' to draw out the subtle and latent (underlying) themes.

SEXUAL ETHICS AND WOMEN'S ACCOUNT OF HETEROSEXUAL CASUAL SEX

We begin the analysis with a discussion of the ways that women's talk reflected 'care for the self'. Women expressed self-care in different ways throughout different casual sex contexts. Forms of self-care included 'setting limits', accounts of satisfying their own desires, accounts of knowing 'what they want', and differing forms of 'self-preservation'.

Self-care

According to Foucault, 'care for the self' is the fulcrum of ethical sexual behaviour as it implies 'care for the other' (Rabinow, 1997). Self-care was explicitly evident in some women's reports of 'setting limits' in casual sex. This was either in reports of activities they participated in or enforced (such as condom use), or the contexts in which they were willing to participate in casual sex:

Rachel: When it's casual I always, I've always used a condom and I get quite I mean I've said no to guys when they're in my bed. (New Zealand)

Agnes: Now I like have this thing where I won't sleep with guys on the first date, just because I don't like the feeling of being used the next day and for me that's a really big thing, and so, but this guy ... we hooked up one night and then, I wouldn't sleep with him, so the next night, he ended up spending the night and I slept with him and then he never talked to me again. And so now, like even that little theory of mine, is totally like ... blown out the window. (Canada)

Both Rachel and Agnes talk about setting limits on their casual sex experiences. Rachel's limit setting (situated within discourses of casual sex as 'risky sex') is based around enforcing condom use (and thus engaging in 'safer' casual sex). Her account of not giving in to pressures of having sex without a condom demonstrates an assertiveness and sexual confidence that is not typically associated with traditional, feminine (hetero)sexuality. However, her limit-setting can still be seen as a contemporary version of female sexual 'gate-keeping', where such accounts represent women as the enforcers of safer (casual) sex. Such depictions still position women as policing men's 'risky' pursuits of casual sex and thus fail to produce an account of casual sex that fully disrupts normative heterosexual discourses.

In the second extract, Agnes reflects on her emotional reaction to some of her other sexual experiences, where being 'ignored' after having sex with someone on a first date led to setting certain limits on the context within which she would engage in (casual) sex. Her account is also situated within a traditional heterosexual framework of women as 'gate-keeper' of sex, and responsible for managing men's sexual desires (see O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Tolman, 2002; Gavey, 2005). Reports like Agnes' of setting limits to protect one's emotional needs in casual sex were often less successful than setting limits to protect health or physical needs. For example, while Agnes reports successfully imposing particular limits on her sexual partners (not engaging in intercourse during the first sexual encounter), this did

not have the intended effect. Her account is a good example of how women negotiate competing subject positions which are embedded in heteronormative practices of sex that have limited capacity for the exercise of power and 'freedom' in relation to sexual ethics.

While women's reports of imposing limits can be seen as indicative of 'care for the self', and as a useful strategy considering the limited subject positions offered through heteronormative discourses, they offer limited scope for the subversions of such discourses. Some women were able to open up space for subversion by exercising other versions of self-care. This was evident in discussions with some women about pleasure and casual sex:

Karen: I don't mind like, like helping myself get off when I'm having sex cause some guys are good at it, some guys know how to do it and you don't have to worry about it, but some guys are totally clueless, especially, maybe not so experienced guys and so I don't have an issue at all with for me it's for me and I know that I don't have a problem with [saying] I want to do this I want to do that. (Canada)

In this account, Karen presents herself as knowledgeable about what she finds pleasurable in sex and said she will not hesitate to pleasure herself if she is not getting what she wants from a sexual encounter. She labels some (inexperienced) men as naïve when it comes to providing this pleasure and herself as the agent in such situations where she describes herself as comfortable enough to ask for what she 'wants'. In a heteronormative context that privileges men's pleasure, it is perhaps not surprising to hear women talk about achieving pleasure as a deliberate act on their (and sometimes their partner's) part. By taking care of her own pleasure, Karen begins to disrupt heteronormative assumptions about sex and takes up an agentic sexual subject position.

In contrast, some women depicted casual sex as sex that 'just happened', with neither partner in control nor instigating the sexual exchange. Evident in such accounts was an expression of a lack of control over the women's casual sex experiences. These women reported methods of 'care for the self' that included forms of 'self-preservation'. Self-preservation strategies, like other strategies, were often situated with gendered discourses of heterosexuality. However, in such accounts women did not necessarily challenge traditional ideals of heterosex, and their talk and management of casual sex were very much situated within such discourses. For example, a sexual double standard (where men who have many sexual partners are positively deemed as 'studs', while women are negatively deemed as 'sluts'; see Kitinger, 1995; Jackson & Cram, 2003), was implicated unreflexively within such accounts. This type of self-care was directed at constructing the women's identity as a 'good girl' and not 'slutty':

Karen: Before I kind of, used my uncertainty of like, ahh, something to make me feel better. Oh I didn't go in looking for sex, I ... not had it forced on me but I was like, I don't know, I felt a little less of a slut if it wasn't something I really intended on doing, [if] it just happened. (Canada)

Another way a self-preservation version of self-care was expressed was through talk of alcohol consumption. Alcohol was sometimes presented as being used specifically to lower inhibitions and to facilitate the instigation of casual sex:

Agnes: And we got really drunk 'cause we were drinking wine and, nothing had happened at all and then after supper we were sitting on the floor talking and then I like confessed to him how long I like had a crush on him for. And then we just started kissing and like making out and that. And that progressed really really fast like. But I don't know if I would have started anything if I would [have] said anything if I wasn't drunk. (Canada)

The depiction of the use of alcohol to facilitate casual sex has been repeatedly cited within casual sex research (see Herold & Mewhinney, 1993; Desiderato & Crawford, 1995; Paul et al., 2000) and this is a common cultural construction of why young people may engage in casual sex. By depicting alcohol in such a way, Agnes and other women who told similar stories of casual sex, subtly exonerated themselves from the 'responsibility' of having had casual sex, and placed it on 'being drunk'. This can be viewed as a form of self-preservation where women strategically work to protect themselves from any potential negative labelling associated with women's participation in casual sex (based on a sexual double standard; see also Levinson et al., 1995).

Women who adopted a self-preservation approach to 'care for the self' often spoke less positively about their casual sex experiences than women who expressed being in more control during casual sex encounters [...] Accounts where women talk of changing their behaviour to better care for themselves demonstrate an ethic of care and concern for the self, even if their accounts were heavily situated within and negotiated gendered discourses of heterosexuality.

The Multiple Meanings of 'Self-Care'

Most of the existing research focuses on the 'risks' of casual sex, particularly for heterosexual women. As we analysed the transcripts (with sexual ethics and self-care at the fore-front of our minds), we were able to identify instances of self-care where the women were looking after themselves. We approached 'self-care' in broad terms, and we were open to identifying any or all aspects of care for the self. This focus resulted in some surprising insights that encompassed the care as physical, emotional, social and in terms of sexual pleasure. As demonstrated in the discussion of Agnes' quotation, consuming alcohol prior to casual sex was also identified as how some women were caring for themselves. At a first glance, this might seem like the opposite of what might be considered 'self-care'. But conducting a theoretical TA allowed us to identify such unexpected moments of care for the self in the data. We were also able to link such seemingly 'unhealthy' or troubling modes of self-care to a broader system of sexual double standards within heterosexuality (see Farvid, Braun, & Rowney, 2016), that facilitated or enabled such contradictory strategies.

Self-reflection

Some women we interviewed often implemented self-care strategies as a result of reflecting on their previous casual sex experiences. Some women went beyond a reflection on specific casual sex experiences and reflected on their desire for engaging in casual sex more broadly:

Anna: I think every experience you have you sort of grow or develop or have, you know, start forming your opinions about things like now I know that I mean what is the point of having sex? Is it for physical or is it for, you know, for something else? So I start questioning my, my intentions for things so I think just maturity-wise I think you sort of do grow a bit and you start just are you actually doing things for yourself? Or are you doing things for, you know, because this is what you think you should be doing? (New Zealand)

Anna talks of questioning where her 'desire' for casual sex came from, and if it was physical (which is depicted as 'ideal') or if she engaged in casual sex for 'other' reasons. She questions whether it is something she 'really' wants to do for herself, or something that she feels she should be doing. Here Anna demonstrates that 'caring for the self' implies more than attention to immediate physical and/or emotional needs associated with casual sex. Anna's account was unique in questioning the notion that 'sexually liberated' young women should now be engaging in (casual) sex.

While 'care for the self' implies an understanding of one's intentions and desires for casual sex, including the physical and emotional consequences of sex, in order to produce an ethical sexuality, women also must reflect on how such acts are situated within a broader cultural context and informed by heteronormative discourses of sexuality (Carmody, 2005). Many participants in both countries demonstrated this type of self-reflection by questioning the sexual double standard. For example:

Melissa: Guys can have sex with however many [girls] they want and they're y'know, they're perceived to be a stud or y'know like a, a great chick magnet or whatever, whereas girls can't do the same, and they just get labelled as like as slut, or y'know like a whore or anything like that so, you must've heard of Christina Aguilera's and 'Lil Kim's song um, 'Can't Hold Us Down?' The lyrics they just talk about this exact thing, and it is one of my favourite songs because it is um, y'know I think it is quite disgusting how we get, um females get different labels from guys, and I think it's, I think it's very wrong! (New Zealand)

Like Melissa, many of the women problematised the sexual double standard, depicting it as inaccurate and unjust. Unlike the women who gave accounts of 'sex just happened', these women positioned themselves as culturally aware of such double standards, and some unapologetically talked of pursuing casual sex and expressing desire for it, in spite of such a double standard. Such reflections on the sexual double standard represent moments of *rapport à soi*, where the women knowingly and actively problematized such cultural definitions. By questioning the sexual double standard, the women opened up discursive space for the disruption and resistance of such cultural imperatives.

Other women challenged gendered social expectations more broadly. For example, one woman reflected on the role of casual sex in her life and not only challenged gendered assumptions about sexuality, but also challenged broader cultural assumptions about women's priorities in life:

Cathy: I guess it's just becoming a bit more acceptable that girls nowadays they've got different priorities. Like relationships aren't always the first priority. Like for me ... I'm more interested in the way I'm going with my career, so I sort of wanna head that way before I get into a relationship. Whereas in the

old days, I think it was sort of get into a relationship then get into a career or not even have a career ... Like you can get different things from different people. You can get your emotional stuff from your closest friends, the physical stuff obviously from your casual sex. (New Zealand)

Here Cathy is actively reflecting on the life choices she's made. She portrays a romantic relationship as a potential impediment to the pursuit of her career. Her account disrupts the traditional notion of romantic relationships (with men) as the main focus of women's lives (articulated through the have/hold discourse) and rejects the cultural idea that a woman needs a relationship with a man to be complete. Cathy's account is fairly unique in that she was one of the few who articulated the role of casual sex in relation to other parts of her life, not limited to her sexual/relational desires.

'Self-reflection' played an important role in women's accounts of casual sex and was integral to the production of a sexual ethic within these accounts. Not all women contemplated the meaning of casual sex in relation to their broader life and career goals as did Cathy, but their contemplation at least allowed for the negotiation of casual sex experiences in ways to better 'care for the self' and negotiate their needs and desires.

An Unexpected Insight: The Power of 'Self-Reflection' as a Tool for Change

Foucault's theory of sexual ethics requires active self-reflection. According to Foucault (Rabinow, 1997), subjects (people) must critically reflect on their experiences, actions and the social context they find themselves in. For this theme, we explored how women reflected on their experiences and then used such reflections to change how they understood sex, sexuality, and intimate relationships, as well as how they related to men during casual sex. During the analysis, we noticed that self-reflection sometimes meant that the women began questioning and challenging heteronormative, limited or sexist understandings of sex, sexuality and romantic relationships. This was an important insight for us, theoretically. The act of critical (self) awareness is often overlooked as a powerful means of challenging the unequal power relations that accompany heteronormativity. The women's active reflection worked to challenge the status quo both subtly (e.g. Anna) and overtly (e.g. Melissa) and served as a useful personal strategy of self-care.

Care for the other

The final important part of an ethics of sex is 'care for the other'. This was the sparsest area for demonstrations of an ethics of casual sex within our interview data. There were only a couple of women who talked quite deliberately about caring for the other. For example, Siena, a hepatitis B carrier, talked about the importance of ensuring her long-term casual sex partner wore condoms to protect himself from contracting the virus. Similarly, Julie would disclose her history of genital warts to her partners. While these women were focused on

forms of 'care' related to physical health, other women demonstrated 'care for the other' differently. For example, Karen and Stacy reported concerns for their partners' emotional well-being and willingness to engage in casual sex.

Karen: I know I wanted to have sex, like that was something that was going to happen for me. But I did ask him because I kinda felt ... just because I was so forward with it all the time, I just wanted to make sure he was along for the, like was there as well ... cause yeah, cause a lot of times I probably haven't been with the guy, and it just happened anyways, you just kind of follow along with the progression of things ... Like I asked him before we had sex, are you sure you're okay with this? And he was like, yeah! Like what the fuck, like why are you asking that question? (Canada)

Stacy: Often what I'll do too is I'll just kind of play with the underwear a bit just with the, with the uh ...

Int: With the waistband . . .

Stacy: With the waistband. Just kind of like play with it a little bit and put you know just a finger underneath and kind of just play with his stomach and move my hand back up and see how comfortable he is with me playing with his underwear at all. You know? And then maybe move down and kind of touch the side of his thighs a little bit you know, before I kind of go in front.

Int: Yeah. And so then you can kind of gauge like his comfort?

Stacy: Well cause if, if, if I put his hand, you know my fingertip under his waistband and he kind of like, moves away and or just changes his behaviour, you know, or acts rigid or something or tenses up, you know that's all very obvious when you're in close quarters. (Canada)

In these accounts Karen and Stacy express concern for their partner's willingness to engage in casual sex. After reflecting on some of her experiences of going along with casual sex, Karen reports asking her partner if he wanted to have sex, to ensure that he was ready. Similarly, Stacy talks of a concern for her partner's comfort. These unique accounts demonstrate 'care for the other' in heterosexual casual sex encounters. Foucault argued that caring for the self implies a care ethic for the other, through a constant and dynamic process of active self-reflection. However, in our analysis 'care for the self' was not necessarily reflective of 'care for the other'. We argue that gendered power relations and traditional discourse of heterosexuality constrained a more fluid negotiation of care for the other by the women in our studies.

Foucault has argued that certain groups (in particular people who have more limited access to dominant forms of power) are constrained in the way they enact ethical conduct. Our research demonstrates that it is crucial to analyse 'care for self' and 'care for the other' within broader cultural constructs of gendered power relations that make only certain forms and practices of ethics available to most women. In considering dominant heterosexual discourses that privilege male sexual needs and desires, it is not surprising that women's stories focused on caring for the self and subverting such discourses, leaving little room for effective means of 'caring for the other'. We argue that the lack of overt expressions of 'care for the other' does not necessarily reflect a lack of ethical engagement with sexuality by the women. Instead, it is most likely indicative of the constraints on ethical relations resulting from gendered discourses and power relations.

Using Thematic Analysis for Theorising 'Care for the Other'

'Care for the other' was the trickiest of the three concepts for us to work with, and we grappled with the concept theoretically, prior to applying it to our data. As mentioned earlier, part of our goal was to promote sexual violence prevention via identifying what ethical sexuality might look like. Yet, Foucault's concept focuses primarily on a person's relationship with themselves. But we also needed to address the relational aspects of sex in order to really think about sexual violence prevention, and to tease out Foucault's articulation of what care for the self could mean, when relating to *others*. To us, his argument that care for the self implies a care for the other initially seemed a bit simplistic. We questioned whether it was possible for one to care for oneself and not care at all for the other. This section therefore required a leap of faith: to remain consistent with our theoretical framework, we needed to incorporate this aspect of the theory into our analysis, but we had questions and reservations about the concept. However, in analysing the data through this lens, we could see that women who were reflective about their own experiences, were indeed also thinking about how their partner(s) were feeling about sexual contact. Our leap of faith paid off, as we could see the connections between women's care for themselves, their self-reflection and their care for the other – something we would not have 'seen' in the data had we not committed to a rigorous, theory-directed analytic approach.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we analysed young women's stories of heterosexual casual sex using Foucault's notion of sexual ethics. We demonstrated some of the ways in which the young women engaged in moments of 'care for the self', 'self-reflection', and (to a much lesser extent) 'care for the other' – all components of sexual ethics and *rapport à soi*. The main thread running through our analysis of women's negotiation of casual sex and sexual ethics is the way in which the accounts were heavily situated within, (re)produced, and at times disrupted, gendered heterosexual discourses. We demonstrated how young women successfully negotiated 'care for the self' within the confines of such gendered discourses. Women who expressed forms of 'care for the self' that emphasised their own desires generally gave more positive accounts of casual sex than women who expressed a lack of agency and control over their casual sex experiences.

While some women were successful in negotiating sexual ethics, our main contention is that dominant heteronormative discourses of sex impede women's negotiation of more positive forms of sexual ethics (e.g. as demonstrated by accounts of the role of alcohol in women's self-care). The women were at times limited in the types of self-care they engaged in, because their accounts often remained embedded within gendered constructions of sexuality. In spite of this, we did identify many varied ways that the women cleverly negotiated gendered (and at times contradictory) discourses of heterosex to deploy strategies of self-care in casual sex. This was evident in accounts of 'setting limits', agency and control, satisfying their own desires, and 'self-preservation', as well as reflections on the influences of broader sociocultural expectations on their experience of casual sex.

Carmody (2005) has argued that sexual violence prevention education may benefit from a turn to a sexual ethics approach (rather than a risk reduction approach). We further this argument by articulating a variety of ways that women used self-care in a range of casual sex experiences, and by demonstrating how dominant heteronormative discourses may hinder more positive expressions of sexual ethics. In addition, our findings can then be used to discuss issues related to 'care for the self' in (casual) sexual encounters with other young adults. For example, educators may discuss how using alcohol can sometimes be a method of 'care for the self', why this might be so, and potential problems with using alcohol in such a way. Educational efforts aimed at fostering more mutual forms of heterosex can also draw on the finding that women who initiate casual sex, or describe some agency and involvement in the instigation and process of casual sex, tended to utilise more positive forms of self-care.

Concluding Remarks

Theoretical TA is underutilised in qualitative research, but we see it as a very useful tool for carrying out innovative and interesting work, and for shifting and pushing the insights we can have around data. We hope that the reflective boxes, describing the 'behind these scenes' processes we engaged in, combined with an edited-down version of the corresponding paper, provide both an exemplar of how theoretical TA can be carried out, and show what it can look like. We encourage others take on and use theoretical TA!
