Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The problem with autonomy

Well, if you like somebody a lot, but you don’t know if you want to go further, that’s hard. Because you want to pay attention to the other person and you don’t want to be rude. [...] And well, if you’re in a situation where you don’t want to say bluntly “no” but you don’t feel a heartfelt “yes,” either... So, then it’s difficult, in the ten minutes before your clothes are off, to figure out what you do or don’t want.

This quote comes from an interview I had with a young woman in 2010. Her story about her subtle navigation of boundaries, and the stories of other participants in my study on negotiating intimacy and sexual boundaries, led me to contemplate the complexity of sexual negotiations and the shortcomings of conceptualising sexual consent as saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’¹. Their stories also stressed how sexual negotiations between individuals are deeply embedded in gendered social norms and discourses. For a few years after I finished the report, a question kept lingering at the back of my mind: how can we rethink sexual agency beyond autonomy?

Autonomy is a powerful endeavour. Being a feminist myself, I have been strongly imbued with the ideal of women’s and young people’s empowerment. In the past 28 years, I have worked for two NGOs² that aim to achieve social change to increase people’s power to make decisions about their own body, sexuality and relationships, free from coercion, stigmatisation, social judgments, or aggression. As Shannahan (2009, p. 60) argues: ‘To grant someone sexual autonomy is to admit ‘your body is your own, your sexual desires and orientation is inherently linked to that, you can say yes as well as saying no, and no one, or legal system, can interfere with that’¹. Thus envisioned, consent provides individuals with a certain kind of power over their “territory” (McGregor 2005, p. 106). My current work for the Dutch NGO Rutgers is based on this sexual rights perspective. The vision of Rutgers states that people are free to make sexual and reproductive choices, respecting the rights of others, in supportive societies. This discourse of sexual and reproductive rights is dominant in sexual health policies and practices in the Netherlands. Many young people, boys and girls, get the message from their parents that they are free to start a sexual relationship when they feel they are up to it, as long as they practise safe sex. Young people have access to condoms and contraception. In case of an unwanted pregnancy, abortion is easily available. Marriage is open to non-heterosexual

¹ The article on this study is included in this book as Chapter 6.
² From 1994 – 2007 I worked at TransAct on the issue of sexual violence and abuse; from 2007 to the present I have worked for Rutgers on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
couples. On television, many soap series contain gay characters, and gay vloggers are popular on YouTube. One could say that young people in the Netherlands are raised to be liberal, free agents.

However, while studying the stories young people in the Netherlands told about their sexual practices and choices, I found that free choice was a problematic concept and agency was not as autonomous as it sounds. Young people were navigating multiple desires, expectations and social norms, and combining different social identities. This raised the question of how sexual agency could be conceptualised in a way that included this sociality, because I believed that acknowledging the challenges young people faced would help them to navigate the bumpy road of multiple identities, sexual desires and practices. Moreover, acknowledging the necessity of navigation could diminish feelings of self-blame and guilt if they ran into trouble, for example being bullied if they did not act ‘manly’ enough, or being called a slut because they posted a sexy picture. So the question came to my mind whether I could develop a theory of the sexual agency of young people that included and acknowledged their social navigation. And from that question, the next question arose: whether sex education is on the right track if the main message for young people is that they should know what they want, be assertive and make their ‘own’ or ‘good’ choices. How should sexuality education be transformed in order to prepare young people for the complex social navigation of sexuality?

In April 2015 I started to explore these questions in depth in the form of a dissertation, resulting in the book you are reading now. In this introductory chapter, I will first elaborate on the conceptualisation of sexual agency. Second, I will introduce the analytical lens I use to study young people’s sexual agency. Third, I will introduce the research questions and the way I worked towards answering them, using my analytical approach. Finally, I will reflect on the methodology and the ethical challenges of my research.

1.2 Conceptualising sexual agency

Sexual agency is a key concept in this project. Agency, and sexual agency as well, is always connected to concepts of power. Spencer and Doull (2015) summarise four main ways in which power is conceptualised connected to agency: power to, power within, power over and power through. ‘Power to’ refers to an individual’s capacity to act and influence others, whereas ‘power within’ is concerned with subjectivity, self-esteem, and personal control. In contrast, ‘power over’ refers to varying forms of domination, underscoring people’s power to exert control over others. ‘Power through’ draws attention to power operating through discursive practices, through dominant norms and ways of knowing. In this paragraph I will explore different perspectives on agency, using these four dimensions of power, in order to conceptualise sexual agency.

(Sexual) agency and structure

The concepts of power through and power over lead to the much-debated structure-agency dualism. Agency and structure are often conceptualised as each other’s opposites, where structure is defined as externally determined
constraints that reduce individuals’ agency. Agency may be understood as the capacity to act within given social structures, which allow for more or less agency (Giddens 1976). In contrast, some scholars see agency as liberation from social structures, the ultimate expression of free will, such as Dedman (2011, p. 511) who defines agency as ‘the ability of individuals to operate, through their own active will, regardless of wider social structures that may otherwise limit the choices that they may possess’. Others explicitly recognise the conflicts between individuals and the power structures around them. For instance, McNay (2000, p. 16) defines agency as ‘the capacity to manage actively the often discontinuous, overlapping or conflicting relations of power’. Other scholars broaden this definition of managing conflicting relations of power to include resistance to social structures, such as van Eerdewijk et al. (2017): ‘Agency is expressed not only in the actual decisions but also in the resistance, bargaining, negotiation and reflection’.

Bourdieu (1977) uses habitus as a theoretical concept to understand how the structural and class positions of individual subjects come to be embodied as dispositions. The objective structure enters into the subjective awareness of the agent. Consequently, the agent incorporates that structure into her interpretation of the expectations of her role. Mahmood’s (2001) contribution to the structure – agency discussion offers a new perspective. Mahmood illuminates how people’s agency is not just limited and repressed by structures but also created by domination. ‘One may argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject—the abilities that define its modes of agency—are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the product of those operations. Such a conceptualization of power and subject formation also encourages us to understand agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable.’ (Mahmood 2001, p. 210) Mahmood (2001) argues that although agency is often understood as the capacity to realise one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition or other obstacles, the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be considered in the light of other desires, aspirations and capacities. Agency, therefore, should not be understood as merely the capacity for positive change, but also as the capacity to endure, suffer and persist.

If we look at the concept of sexual agency from this perspective, it is clear that social structures have a huge impact on the sexual agency of individuals. Unequal power relations between men and women, lack of LGBT rights, intersecting inequalities of ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality (Bowlé 2012), social stigmas and dominant discourses of heteronormativity and traditional gender ideology (Mann et al. 2015), all these structural elements restrict the sexual agency of individuals. Moreover, neoliberalism forms an additional structural factor. Bay-Cheng (2015) argues that being agentic has become a strict norm. Implicit in this is the unjust assumption that all persons can be equally agentic. Sexual agency is not equally available to all groups. Structural conditions create limitations for everyone when it comes to agency, but they limit (ideologically, socially and/or economically) disadvantaged groups especially strongly (Vanwesenbeeck
et al. 2018). Besides, this assumption results in shifting responsibility for any consequences onto the individual, which in turn contributes to self-blame (Bay-Cheng 2015). Neoliberalism does not advocate freedom in the form of nonconformity or challenge of authority. ‘Thus what appears to be an expanded, liberated space is actually a normative minefield, one that requires continual self-monitoring, impression management, and a full complement of defensive and offensive manoeuvres.’ (Bay-Cheng 2015, p. 286) Additionally, Harris and Dobson (2015, p. 154) argue: ‘Understanding girls’ agency in a post-girl power cultural landscape cannot involve uncritically positioning girls as inherently powerful subjects, but instead must unpack how girls are over-determined as such, and how they feel, enact, and make sense of their experiences in such conditions. We have suggested that there is also a need for a more readily available vocabulary that at least tries to manoeuvre around and unravel a bit, if not ‘get beyond’ the powerful agency/structure dichotomy that is so embedded in post-feminist, neoliberal conceptual frameworks. We have offered the casting of girls as ‘suffering actors’ rather than as ‘pure’ agents or victims as one possible term in such a vocabulary that we hope other feminist scholars will take up and build upon.’

**Sexual agency and autonomy**

Agency is often described from the perspective of **power to** as the capacity or ability of an individual to act and make decisions concerning one’s own life and body. Van Eerdewijk et al. (2017, p. 25) define agency as: ‘the ability to pursue goals, express voice and influence and make decisions free from violence and retributio. It captures observable action as well as the meaning, motivations and purpose individuals bring to their actions (Klugman 2014; Kabeer 1999).’ Pham (2013) examines the notion of freedom and agency in theories of different scholars, including Butler and Foucault, and concludes: ‘although the “how” of transformation varies with each theorist, they all share a project of freedom as autonomy. They aspire toward a freedom which is “self-grounding”, a limitless drive to transgress one’s limit at a given moment and to reinvent one’s individual and collective self.’ (Pham 2013, p. 213) Pham is concerned that other ways of being and acting in the world are not recognised as agency because they are seen, through modern secular eyes, as neither politically active nor world-transformative.

**Sexual agency** is often perceived as the presence of (or the perception of having) power and choice with regard to one’s sexual partners, activities, and refusals (Fetterolf and Sanchez 2015). From this perspective, sexual agency has often been defined in terms of self-efficacy, being sexually assertive, having sex that is wanted rather than unwanted, and being able to resist submitting to sex at someone else’s request (Fetterolf and Sanchez 2015). Jackson (1996), for instance, defines sexual agency as the rights and ability to define and control your own sexuality, free from coercion and violence. Definitions that pay attention to the threat of violence when social norms or boundaries are crossed refer to the limitations formed by social structures. The properties of intentionality and rationality are not unproblematic when it comes to defining sexual agency, as they can also be used as arguments to deny young people agentic positions. In many countries, young people are regarded as incapable of making informed and
rational choices to engage in sex and to express sexual consent. Lehr (2008) illuminates how the concept of adolescence limits the sexual agency of young people: ‘A central point here is that to be adolescent is to be engaged in the process of becoming. As this language suggests, adolescents are not yet selves, and therefore, they are not capable of agency.’ However, other scholars point out that sexuality is a developmental opportunity for young people, as Arbeit (2014, p. 259) argues: ‘Sexuality is central in human life, perhaps especially in adolescence when multiple dimensions of change constitute physical, psychological, and social challenges and opportunities for the developing young person.’ Age also intersects with gender roles and gender norms. As Dalessandro and Wilkens (2017) argue, the meaning of youth is gendered. Immaturity is associated with vulnerability when it concerns young women and with selfishness when it concerns young men.

(Sexual) agency and subjectivity
As mentioned above, the concept of power within is connected to the concept of subjectivity. This approach to agency focuses on the way people experience their lives. In this concept of agency, a person, or subject, is formed through personal relationships and the stories one tells about oneself in dialogue with others. This can be defined as the capacity to ‘weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for the individual selves’ (Benhabib 1999, p. 344). Pham (2013) introduces the concept of bonded agency. She analyses that social bonds can impose terrible tension on an individual, but they can also protect her or him through guidance, sympathy, encouragement, reassurance, and so on, and give her/him strength in the face of difficulties. She raises the question of what we mean by the self. She emphasises that social relationships should not be understood as merely constraining or enabling people’s agency (as if they were external factors), but as constituting the very structure and expression of agency. Therefore, being bonded does not need to be the opposite of being free. She states: ‘One’s action is rarely one’s own and rarely for one’s own sake only, for it is pulled, pushed, harmonized, agitated, coaxed, pleaded... by multiple bonds. In this sense, one could say it is always already co-authored. So tightly knitted with others, one is not necessarily set on freeing oneself from the given (though the desire for autonomy cannot be ruled out altogether), but often navigates and negotiates carefully, subtly, even artfully within the intricate webs of what’s given.’ (Pham 2013, p. 37).

The concept of sexual subjectivity, how people narrate and give meaning to their own subjective experiences of sexuality (Fahs and McClelland 2016), is highly relevant to sexual agency. Tolman (2002) offers a broad definition of sexual subjectivity as ‘a person’s experience of herself as sexual being, who feels entitled to sexual pleasure and sexual safety, who makes active sexual choices, and who has an identity as a sexual being’ (Tolman 2002, p. 2). Schalet (2010) argues that sexual subjectivity varies greatly across national contexts and, as such, moves beyond individual interpretations of social reality to a deeper recognition of how social norms, policies, and relationships shape what people think about their sexual selves. In this way, Schalet connects structure to subjectivity.
As sexuality is closely related to maintaining relationships and social bonds, one would expect that many definitions of sexual agency take social bonds into account. However, there are not many scholars who do so. Schalet (2010, p. 307) reflects on this missing perspective: ‘The analytic focus of much of the research to date has been on girls’ individual attributes—desire, pleasure, contraceptive use, and capacity for social critique—rather than on the attributes of the relationships in which sexual subjectivity is or is not developed. This lack of attention, empirically and analytically, to the different relationship contexts in which sexual subjectivity and agency are attained or hindered is particularly striking given that evidence of their significance can be culled from existing studies. That research suggests that mothers, and other adult women, can serve an important role in helping girls to feel entitled to pleasure, feel validated as agents of their own choices, and develop a critique of gender inequality. Likewise, we know little about whether, how, and under what conditions romantic relationships themselves help and hinder the development of sexual subjectivity.’ Bell (2012) is an exception, as he emphasises the social navigation process in his definition of sexual agency as ‘processes where young people become sexually active and the strategies, actions and negotiations involved in maintaining relationships and navigating broader social expectations’ (Bell 2012, p. 284). In Bell’s definition, sexual agency is not just about an individual’s capacity to reach desired goals and outcomes, but it is contextualised more broadly as a form of social navigation. Pham’s concept of bonded agency goes even further as it moves away from individual agency to relational agency. Pham’s concept of response-ability (Pham 2013) offers new perspectives, as it grounds ethical relationships and interactions in cooperation and interdependence, thereby questioning individualistic views that celebrate competition and goals of self-sufficiency.

(Sexual) agency and the body
Fahs and McClelland (2016) summarise the issues concerning agency and the body: ‘Is the body a performance of gender norms or a “thing that exists in the world” regardless of social scripts of gender (Butler 1990), and is the body separate from technology (Haraway 1991), imagined spaces (Gatens 1996), and power?’ Often scholars do not talk explicitly about the body but about embodiment, which refers to the experience of living in, perceiving, and experiencing the world from the physical and material place of our bodies (Tolman, Bowman, and Fahs 2014). Embodiment theorists suggest that the body can exist through “intersubjectivity” (that is, shared understandings of reality) or relationships with other people (Fahs and McClelland 2016). Mahmood (2001) analyses how the concepts of the body, the self and agency are intertwined: ‘Equally crucial is an entire conceptualization of the role of the body in the making of the self in which the outward behaviour of the body constitutes both the potentiality, as well as the means, through which an interiority is realized.’ For example, when analysing the role of the veil, Mahmood (2001, p. 217) states that the veil in this sense is the means of both being and becoming a certain kind of a person:

As my analysis of the practice of shyness and veiling reveals what
is at stake in these symbolic practices is not only the regulation of the feminine body by male religious authority, but also the very concepts through which the mind and the body are articulated in shaping the disciplined self. This means that the question of reform of this tradition cannot start simply from an advocacy of women’s emancipation from male control, but necessitates a much deeper engagement with the architecture of the self that undergirds a particular mode of living and attachment of which shyness/veiling are a part.

The body is crucial to sexual agency, as some aspects of sexuality are corporeal and that corporeality is indivisibly related to individual agency. Plummer (2007, p. 24): ‘There has been an exaggeration of the symbolic at the expense of the corporeal being ... Sexuality is most certainly a hugely symbolic, social affair ... But it is also (and not contradictorily) a lusty, bodily, fleshy affair’. Sexual practices are central to the making of sexual identities. Indeed, it is through sexual practices that the sexual subject is brought into being. Human agency is a central feature of the process, making it a project that develops over time (Bryant and Schofield 2007). However, Bryant and Schofield emphasise the power of the body itself: ‘Far from a passive surface upon which sexual scripts are inscribed, the body in sexual action is itself a dynamic force in generating sexual subjectivities’ (Bryant and Schofield 2007, p. 321).

Summarising, sexual agency is connected to different concepts of the self, being autonomous or bonded, being in control of one’s body or becoming a subject through the body. Relationships play a crucial role in creating possibilities and constraints for individuals when it comes to developing sexual agency. Sexual agency can be viewed as the strategic negotiations of an individual to situate oneself and one’s choices in a social context, maintain relationships, and make sense of experiences. These strategic negotiations take place in a broader social and cultural context which imposes constraints on the agency of all people; however, due to structural inequalities some people experience more constraints than others.

1.3 Analytical lens of this dissertation

Critical sexuality studies
In this dissertation, I approach young people as actors, able to enact sexual desires, identities and practices. I focus specifically on young people’s negotiation of their sexual identities, desires and practices; therefore, my research deals with the interface between the individual and society. Young people’s perspectives and strategies are central to my studies, but I also analyse the way their stories reflect social norms, gendered ideology and sexual discourses, and the morality and narrative landscape that surrounds them. Context shapes meaning and meaning making is a process that is open-ended and continuous. This situates my dissertation in an interdisciplinary field of anthropology, sociology, psychology, gender studies, pedagogy, cultural studies and practical theology. My scientific
approach consists of a combination of a hermeneutic, interpretative approach, narrative inquiry and critical theory (see for instance De Boer and Smaling 2011 for an explanation of these approaches). As I argued in the first paragraph, sexual agency is connected to feminism. Therefore studying sexual agency situates my research in feminist sexuality research, specifically in feminist-pragmatic social research, whose purpose is ‘to capture the world as it is actually lived and experienced so as to advance the cause of social progress.’ (Baranov 2012, p. 153). My research is about power and social positions, about gendered inequalities and the agentic potential of cultural and sexual minorities. My stance corresponds to the way Fahs and McClelland (2016, p. 394) describe the aim of critical sexuality studies: ‘While critical sexuality studies tries to describe and explain the social world, it also tries to improve it (self-critically, with awareness of the hazards of a linear progress narrative) by striving to be an emancipatory force in its examination of the relationship between sexuality and the politics of the social.’ My dissertation builds on an array of research and theories by researchers who have been developing sexuality research for the past few decades.

**Intersectionality**

In this study, I am interested in how young people negotiate their sexuality within their social, moral and narrative context. Clearly, this context differs for young men and young women, young people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and positions, sexual majorities and minorities, young people of high and low social classes. Intersectionality is the study of the intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination or discrimination. This feminist sociological theory was first named by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. The theory suggests that—and seeks to examine how—various biological, social and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, and other axes of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic injustice and social inequality. This is highly relevant to my research. In studying sexual agency, I am particularly interested in the impact of gender norms but also recognise that gender does not operate in isolation from other social identities and forces (Shields 2008). Classism and racism have always combined with gendered sexual stereotypes to leave women with low socio-economic status (low SES) and non-white young women prone to accusations of licentious (as opposed to agentic) sexual behaviour (Armstrong et al., 2014; Attwood 2007; Bettie 2003). The intersectional analysis of ethnic and class diversity among participants allowed me to consider the interaction of various social norms in young people’s sexual lives, including cases that contradict the common assumption that ‘liberal’ cultural norms are progressive and that ethnic minority youth are held back by ‘traditional’ norms (Haggis and Mulholland 2014; Kendall 2012; Whitten and Sethna 2014). My aim is to ‘queer’ (as used by Louise Allen 2013) the taken-for-granted dichotomies between oppression and subordination, progressive and traditional, masculinity and femininity, straight and gay, to open sites of possibilities to see the versatility of young people’s agency across all forms of sexual, gender, class, religious and cultural diversity.
Young people and sexuality
Sexual development starts from birth, and children already start to develop many skills as they explore their own bodies and connect with other people both physically and emotionally (Richardson and Schuster 2003). To study young people’s sexuality, I use a broad definition of sexuality, as the WHO (2006) has proposed:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life encompassing sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

This broad definition of sexuality fits within a social constructionist approach, which assumes that sexuality is constructed differently across cultures and over time (van Reeuwijk 2010). Moreover, it emphasises the interconnectedness of body and mind, and of individual identities and practices and their social context. Sexual behaviour can be seen as a normal expression of physical, mental and personal development, especially during puberty (Vanwesenbeeck 2011, Baams 2014). It reinforces one’s sense of self and can be seen as a form of identity agency (Hitlin and Elder 2007, van Reeuwijk 2010). Identity can be viewed as ‘a narrative of the self, a dynamic process, a changing view of the self and the other that constantly acquires new meanings and forms through interactions with social contexts and within historical moments.’ (Ghorashi and Ponzoni 2014, p.170). Engaging in sexual relationships has the symbolic meaning of growing up, becoming independent and negotiating culturally transmitted values (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Martin (1996, p. 10) emphasises the role that sexuality has in young people’s ability to imagine and subsequently shape their world: ‘Sexual subjectivity is a necessary component of agency and thus of self-esteem. That is, one’s sexuality affects her/his ability to act in the world, and to feel like she/he can will things and make them happen’. Building social, emotional, and cognitive skills related to sexuality is therefore a major developmental task for all adolescents (Diamond and Savin-Williams 2009).

Sexual development
Sexual agency and sexual development are closely connected. In fact, growing up and becoming a sexual self includes becoming a sexual agent, having more and more agentic potential, such as communication and navigation skills. Several scholars have proposed frameworks that visualise the sexual development of young people and the dynamics between individual(s) and social context. I will elaborate on two models that have been sources of inspiration for my research. Firstly, the Sexual Interactional Competence (SIC) model of Vanwesenbeeck et al. (1999). This model (figure 1) moves beyond the individual level to include what
happens in the ‘sexual arena’ i.e. between sexual partners. The SIC model shows how multiple factors influence the outcomes of the sexual encounter, such as each partner’s childhood history, adolescent social integration and sexual socialisation, but also factors influencing the immediate context of the encounter. The concept ‘sexual interactional competence’ refers to the complex of communicative and social skills, capacities, sensitivities and mental and behavioural strategies that help people to arrange their encounters in a mutually rewarding way (Vanwesenbeeck 1999, p. 28). By adding the evaluation phase, the model includes an individual’s learning process by means of embodied experiences.

### Figure 1 Vanwesenbeeck et al. (1999): An integrated view of factors and processes in heterosexual competence and risk

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<th><strong>THE SEXUAL ARena</strong></th>
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<td>Exposure and participation</td>
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<td>(Emotional) sexual meanings and motivations</td>
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<td>Sex education/Information</td>
<td>Gender/sexuality related attitudes</td>
<td>(Activation) of skills/strategies/tactics</td>
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<td>&quot;Choice&quot; sexual partners and situations</td>
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Secondly, I will introduce the skills-based model of adolescent sexuality development of Arbeit (2014, see figure 2), which shows how sexual development combines individual agency with relational learning, and skills with moral values. The three main components of this model are sexual selfhood, sexual negotiation, and sexual empowerment. Arbeit’s model highlights the different components of positive sexual development and what young people can do to support their own sexuality. The model focuses on skills, ‘as in, how young people can skillfully engage with their own sexuality and with the sexual world around them. Along with doing something skillfully, or doing it well, comes the idea of doing good, of engaging with morality (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon 2002). With sexuality skills, young people can both do well for themselves (e.g. experience their own sexuality with pleasure) and be good towards others (e.g. treat other people with respect)” (Arbeit 2014, p. 261).
Although both models are relevant to my research, they do not address the whole field I want to study. They both focus on the interaction between sexual partners as the site of negotiation and development of sexual competences (Vanwesenbeeck) or sexual selfhood (Arbeit). The models do not include the negotiation of young people with their peers and families and other social and moral audiences, which is central to my research. I am interested in the broader social, moral and narrative landscape young people have to navigate. Therefore, both sexual negotiation and agency have a narrower meaning in Arbet’s model compared to my interpretation. In this model, sexual negotiation is restricted to the negotiation of sexual intimacy with a partner and agency is restricted to the connection between selfhood and encounters with a partner. My conceptualisation of sexual agency encompasses all the processes in this model, during the negotiation of sexual identities/selfhood and sexual practices, within the broader social context.

**Sexual scripts**

Sexual script theory provides a framework for understanding sexual experiences and sexual behaviour and is widely used in (feminist) sexuality research. The essence of sexual script theory is that sexual behaviour is learned from culturally available messages that define what ‘counts’ as sex and how to behave in sexual encounters (Frith and Kitzinger 2001). Simon and Gagnon (1984), the originators of sexual script theory, theorised that sexual behaviour is influenced at three levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scenarios reflect culturally shared social norms and values that influence interpersonal scripts. Historically, sexual scripts have been gendered in ways that
perpetuate gender stratification. The traditional, mainstream cultural sexual script prescribes specific, often opposite, roles for men and women (Gavey 2005; Tolman 2002). The traditional female script casts women in the role of sexual gatekeeper (Rose and Frieze 1993; Wiederman 2005). The male sexual script centres on physical pleasure devoid of further meaning, thereby casting men in the role of sexual initiator or aggressor (Wiederman 2005). This traditional gendering of the sexual script creates a sexual double standard: women’s sexuality is circumscribed and subject to social control, while sexual experimentation and multiple partners allow men to symbolically display masculinity and claim masculine privilege (Berntson, Hoffman and Luff 2014). Moreover, sexual scripts are shaped by race, ethnicity, social class, and religion.

However, people are not passive recipients of cultural scenarios, they are in fact ‘partial scriptwriters’ who adapt, shape and fashion scenarios into scripts across a variety of contexts (Bowleg et al. 2015). Sexual scripts are not hegemonic as ‘sexual scripts also operate on inter- and intrapersonal levels, there can be areas of discontinuity between people’s dyadic or individual scripts for gendered behaviour in heterosexual relationships and their cultural scripts’ (Masters et al. 2013, p. 409). Many scholars have found that young people desire or enact very different scripts than those they cite as cultural norms (Dworkin and O’Sullivan 2005; Masters et al. 2013). Masters et al. (2013) found many areas of discontinuity between people’s individual scripts for gendered behaviour in heterosexual relationships and the scripts they described as operating on the cultural level. They found both continuity with traditional sexual scripts and change in these scripts in the stories of their participants. The way Masters et al. (2013) use sexual script theory includes possibilities of change, how ‘young people grappled with differences between their personal scripts and cultural scripts, shedding light on the active role individuals play in both maintaining and changing mainstream sexual gender scripts’ (Masters et al. 2013, p. 419).

A critical view on sexual script theory is offered by Frith and Kitzinger (2001), who argue that the fact that people talk about sex as if it were scripted does not mean that they reflect or express their internalised notions of what sex is like. Talking about sex does not simply reflect what happens in the real world. Talk is always occasioned and produced in a context, in interaction with others. As Frith and Kitzinger argue, reproducing sexual scripts should be seen in a social context, serving to make the speaker less personally accountable for ‘failures’ and enabling the speaker to engage in reputation management ‘by using the ordinariness of their difficulties to refute potentially negative dispositional attributions’ (p. 227).

Sexual script theory served as an inspiration for this dissertation, illuminating the interplay between individual and cultural, social norms and the strategies young people may use to negotiate differences between the intrapsychic, interpersonal and cultural scripts they experience. However, to study the strategies young people use to negotiate their sexual identities and practices, I also needed to reflect on the stories the participants told about their identities and practices, and the role their stories played in their identity construction and their reputation management.

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3 The influence of sexual script theory is most visible in Chapter 6.
Sexual stories

Sexual stories, as conceptualised by Ken Plummer in his book Telling Sexual Stories. Power, Change and Social World (1995) are the personal experience narratives of intimate life, focused especially on the erotic, the gendered and the relational. They are part of the wider discourses and ideologies in society, and they come in different forms: scientific, historical, fictional, political. In telling stories, people are not completely free to make their own story; they always draw on culturally and historically available narratives. Their stories are grounded in ‘historically evolving communities of memory, structured through class, age, race, gender and sexual preference’ (Plummer 1995, p. 23). Stories and narratives depend upon communities that will create and hear those stories: social worlds, interpretative communities, communities of memory (Plummer 1995, p. 145) Moreover, people’s life stories change during their lives: ‘the stories we can tell now are not the same as the stories we could tell in the past, which is not to suggest that past stories were untrue or less true and contemporary stories (more) true, but to argue that all stories are informed and limited by the circumstances or contexts of their telling’ (Woodiwiss 2014, p. 140).

Plummer argues that sexual stories cannot be studied as representing reality or truth, but should be topics of investigation in their own right. Questions come up, such as: why do people tell these stories, or not tell them? To whom do they want to tell them, or not? What sorts of situations enable people to find a voice, and what happens to people once they have given voice to their sexual story? And also, how do I, as a social scientist, hear the story, what do I do when I hear it? Which part of the story draws my attention and leads me to ask a follow-up question, and which part remains unnoticed? In fact, as Plummer argues, the sexual stories people share with an interviewer should not be taken as transparent and unproblematic when searching for the truth. Moreover, this scientific perspective positions the social scientist in the midst of the storytelling, drawn into this mutual social process of being observed and analysed, thus playing an active role in the construction of knowledge of sexuality. The process of analysis requires much reflectivity on the part of the researcher, who should look into what stories were possible to be told and what were not in this specific context. Besides the two people involved directly in the interviews, many audiences are present. Although a personal experience narrative is constructed around very personal, intimate experiences, the story is connected to the storytelling of others. The stories can be seen as ‘socially produced in social contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feelings of everyday life.’ (Plummer 1995, p. 16). The concept of ‘storyscape’ offered me a lens to analyse the stories young people can draw on. A storyscape can be seen as the surrounding landscape of interconnected stories with which we inevitably interact (Ganzevoort 2017). The concept of storyscape refers to the combination of the narrative repertoires and normativity provided by the social and cultural context and the narrative audience to which the narrator responds. It is not limited to specific contents within a person’s narratives but asks what narrative world

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4 I am grateful to Mark McCormack for drawing my attention to Plummer’s work when I was working on Chapter 5 in 2015.
is presented to an individual and how she or he constructs a life narrative to respond to that world. In that sense, the narrator is always negotiating possible meanings within her or his narrative context. This negotiation is an inevitable consequence of the storyscape.

Social and moral context
The construction of sexual desires, practices and identities always takes place at a certain time, at a certain place, in a certain political and social context. Public discourses on sexual freedom, on young people’s agency, and on gender equality intersect with private strategies and identities. I will introduce Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological model here (1992, see figure 3) to illuminate the intersection of different layers or rings of social and cultural influences on the agentic possibilities of individuals. The outer ring represents public discourses on sexual freedom, young people’s agency, and gender equality intersecting with private strategies and identities. These public discourses can take various forms, ranging from cultural beliefs and customs to policies, rights and rules, such as LGBT rights and laws on abortion. The next ring closer to the centre is formed by messages and social norms conveyed by mass media, social services and the educational system. Immediately surrounding the individual in the centre, peers, sexual partner(s) and family influence the individual with social norms, gender norms, family roles and expectations. The black arrows in the model indicate the two ways the levels interact. On the one hand, structural factors influence (limit or enable) individual possibilities, but, on the other hand, individuals and social groups influence the system. The chronosystem expresses the dimension of time, reflected in individual development, but also indicating developmental stage identity (‘being a teenager I identify as.’) and generational cohort effects.

Figure 3  Ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1992)

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5 See Chapter 7 for the application of the concept of storyscapes.
Whereas Bronfenbrenner’s model identifies the various social, cultural, and institutional actors, Browning’s model of practical moral reasoning (1995) identifies five levels or dimensions included in moral reasoning. He argues that concrete moral choices are the outcome of a multi-level moral negotiation. The five dimensions of moral thinking that Browning distinguishes are: (1) a vision level generally conveyed by narratives and metaphors, (2) an obligational level guided by some implicit or explicit moral principle of a rather general kind, (3) assumptions about basic regularities of human tendencies and needs, (4) assumptions about pervasive social and ecological patterns that channel and constrain these tendencies and needs, and (5) a level of concrete practices and rules that are informed by all the previous dimensions (Browning 1995). The moral negotiation of sexual agency operates on all these levels. The different discourses on sexuality existing in Dutch society (the outer ring in Bronfenbrenner’s model) can be seen as the first dimension of moral thinking that Browning has identified.

Young people’s experiences and desires are located on the more concrete third and fifth level. The negotiations of young people connect these levels and are strongly influenced by the fourth level of social and ecological patterns. The space for negotiation is partly determined by the degree of agency young people can develop in their situation.

My research is situated in the Netherlands, which contains in fact many different social and moral contexts for young people. The Netherlands is widely recognised as being at the forefront of the move towards egalitarianism and sexual openness (Elliott 2016; Schael 2010). As in most Western countries, the contemporary public discourse in the Netherlands is dominated by a (neo)liberal sexual culture, based on the sexual rights of individuals. As a result, notions such as responsibility (for oneself, for young people, for partners, for family, for society) are crucial to arguments within and about sex education (Rasmussen 2010). Responsibility is emphasised through the repeated message ‘if you are going to have sex, do it safely’. This message is conveyed by means of information about safe and unsafe sex, different types of contraceptives, where to obtain contraceptives, how to use them, and negotiating contraceptive use with your partner (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, and Knijn 2008). The dominant cultural logic in the Netherlands normalises and accepts adolescent sexuality and views teenagers as sexual agents who can choose for themselves when they are ready to engage in sexual activities, as long as they take place in the context of a more or less equal relationship, without coercion and with adequate contraceptive use (Schael 2000). Within Dutch society, adolescents are seen as sexual subjects from the age of 16, capable of making choices and having sexual agency, whereas children below 16 are not. However, this view of adolescents as sexual subjects is not shared by every Dutch citizen. For the purpose of my inquiry into sexual agency, this friction between the different social worlds that young people have to navigate provides valuable insights into agentic strategies. Religious and ethnic cultural groups often live within different discourses on sexuality (see for example Deković, Pels and Model 2006, Ganzovoort, van der Laan, and Olsman 2011, Siraj al-Haqq Kugle 2014). Religious and ethnic minority youth therefore have to navigate between different sexual discourses existing in their families and in the
wider Dutch society. Moreover, the sexual double standard is still widespread among Dutch people, meaning that boys have more sexual privileges than girls (Emmerink et al. 2015). Furthermore, although tolerance regarding homosexuality is relatively high in the Netherlands (Kuyper 2016), the dominant sexual culture in the Netherlands, as in most countries, portrays heterosexuality as ‘normal’ sexuality. Sexual diversity is mainly treated as a social phenomenon, with a focus on social acceptance and tolerance, while sexual practices and ‘normalcy’ are reserved for heterosexual sexuality, which leads to the ‘othering’ of non-heterosexual people (van Lisdonk, Nencel, and Keuzenkamp 2017, Meershoff 2016). Although all young people have to navigate different social norms and expectations, the road is more complex for young people deviating from cultural ‘normalcy’, for instance by being non-heterosexual, gender-fluid or transgender, or by not conforming to the cultural ideas of being a ‘good girl’ or a ‘real man’.

1.4 Research questions and outline of the project

The central question of this study is how young people negotiate sexual agency within their social context, formed by different cultural discourses, social norms, expectations and gender dynamics. Subquestions:
1. How do young people negotiate their sexual identities, desires and practices within different cultural discourses?
2. How do social norms and expectations influence young people’s sexual agency?
3. How do the intersections of gender, ethnicity and sexuality influence young people’s sexual agency?
4. How can sexuality education be based upon and address the complex social navigation of sexual agency?

Case studies

In order to collect data for an analysis that could answer these research questions, I first conducted four separate case studies (see Table 1). I was the first author and lead researcher of the case studies that are part of this dissertation. In three studies I had the opportunity to work together with a team of interviewers and a co-researcher who participated in the coding of interviews.

In line with my analytical approach, each case study was based on life histories of young people (see 1.5 for details about the methodology). As I conceptualised sexual agency as the multi-layered negotiation of sexual identities and practices by individuals with their partners, peers and family, within society and social groups, I selected four case studies to explore in

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6 In the study on sexual discourses among bicultural youth I cooperated with Lieke van Dijk as co-researcher and Malika Elmouridi, Taraq Hok-A-Hin, Ludette El Barkany and Grace Pinas as interviewers. In the study on negotiating intimacy and sexual boundaries I worked with Lieke van Dijk as co-researcher and with Henri van den Idsert, Esma Linnemann and Ther Knoperts as interviewers. The study on teenage pregnancies was conducted together with Eline Dalmijn as co-researcher and with Maaike Goenee, Eugenie Waterberg, Laura van Santen, and Lisa van Son as interviewers.
depth how young people negotiated sexual agency. The four case studies were designed to explore young people’s sexual agency while navigating sexual discourses (Chapter 4), negotiating sexual identities (Chapter 5), negotiating sexual intimacy (Chapter 6), and negotiating the meaning of consequences of sexual behaviour (Chapter 7). Below I will briefly describe each case study. In a meta-reflection at the end of this dissertation, I connect the findings of these case studies in order to answer the research questions (Chapter 2 and 3).

Table 1 Characteristics of the four case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Study/Title of Article</th>
<th>No. interviews</th>
<th>Age of participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnic background</th>
<th>Self-identified sexual identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sexual discourses and strategies of ethnic minority youth in the Netherlands</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12-22</td>
<td>Women, Men</td>
<td>Moroccan-/Turkish-/Antillean- and Surinamese-Dutch</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Navigating identities: subtle and public agency of bicultural gay youth</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Men, Women and Transgender</td>
<td>Various bicultural-Dutch backgrounds</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay and bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘Do I score points if I say ‘No’? Negotiating sexual boundaries in a changing normative landscape</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>16-21</td>
<td>Women, Men</td>
<td>White-/Moroccan-/Turkish-/Antillean-/Surinamese-Dutch</td>
<td>Mainly heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The storyscapes of teenage pregnancy. On morality, embodiment and narrative agency</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17-25</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>White-/Surinamese-/Antillean-Dutch</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Navigating sexual discourses
The first case study (Chapter 4) focused on how young people aged 12-22 navigated multiple sexual discourses to give meaning to sexuality. The participants of this study were all from a migrant background, which meant that they were exposed to multiple sexual discourses, at home, at school and in the media. The way sexual, cultural and religious minorities navigate sexual discourses is particularly valuable for reflecting on young people’s agency, as the messages of the dominant Dutch culture, e.g. free choice and autonomous decisions, often do not correspond to their lived realities. The life stories of the participants showed that they grew up with and within a variety of discourses but also reshaped them according to their circumstances and needs. Participants who felt connected to multiple social groups, as was the case with many of them, had a hard time negotiating their sometimes complex affiliations. The strategies young people used to exercise agency were temporary outcomes of their negotiation between conflicting identity elements. In many cases, young people experienced conflict between the discourses at home and those that were prevalent more generally in Dutch society. Young people’s ways of negotiating these contradictory discourses comprised four main strategies: conforming
to parents’ values, breaking up with parents, leading a double life and integrating competing discourses. The strategies adopted by young people in this study clearly illustrate a plurality of desires, including the wish to be a good daughter or son, or a respectful member of the community, thus showing that sexual agency in the lived realities of young people’s lives is not limited to striving for autonomy.

**Negotiating sexual identities**

The second case study (Chapter 5) aimed to explore how young people negotiated sexual and social identities in social communities and families. The study involved young bicultural gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women, aged 21 to 30. The socio-political context makes the expression of same-sex desires by people with non-Dutch roots more complicated, as prevailing schemes of interpretation consider being migrant and gay incompatible. In-depth interviews with fourteen young adults showed how young people negotiated bicultural identities in Dutch society, highlighting the complexity of managing diverse sexual identities and strong religious and cultural affiliations in tandem. This study showed that bicultural gay young people use creative and conscious tactics to reorganise loyalties and relations of ‘bondedness’ (Pham 2013) and to renegotiate the meanings of self and freedom in relation to sexual desires. The stories of bicultural gay youth confirm the findings of the first case study by showing that roads to sexual freedom and agency are not confined to the well-known public strategy of ‘coming out’, but may also consist of more subtle strategies.

**Negotiating sexual intimacy and boundaries**

The third case study (Chapter 6) dealt with participants’ strategic negotiations of intimacy and sexual boundaries with a sexual partner. The participants’ life histories showed the impact of gendered social norms on young people’s negotiations of sexual intimacy and boundaries. We conducted in-depth interviews with 68 ethnically diverse young Dutch men and women (aged 16-21) about their sexual experiences to understand how norms and values shaped their sexual negotiations. Most of their narratives showed the continued relevance of heteronormative gender roles, with participants framing sexual negotiations as a contest between opposing sides, dictated by different rules for women and men. Other narratives suggested that the normative landscape may be changing, with women drawing on discourses of autonomy and men using reciprocity as a guiding principle. Our findings indicate that while conventional gender norms and scripts continue to dominate sexual negotiations, many young Dutch people also draw on alternative discourses in their sexual relationships. Moreover, the intersectional analysis of ethnic and class diversity among participants made it possible to examine the interaction of various social norms in young people’s sexual lives, including cases that contradict the common assumption that “liberal” cultural norms are progressive and that ethnic minority youth are held back by “traditional” norms.
Negotiating the meaning of consequences of sexual behaviour

The final case study (Chapter 7) focused specifically on the way young women develop narrative agency over teenage pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy is often seen as a sexual risk and a consequence of careless behaviour. So it is loaded with social stigma. How do young women claim agency over their life stories and their choices? Normative discourses influence the stories young women tell about their pregnancies and the choice they made. Social norms and stigma play an important role in the construction of the meaning of teenage pregnancies. However, the embodiment of being pregnant constitutes meaning as well. This paper draws on the findings of a qualitative study conducted among 46 young Dutch women who became pregnant before their 20th birthday. Our study explored how young women navigated the moral arena when they were confronted with a teenage pregnancy. The concept of storycapes visualised how young women were constrained by their embeddedness in multiple storycapes, defined by different and often conflicting audiences. Nevertheless, our study indicated that the momentum of pregnancy could offer young women agentic possibilities to take up another position in relation to their social environment and develop narrative agency.

Significance

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the knowledge about young people's negotiation of sexual identities, desires and practices in order to expand the theoretical basis for the development of sexuality education that addresses the needs and challenges young people experience. More specifically, this dissertation explores the ways in which young people exercise narrative, moral and embodied agency over their sexual identities and relationships, as this perspective is currently missing in the models used. Moreover, this dissertation contributes to a broader understanding of young people's subtle and sometimes complex navigation of different normative worlds and in doing so helps to reduce social judgement, social stigma and the disproportionate emphasis on individual responsibility and good decision-making.

Besides the fields of critical sexuality studies and sex education, this dissertation may also be relevant for debates about moral reflection and identity formation in the field of practical theology. The study deepens the understanding of the impact of culture (and religion) on sexuality, an important aspect of people's lives. Focusing on the more implicit level of personal and cultural values and negotiation of agency, the research project is closely linked to practical theological studies on moral reasoning, identity, implicit religion, and sexuality (Browning 1995; Ganzvoort, van der Laan, and Olsman 2011). The project has links to the expertise and research of the Faculty of Religion and Theology of VU Amsterdam (e.g. the project Contested Privates and earlier projects of my supervisor) because the focus of the project is on the dimensions of culture, values, morals, and meaning rather than on the biological or psychological dimensions of sexuality.
1.5 Methodology

Life history approach
To grasp the construction of the meaning of different aspects of sexuality, in the context of young people’s lives, I used a life history approach. Life history research is a powerful means of capturing the dynamic and conflicting experiences of the sexual subject (Bryant and Schofield 2007). Life histories can reveal ‘social structures, collectivities, and institutional change at the same time as personal life’ (Connell 1991, p. 143). As Bryant and Schofield (2007, p. 323) emphasise, ‘life histories also capture the way in which individuals ‘move through’ life, revealing how subjects are produced or made over time. Thus, life history research situates the experiences of the subject within a specific historical and cultural framework. However, because it emphasises the temporal and existential specificity of a person’s experience, it does not render such experience a mechanically determined outcome of social structure and culture.’ Life history research suited the purpose of my research very well as it delivers insights into the social and cultural contexts and discourses influencing the sexual identities and practices of young people, and into their individual strategies to exercise agency over their sexuality.

We invited young people to tell us about their life history, guided by specific research questions related to relationships and sexuality, sexual identities and practices. As mentioned in the paragraph on sexual stories, I consider an interview to be an occasion for more systematic reflection and storytelling about the world (Plummer 1995). During narrative interviews, the participants shared a part of their life story with me and my co-interviewers, reflecting on their embodied experiences and the perceived ‘reality’ around them. Narratives of personal experience are stories that people tell and that allow them to make sense of events, create order, contain emotions and establish connections with others, particularly when narrating difficult times in their lives (Mann et al. 2015).

Through narrative we try to make sense of how things have come to pass and how our actions and the actions of others have helped shape our history; we try to understand who we are becoming by reference to where we have been (Mattingly and Garro 1994, p. 771).

Use of visual methods
The literature on life history research provides few suggestions for appropriate research tools to encourage young people to tell their stories, especially about sensitive topics (Wilson et al. 2007). Wilson et al. (2007) therefore explored the possibility of using the life grid, a visual tool for mapping important life events against the passage of time, in their study among young people on the subject of parental substance use. Their positive evaluation of the effect of the tool on the wellbeing of participants and the research results, as well as the opinions of other scholars (Berney and Blane 1997; Hanks and Carr 2008; Parry et al. 1999) encouraged me to include visual methods in all four case studies. During the interviews conducted as
part of three of the studies, participants were invited to draw their ‘lifeline’, with their age on the horizontal axis and the ‘level of happiness’ vertically (see Figure 4). Like Wilson et al. (2007), we employed the lifeline at the beginning of our interviews, prior to the other questions. The lifeline was introduced by asking ‘could you point out events or draw a line about what happened in your life with regard to love and sexuality, and indicate your level of happiness concerning these events or feelings?’ The aim of the lifeline was not so much to facilitate the linear recall of events, or to have a ‘complete’ picture, but to engage with the respondents, support their ‘voice’, and encourage them to tell their stories (Wilson et al. 2007). In the study on navigating social identities (Chapter 5), participants were invited to draw an ‘identity circle’ and include all the different identities the participant felt connected with, as a starting point for exploring the meaning of each identity and possible conflicts between different identities (Bos and Cense 2005).

The use of visual methods empowered participants on several levels. First, starting with their own drawing allowed participants to take control of the construction of their biographies. While drawing participants often discovered associations between different events in their lives that they had not previously considered, as Parry et al. (1999) found as well.

Participants made these associations at the same time as the interviewer and were able to reflect on these issues as they arose. Drawing their lifeline contributed to participants’ satisfaction with the interview, as it generated a new perspective on their own life history. The thrill of assigning new meanings was reflected in their evaluations directly after the interviews or later by email. Some participants wrote that they felt supported by the interviewer to tell their story and that drawing their lifeline and answering the ‘ignorant’ questions of the interviewer led to new perspectives and helped to overcome feelings of guilt and shame.

Second, the lifeline and identity circle ‘diffused’ tension around sensitive issues as these issues were discussed as part of the broader story of the respondents. This prevents their life from being interpreted entirely according to one particular theme or problem. In the study on teenage pregnancies for instance, participants could also include their happy experiences of being in love or their first kiss, as well as add other problems besides the unintended pregnancy, such as abusive boyfriends. This contextualised the pregnancy, both for the participant and the researcher.

Third, the drawing of the lifeline reduced power differences between the researcher and the participant, as the participant chose explicitly what events and feelings were noted, what was made visible and what was not, what was important and what was not. Drawing also changed the dynamics of the interview as it differed from the usual question-answer format. Finally, drawing a visual representation of their life also helped the participant to recall and reflect on events from the past.

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7 The studies on sexual discourses among bicultural youth (Chapter 4), young people’s negotiation of intimacy and boundaries (Chapter 6), and teenage pregnancy (Chapter 7).
Figure 4  Lifeline of a participant in the study on the meaning of teenage pregnancy. This lifeline shows the many ups and downs in the life history of this young woman, drawing the picture of the context of the teenage pregnancy. The participant included for instance a drop in happiness when her parents divorced at the age of ten and she was placed out of home at the age of twelve. The birth of her son was one of the good things, but was followed by a depression and trouble in her relationship. Due to domestic violence life was very miserable. She fled with her son and then her life became better, illustrated with the words ‘learning to stand on my own feet’, ‘independence’, ‘work’, ‘school’, ‘new boyfriend’ and ‘new home’.

Part 1

Part 2
Sample and participants
A different sample was used for each of the four case studies (see Table 1 for an overview) to suit the specific research goals of each study. Although the four studies focused on different subjects and involved different groups of young people, they all shared the goal of learning more about the way young people negotiate their choices as (sexual) agents and about the strategies used to deal with conflicting discourses and social norms. The inclusion of participants who were diverse in terms of ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation was an important and necessary effort to enable an intersectional analysis of the interaction of various social norms in young people’s sexual lives. Obviously, this diversity also required a large sample (174 participants in total), and a lot of effort to recruit young people. We recruited young people in partnership with youth centres, schools, migrant groups and organisations, and counselling services and teenage mother groups (specifically for the case study on teenage pregnancy). We also used snowball sampling to recruit people, especially for the case studies on bicultural LGBTs and teenage pregnancies where social stigma might complicate the willingness to participate in research. The majority of the participants did not know the work of Rutgers and did not have any connection to the work of the organisation. The main reason that participants gave for participating in the studies was to have their voice heard and their needs noticed and addressed in order to improve education and support. Furthermore, some participants stressed they wanted to illuminate specific aspects of their life history that were rarely picked up by the media or to correct an image of the social group they felt connected to. A sample bias of the studies might be that the researchers only engaged with young people who were comfortable enough with our topics to volunteer for an in-person interview study. However, our use of several modes of participant recruitment allowed us to interview participants with varying levels of comfort in discussing sexuality, including many who might never have responded to an advertisement. The diversity of the sample adds to the quality of the analysis and to the transferability of the findings across the population of young multicultural Dutch people.

Analysis
As mentioned above, the core of this dissertation consists of four different case studies. Each case study was conducted as an independent qualitative study with a specific purpose related to the development of the work of Rutgers. The four studies aimed to deepen the understanding of the social dynamics involved in a specific issue (sexual coercion or teenage pregnancies) or the needs of specific groups (bicultural youth and bicultural LGBTs), in order to develop and improve Rutgers’ work in the field of promoting sexual health and rights. Although the studies originally served other purposes, I specifically selected these four studies as case studies for my dissertation as the data contained valuable narratives on negotiating sexual agency.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, coded and

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*In the past years, I have also conducted qualitative studies on nonbinary identities, sexual victimisation of transgender people, changing gender norms amongst boys and the*
analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006) and a thematic narrative analytical technique that focuses on the kinds of stories produced in the data (Riessman 1993). In the analysis, the life stories were considered as the ways in which individuals construct their identities as active agents of their lives. The analysis combined the sociological view of stories as presenting social worlds and discourses, and the psychological approach to stories as audible embodiments of inner life and identity. Acknowledging that stories are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, for different purposes (Gubrium and Holstein 2009) I also reflected on the impact of the position of the researcher(s) and the way the participants were recruited in each case study (see Chapter 4-7). In three case studies, the interviews were transcribed and coded by myself and a co-researcher\(^9\), so we were able to compare the different codings, discuss differences, and develop new insights. In the study on navigating identities of bicultural LGBT I conducted the interviews and the analysis alone.

After drafting the articles based on these four case studies I conducted an overarching analysis, to explore how young people negotiated sexual agency in a multi-layered social context. In this analysis I explored the first three subquestions: (1) how young people negotiate their sexual identities and relations within different cultural discourses; (2) how social norms and expectations influence young people’s sexual agency and (3) how the intersections of gender, ethnicity and sexuality influence young people’s sexual agency. Each study contained findings that addressed these three questions. Based on the findings of the four case studies, I developed a new theory of sexual agency containing four different components of sexual agency (see Chapter 2). Finally, to answer my fourth research question, how can sexuality education be based on and address the complex social navigation of sexual agency, I conducted a literature review on the topic to complement my fieldwork and strengthen my theoretical model (Chapter 3).

**Transferability**

The models presented in Chapter 2 and 3 are based on the four case studies. As a result, the characteristics of the samples might restrict the applicability of the models. As mentioned above, the samples consisted of young people living in the Netherlands, aged between 12 and 30 – most participants were aged between 16 and 25. The samples contained a lot of diversity in terms of cultural, religious, class, gender and sexual identities, but some groups were not included: transgender and intersex youth, and young people with limited mobility or other disabilities. However, I expect that the challenges of people with social identities that face even more social stigma and marginalisation will entail even more complex navigation work to develop their sexual selves in their social context. So the models will be applicable to them as well. Another interesting category is white, heterosexual young men, as they might not recognise the complexity of negotiating sexual

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\(^9\) This was Lieke van Dijk for the studies on sexual discourses and on sexual boundaries and Eline Dalmijn for the study on teenage pregnancies.
agency because they have been granted an ‘easy’ dominant social position. However, studies show that masculinity norms are not hegemonic and heterosexual men’s experiences of sexuality must also be seen as diverse, complex and dynamic (Casey et al. 2016; Cense, de Blécourt and Oostrik 2016; Connell 2005).

As each of the studies was conducted among Dutch youth, the theory derived from them is situated in the sociocultural context of the Netherlands. To explore the value of the model in other sociocultural settings, it needs to be compared with the life stories and strategies of young people living in countries with different ideologies regarding gender and young people’s sexuality, and in other cultural climates. However, the diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds of the participants in the four case studies reflect the variety of ways in which young people mediate and embody different aspects of the cultures they inhabit. Moreover, the sexual diversity of the young people who participated in the studies contributed to the quality of the analysis, as life stories from a variety of perspectives were included. On balance, it is therefore likely that the model is also applicable to other countries and areas with culturally diverse populations.

**Methodological challenges**

Research into sensitive issues like sexuality presents numerous methodological challenges. Some are even more challenging when the participants consist of young people. Below I will elaborate on five specific challenges and how I dealt with them in my study.

**Sexuality is private**

First, sexuality is a private issue, surrounded by taboo and issues of shame and blame. Of course anonymity was promised and strictly applied (see also the paragraph on ethics below). Nevertheless, many people feel reluctant to talk openly about their sexual desires and experiences with a stranger. This poses a challenge to the recruitment of participants. Moreover, when approaching young people to participate in a study on sexuality it is not just the privacy of the participant that is at stake, but also the feelings of parents, who may have strong opinions about whether it is appropriate to talk with their son or daughter about sexuality. For participants under 16, parental permission was needed for the interview. However, parents may have influence on what their children agree to for much longer. Gaining the trust of the young participants and their parents was an important issue in the recruitment process because for some parents the association of their son or daughter with sexuality was neither obvious nor desirable. As we aimed for a multicultural sample for each case study (and in two case studies only young people from migrant backgrounds were included), the recruitment strategy involved cooperation with youth centres and the informal network of migrant groups who participated in the research.

Gaining trust and building rapport between interviewer and participant was an ongoing process during the interviews, requiring an empathetic, non-judgmental attitude and genuine interest on the part of the interviewer. Sometimes participants explicitly tested whether the interviewer had judgements about their behaviour, for instance when talking about an
emotional life event, such as an abortion or sexual violence, or about choices that may be contested, like keeping your sexual identity secret from your family, staying in an abusive relationship or committing yourself to remaining a virgin until marriage.

*How to inquire what a participant wants to tell*

The aim of the interviews was to facilitate the participants to disclose their life histories regarding specific subjects. As explained above, at the start of the interview the researcher asked the participant to draw a lifeline. As the researcher had no idea what kind of story to expect, the wording of the question was very broad, e.g. ‘could you draw a line or tell me how your life developed regarding love and sexuality?’. Sometimes participants asked for more concrete instructions, e.g. ‘do you mean when I first kissed or..?’ The interviewer would answer ‘please include anything you think is relevant to your life’. This open start resulted in very different starting points for the interview. Some participants wrote down a lot of events and feelings such as kisses, falling in and out of love, feeling betrayed, having an abortion or giving birth, and contexts such as divorcing parents, being bullied at school, and migration. Other participants, however, just drew two or three dots, indicating when they first kissed and when they had sex for the first time. If the lifeline remained very basic, the interviewer had to ask more questions to explore parts of the life history of the participant that were relevant to the research questions. However, the interviewer had to be alert that the words used might have a different meaning for the participant, and are linked to social and sexual scripts, such as first time sex, sexual identity, sexual boundaries and sexual coercion. As Fahs (2016, p. 215) notes: ‘What we as researchers may imagine when designing certain questions enters an entirely different discursive framework when participants hear, interpret, and comment upon such questions. In other words, what we intend to ask and what participants hear us asking often differs in meaningful ways.’ Moreover, the story of the participant is not a fixed story that is reproduced whenever prompted. It is adjusted to who is listening and to what the participant feels would be of interest to the researcher. So the life story is not preserved and delineated in the head of the participant, waiting for the right question to pop up, but is constructed while talking. As Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots (2008, p. 637) argue: ‘This implies that there is no such thing as a fixed authentic, prediscursive self that exists independent of the speaking. To use Barthes’s words, “We give birth to ourselves in our writing” and speaking (in Davies et al., 2004, p. 365). This means that the birth of selves is coincidental with the speaking and that we speak ourselves as multiple in the multiple stories we create of ourselves.’

Fahs (2016, p. 222) also emphasises the importance of being curious about the moments when listening and hearing break down, when new conversations about hidden spaces or missing discourses can be heard. ‘We as researchers need not only hear what women say (and make sense of it), but also we must hear what they do not say, or what they minimize. We should be curious about how the questions we ask twist and flip and flop and circulate differently than we intended, and, ideally, we should see this as a productive site of shared meaning making and
knowledge production within qualitative research.’ I therefore consider an interview a joint search for meaning, a co-construction of sexual subjectivity. A researcher does not remain outside the story as an objective observer, but is part of the dynamic construction process (Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots 2008).

Assumptions
The young woman looked at me and said:

You can never control your own life. You can make some effort to get it the way you want it, but you cannot determine it. I don’t feel that would be right either. Everything happens for a reason. Like the twins: I first had an abortion and then I become pregnant again and have twins. That’s just... not a coincidence....

I felt my head nodding as a sign of empathy and encouragement, while at the same time my mind was racing. Did she really believe that the abortion in some way resulted in twins later on? Like a journey of souls? Or did this story help her to accept her current, pretty difficult situation, raising twins on her own at the age of 19? I blocked the thoughts as irrelevant to the interview and listened to the rest of her story. On my way home I reflected on my assumptions. My initial response was derived from a rational view of the conception of twins, leaving not much space for more spiritual dimensions. This made me realise that as I really wanted to include multiple ways of making sense of experiences, including spiritual or religious ways, I had to invite participants consciously to disclose the possible spiritual or religious meanings of their sexual identities and practices as well.

Furthermore, I felt the urge to defend the right to have an abortion without having to ‘pay for it’ so to speak. My deep-rooted convictions about sexual rights and women’s rights sometimes made it difficult to listen without interrupting, especially when young women explained why they had been abused, blaming themselves for not having been clear enough. On some occasions, I spoke out after the interview had finished, reassuring the participant that what had happened was not their fault, that everybody has the right to be safe from sexual violence. However, I was aware that my stance on sexual rights and gender equality might not correspond to the way the participants experienced the world. As I wanted to learn about young people’s perceptions, I wanted to listen with an open mind to how they experienced their identities and practices, including possible victim blaming and gendered inequalities. As Fahs (2016, p. 209) argues: ‘our own beliefs about the world (and about sexuality) are nearly impossible to minimize or erase.’ By involving more people in the process of interviewing and analysis as interviewers and (co-)researchers, I strived to avoid the pitfalls of my personal axioms and blind spots as much as possible.

Taking account of my situatedness
Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of a researcher’s positionality, as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position
may affect the research process and outcome (Berger 2013). Since my introduction to gender studies in 1986, I have recognised the importance of reflexivity as a form of self-appraisal in research. As Berger (2013, p. 220) argues: ‘It means turning the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation. As such, the idea of reflexivity challenges the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective.’ Moreover, when studying sexual agency the theoretical position I take up in that field will affect my findings. Spencer and Doull (2015, p. 904) argue how varying interpretations and uses of power and agency shape not only the ways in which young people’s agentic experiences are theorised and investigated by researchers but also the presumed effects of that agency. They stress that different theoretical positions not only shape the understanding of agency as being affective and/or effective but also how these understandings inform the ways we interpret young people’s perspectives and actions as holding the potential for ‘agency’. I have illuminated my theoretical position on agency above. My focus on the interplay of individual and context, with a special interest in the strategies young people used to negotiate agency, must have affected the stories young people told and the analyses of the data. As I explained above, this should not be seen as a deviation but rather as the essence of using storytelling as a methodology for shared meaning-making and knowledge production.

Being simultaneously an in- and outsider
Whether the participant and the researcher see each other as ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ is considered a significant determinant of how researchers build rapport with participants or analyse data (Acker 2000). Berger distinguishes three ways the in- or outside position of the researcher impacts the study: (1) access to the field, as respondents may be more willing to participate when they perceive the researcher as sympathetic to their situation; (2) shaping the nature of the researcher-researched relationship and creating more or less openness and (3) the views of the researcher affect the way he or she constructs the world, uses language, poses questions and chooses the lens for filtering the information and making meaning of it (Kacen and Chaitin 2006).

Sharing the same position or experiences as your participants offers many opportunities and some pitfalls. A ‘shared experience’ position equips a researcher with knowledge of relevant issues, familiarity with the language and awareness of sensitivities, making it possible to understand the nuanced reactions of respondents, hear what remains unsaid and probe more efficiently. The role of the insider also facilitates the recruitment of participants because of trust. However, the insider position also carries the risk of blocking other perceptions and voices, so the challenge is to use one’s own experience and sensitivity while at the same time avoiding imposing one’s own experience on participants (Pillow 2003). Berger argues that shared experience also colours the power relationship between researcher and participant, which may vary from closeness to comparison
and competition, and may lead to more in-depth disclosures but also risks compromising the researcher's perspective.

Not sharing the same position, studying the unfamiliar or studying ‘others’, offers several advantages and risks too (Berger 2013). The risks mirror the insider’s advantages: an outsider misses the familiarity, the obvious sensitivity to what questions are relevant, and what kind of language is appropriate, as mentioned above. Recruitment can become much harder, as trust has to be won. Moreover, if the researcher does not identify with the experiences of the participants she or he may view their stories through judging lenses that influence the conceptualisation of the research question and the interpretation of participants’ experiences (Smith 1999). However, the ‘ignorance’ of the researcher is also an advantage because the participant will be perceived by both as the expert on the matter, which positively contributes to a more balanced power relationship. This is especially valuable when participants are socially disadvantaged, experience stigma or fear judgements. Many participants in my studies experienced social stigma or did not disclose their experiences before out of fear of judgments because they were gay and bicultural, had had an abortion, had become pregnant at a young age or had experienced sexual abuse.

I often had the experience of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider while conducting the case studies. For instance, while interviewing teenage mothers I could easily identify with their experiences of being pregnant, giving birth and motherhood, but I did not share their context of being a teenage mother, of being confronted with judgments and coercion. During my interviews with bicultural LGBTs I could identify – being bisexual myself – with being non-heterosexual and opposing the dichotomy and the Dutch focus on being explicit and ‘honest’ about your identity, but clearly, being white Dutch, I did not experience the complexity of growing up as LGBT in a family with a history of migration. Through my social position of being a woman, I was familiar with the social navigating that was present in many stories of young women but also of young men in minority positions. As both the participants and I had multidimensional identities and experiences, I was convinced that we could identify and interact empathetically across differences because of our shared capital of human emotions and desires. Nevertheless, I do agree with Berger that an outsider should stay alert for stereotypes and stigmatising perceptions and should actively seek guidance and feedback to ensure that he or she is not missing important aspects.

Of course, being an insider or an outsider is not just linked to my perception, but also, and even more importantly, to the perception of the participant. For several reasons, I was probably perceived as an outsider by my respondents. First of all, I am convinced that they considered me to be ‘old’. As I was born in 1965, my age clearly distinguished me from my participants. There was always an age difference of at least twenty years, and more often thirty years, between me and my interviewee. So I was probably around the same age as their mother. This was not just a difference in years, but also in maturity (most participants were adolescents who lived with their parents) and in sexual culture (I grew up in the 1980s, in a different age in fact). Moreover, I was obviously white, whereas many respondents identified as bicultural or non-western. My whiteness probably
led to more extensive descriptions of the role culture and religion played in their life stories. But it may also have led to cautiousness, suspicion or fear of not being understood. Being perceived as an outsider sometimes felt uncomfortable, as I felt I had to prove that I was sensitive enough to understand what somebody told, and bold enough to confess if I did not. However, being an outsider also made it easier to ask questions about the obvious, the norms and discourses present in their story.

In two studies I worked with a team of interviewers with different gender and cultural identities. This enabled us to reflect together on differences in recruiting, engaging with participants and interviewing. We consciously paired interviewers and participants to facilitate rapport, based on shared experiences. However, for practical reasons such as the availability of an interviewer at the time and place the participant proposed, this match could not always be made. This process created an opportunity to compare the insider and outsider perspectives. One aspect of the interview process that absolutely benefited from an insider position was the recruitment. The bicultural background of the interviewers also enabled openness and trust during the interview process itself, as the shared position of being a migrant made them open to views differing from the obviousness and dominance of Dutch liberal sexual culture. Therefore, both case studies benefited from the pairing of bicultural interviewers and participants, but also from the exchange of views and experiences between different interviewers during the analysis of the data. However, the match in gender between interviewers and participants, in our case between young male interviewers and young male participants, did not generate different outcomes compared with the interviews between female interviewers and young male participants, neither in terms of the openness of participants nor in terms of different views or perspectives of the interviewers. A reason for this might be that young men are used to talking with women about their experiences and feelings. As both teams of interviewers consisted mainly of women, all young female participants were interviewed by female interviewers.

1.6 Taking care of ethics

Research integrity is essential to conducting good research. The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018) distinguishes five guiding principles: honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence and responsibility. The code of conduct describes these five principles as follows:

1. Honesty: reporting the research process accurately, taking alternative opinions and counterarguments seriously, being open about margins of uncertainty, refraining from making unfounded claims, refraining from fabricating or falsifying data or sources and refraining from presenting results more favourably or unfavourably than they actually are.

2. Scrupulousness: using methods that are scientific or scholarly and exercising the best possible care in designing, undertaking, reporting

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10 The studies on sexual discourses among bicultural youth (Chapter 4) and young people's negotiation of intimacy and boundaries (Chapter 6).
and disseminating research.

3. Transparency: ensuring that it is clear to others what data the research was based on, how the data were obtained, what and how results were achieved and what role was played by external stakeholders. It must be evident, at least to peers, how the research was conducted and what the various phases of the research process were. At the very least, this means that the line of reasoning must be clear and that the steps in the research process must be verifiable.

4. Independence: not allowing the choice of method, the assessment of data, the weight attributed to alternative statements or the assessment of others’ research or research proposals to be guided by non-scientific or non-scholarly considerations (e.g. of a commercial or political nature). In this sense, independence also includes impartiality. Independence is required at all times in the design, conduct and reporting of research, although not necessarily in the choice of research topic and research question.

5. Responsibility: acknowledging the fact that a researcher does not operate in isolation and hence taking into consideration – within reasonable limits – the legitimate interests of human and animal test subjects, as well as those of commissioning parties, funding bodies and the environment. Responsibility also means conducting research that is scientifically and/or societally relevant.

As for the first three principles, honesty, scrupulousness and transparency, I have reported in each chapter how the research process of each separate study was conducted, why the methods used were appropriate for the studies, and how I carefully designed each study, in cooperation with co-researchers, to come to conclusions that are scientifically sound and verifiable. I feel I have done my very best to live up to these standards.

I will discuss the next two principles in more detail. First, independence. Working for an NGO with its own vision, goals, and interests might affect one’s scientific independence. However, Rutgers has high scientific standards, which include the involvement of external scientific experts and experts from other NGOs and migrant communities by means of advisory committees. These committees critically reflected on the choices, the reasoning and the consequences of the steps taken. The position of the researcher as an employee of an NGO also influenced contacts with participants. In every study, my co-interviewers and I introduced ourselves to the participants as working for Rutgers. Some participants were familiar with the work of Rutgers in the field of sex education and advocacy for sexual rights. This positioned the interviewer in socio-political terms as having a liberal stance on sexual diversity, abortion and young people and sexuality more generally. However, it also positioned the interviewer as a representative of the whole field of sexual rights advocates and providers of sexual health services, and some participants did not feel these represented them or had served them well. Sometimes this was apparent from a reluctant attitude at the start, with the participant wanting to know whether the information obtained would be used in an effective way. The interviewer always explained that the organisation was aware that the education, information and services that Dutch organisations provided did not suit
everybody well and that the aim of the research was to gain knowledge about young peoples’ strategies and needs in order to improve these services.

The fifth principle, responsibility, was particularly important to me, as the samples always consisted of young people and the interviews dealt with morally and emotionally loaded subjects such as sexuality and identity. Therefore, it was very important to ensure that the studies did not harm young people in any way. The following ethical guidelines were followed to ensure this:

- Age/vulnerability: Young people who participated were at least 16 years old. The only exception is the study on sexual discourses (Chapter 4), in which young people from the age of 12 participated.
- Consent: (1) Young people were informed transparently about the goal and the publication of the study; (2) Young people were asked for their consent to participate in the study; (3) In the case of young people under the age of 16, their parents were asked for consent; (4) During the process of data gathering (mostly interviewing), young people were informed they could withdraw at any moment and were urged to speak out if they did not want to tell something or felt uneasy;
- Respectful, safe space: All interviewers were competent in creating a safe environment, in respectful and non-judgemental listening, and in dealing with emotions in a proper way;
- Aftercare: In each study young people were informed about counselling and information services available;
- Anonymity: data were coded and stored under fictitious names. In any form of written or oral reporting, utmost care was taken to ensure that quotes were not traceable to a specific person.

In each individual study in this project, these ethical guidelines were operationalised in line with the code of conduct of Rutgers and the guidance on ethical considerations in planning and reviewing research studies on sexual and reproductive health in adolescents (WHO 2018), including voluntary participation, safeguards against participant identity disclosure, and respect for participants.

1.7 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of two parts:

- **Part I, ‘Rethinking sexual agency’,** contains the main body of the dissertation, in which the research questions are covered. This part consists of three chapters. First, this introductory chapter outlines the reason to start this research project, the research questions, the analytical lens, the conceptualisation of sexual agency and other concepts used in my study, and my reflection on my position as a researcher. The next two chapters deal with key aspects of the research questions. These chapters contain in fact the extensive conclusions of my study. Chapter 2 addresses how young people’s sexual agency is negotiated within their social context formed by different cultural discourses, social norms, expectations and gender dynamics (research question 1 – 3). In this chapter I present the results of the analysis of the four case studies in the form of a multicomponent model
of sexual agency. Chapter 3 focuses on how the social navigation of sexual agency can be included in sexuality education (research question 4). In this chapter a second model is presented to develop a newly comprehensive form of sexuality education, based on the findings of my study.

Part II, ‘Young people's navigation of discourses, identities, practices and consequences’, contains the four underlying case studies, in four separate articles. This part can in fact be seen as a supplement, for readers who have a specific interest in one of the topics or want to study the findings of the case studies in more detail.

Besides the introductory chapter, all six chapters have been published previously as separate articles in international journals. Because all articles were written to be read on their own, there is some overlap between the content of the articles, especially with regard to the introduction and methodology.

Two chapters were co-authored by my supervisor Prof. Ruard Ganzvoort: Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. Chapter 6 was co-authored by Prof. Laina Bay-Cheng and Lieke van Dijk. The contributions of the co-authors consisted of commenting critically on the analysis and outline of the paper, suggesting literature, and contributing to the discussion.