The ABC of unsafe sex takes a critical perspective on mainstream research and policies on AIDS in general, and young people’s sexual and reproductive health in particular. Central are the intimate lives and sexual relationships of Dakarois girls and boys. Contrary to dominant norms valuing virginity, young people in Dakar are sexually active prior to marriage. They are, however, not universally practising safe sex, as amongst others is signified by the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies. Unsafe sex also exposes them to HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. This thesis investigates how the safe sex practices, or lack thereof, of unmarried girls and boys are embedded in the construction of their gendered sexualities.

The largely qualitative analysis is based on participant observation, secondary statistical data, and most importantly “talking about sex” with young people, aged 16 to 23, in focus group discussions and individual interviews. How do these Dakarois girls and boys of varying backgrounds look at intimate relationships, love and sex? What kind of relationships are they engaged in? What strategies do they adopt to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections?

Distancing herself from the behavioural paradigm and the notion of “African sexuality”, Anouka van Eerdewijk builds on the social constructionist and intersectional understanding of both sexuality and gender. By understanding gendered sexualities as performative, space is created to explore the agency of both girls and boys to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use – the three strategies in the ABC approach to safe sex. The ABC of unsafe sex provides an alternative perspective on safe sex by showing how it is affected by processes of giving meaning and interpretation.
The ABC of unsafe sex

- Gendered sexualities of young people in Dakar (Senegal)
The ABC of unsafe sex
Gendered sexualities of young people in Dakar (Senegal)

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op het gebied van de Sociale Wetenschappen

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### List of abbreviations

**ABC of safe sex**  Abstinence, Being faithful and Condom use as the three prevention strategies against HIV infection

**AIDS**  Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

**CERPOD**  Centre d’Études et de Recherche sur la Population pour le Développement

**CR LP**  Center for Reproductive Law and Policy

**DCYP**  Dutch Council on Youth and Population (Raad Jongeren en Bevolking)

**EDS**  Enquête Démographique et de Santé (Demographic Health Survey) (I to IV)

**ESAM**  Enquête Sénégalaise Auprès des Ménages (Senegalese Household Survey)

**FGD**  focus group discussion

**Franc CFA**  Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine

**GEEP**  Groupe pour l’Étude et l’Enseignement de la Population

**HIV**  Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**HDR**  Human Development Report

**ICPD**  International Conference on Population and Development (1994)

**ICPD+5**  Review of ICPD in 1999 (5 years after ICPD)

**INT**  individual interview

**IUD**  Intra Uterine Device

**KAPB**  Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Beliefs

**MFDC**  Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance

**NGO**  non-governmental organisation

**PDS**  Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS)

**PS**  Parti Socialist

**RAWWOO**  Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council

**STD**  sexually transmitted disease

**STI**  sexually transmitted infection

**UN**  United Nations

**VDN**  Voie de Dégagement Nord (a road in Dakar)

**UNAIDS**  Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

**UNDP**  United Nations Development Programme

**UNFPA**  United Nations Population Fund

**UNICEF**  United Nations Children’s Fund

**WHO**  World Health Organisation

**WDR**  World Development Report
My Ph.D. officially started on the 1st of August 1999. I am writing these words of thanks at the very end of December 2006. In the seven years that have passed, I not only ‘delivered’ this thesis, but also got married and had two fantastic children. I would not have been where I am today without the inspiration and support of many. I am grateful to many more people than the few I can mention here.

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One very special and talented person earns a warm word of thanks here, and that is my sister Erna van Eerdewijk. I am grateful to her, for being the dearest sister in the world. On top of that, she has done an incredible amount of work to make this book look as beautiful as it does. With her expertise and our mother’s contribution, this book has become a genuine ‘family production’ of which I am really proud. Speaking of my mother, I am indebted to her for so many more than I can mention here. Most of all, I am grateful to her for making me believe in myself. And I thank her for being there, alone or with Peter, to look after the kids when I had to be in the office or abroad. And to my father, Dad, I hope that in one way or another you have kept track of me, and I hope you are proud of how I have built on the way I was raised by the two of you.

These acknowledgements always keep the best part for the last. Without doubt, the best part throughout all these years has been Bard. Thanks for making me get the most out of myself, and for sharing and celebrating life with me. Now that this thing is over with, let us continue to do so. Kyra and Sven, you are probably too young to realize what is exactly going on, but thanks for just being there and making me smile.

Nijmegen, January 2007
Nafissatou is 20 years old and lives with her mother and several relatives in an apartment not far from Patte d’Oie, a roundabout which directs the highway out of Dakar, the capital of Senegal. She has not finished her secondary education, but has been trained as a hairdresser, which allows her to earn some money. Nafissatou is the mother of a 5-month-old baby boy. She has been dating her boyfriend for several years. Nafissatou had witnessed several unwanted pregnancies among her peers, so was aware of the risks. Yet, she and her boyfriend did not use a condom or any other contraceptive method when they had sex. Nafissatou’s boyfriend promised on several occasions that he wanted to marry her, but so far has not undertaken any initiative in this respect. Now that her son is 5 months old, Nafissatou is tired of her boyfriend’s promises and concludes: “il m’a trompée deux fois”, he has deceived me twice. She has lost her interest in him and indicates that she will take care of herself and that she is open to relationships with other boys and men.

Malick lives in a neighbourhood next to the VDN (la Voie de Dégagement Nord), a road that connects Dakar city with Parcelles Assainies and the other large suburbs. He is 20 years of age, and attends a public secondary school. His current grades do not allow him to pass to the next grade. Since Malick became sexually active at the age of 13, he has made two girls pregnant. The first one when he was about 14 or 15 years old; the second one only a couple of weeks ago. The first pregnancy is the result of what might be called a ‘one night stand’. Malick has refused responsibility for this pregnancy, and is not in contact with the girl. Nor does he take care of the child to which she gave birth. The second pregnancy occurred with a girl that Malick had been dating for a couple of months. Malick accompanied this girl to the clinic where she had an abortion. Ever since, they only see each other irregularly, and the relationship seems to be nearing its end.

Unmarried young people in Dakar, Senegal, are not supposed to be sexually active. Virginity until marriage is highly valued in traditional customs and religious – predominantly Muslim – beliefs. Premarital pregnancies, such as Nafissatou’s or Malick’s, are however a common phenomenon. In fact, almost three in ten of the first births in Senegal are conceived prior to marriage (Diop 1995a: 89–91, 97). All young people who participated in this study could tell about numerous out-of-wedlock pregnancies of cousins, friends, sometimes sisters or brothers, or otherwise girls or boys in their neighbourhoods or schools. The occurrence of these pregnancies suggests that, despite the restrictive norms on premarital sex, young people are having sex. Moreover, the stories disclose the unprotected nature of these sexual contacts. This implies that, besides unwanted pregnancies, unmarried girls and boys are also exposed to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (Humane Immunodeficiency Virus) – the virus that causes the Acquired
Immune Deficiency Syndrome, commonly known as AIDS. This thesis seeks to understand the safe sex practices, or lack thereof, of young, unmarried people in Dakar.

For a long time and in many countries, the sexuality of young people has been neglected and silenced in both policy and research (Hawkins & Meshesa 1994; RAWOO 2002). Over the course of the 1990s, sexual and reproductive health debates and programs started to consider the specific situation of young people. In the context of HIV or STIs as well as unwanted pregnancies, increasing attention has been given to questions on premarital sex and sexuality. Given its contested nature, young people’s experiences and views regarding their sexuality are often not well represented in those debates. This research aims to compensate for this by taking the experiences and perspectives of unmarried Dakarois girls and boys as its starting point.

My interest is to gain an understanding of how young, unmarried people in Dakar live their sexuality. With its explicit focus on sexuality and safe sex, this study hopes to counter the “curious fact that sexuality has rarely been a dominant theme in ethnographic research, despite strong interest in the topic on the part of some of anthropology’s founding practitioners and a few of their descendants” (Lyons & Lyons 2004: 2; see also Davis & Whitten 1987; Tuzin 1991; Kulick 1995; RAWOO 2002). Of course, sexuality has been indirectly touched upon in relation to for instance kinship, marriage, reproduction or gender (see Vance 1999). In a broader context, research on sexuality has been stimulated by the AIDS pandemic and the sexual and reproductive health approach, but in these more medically oriented perspectives sexuality often remained a sub-topic, as the prime interest was in pregnancies or HIV infections (see also Van Eerdewijk & Spronk 2004a, 2004b; Cáceres 2000). This thesis on safe sex, however, puts the lived reality of sex and sexuality central stage. It seeks to gain insight into what is going on in the sexual lives of unmarried girls and boys in Dakar by investigating their intimate relationships and sexual experiences. By looking at what sex and sexuality mean in the lives of these young people, I hope to come to a meaningful understanding of their safe sex practices, not merely as a medical or individual matter, but as a practice that takes shape in the construction of the gendered sexuality of girls and boys.

This introduction details further what this research project and thesis are about. It starts with giving a first impression of Dakar and sketching the position of young people there. This is followed by a look at the international debate in section 2, as that is where the initial ideas for this study originated from. Section 3 is dedicated to conceptualising safe sex and gendered sexuality on a theoretical level. I formulate the central research question in section 4. Here I will also briefly touch upon methodological considerations. Section 5 highlights why Dakar and Senegal are interesting locations to carry out this research project. The outline in section 6 will direct the reader to the remainder of the thesis.

1 Dakar: a first impression

Dakar is situated on a peninsula – Cape Verde – at the most western point of Senegal (map 1.1 below). The old town centre is found at the far peak of the peninsula (map 1.2 below) and houses the commercial banks, the ministries, the presidential palace, the parliament, embassies, as well as ambassadorial residencies, restaurants and hotels. Several large and

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1 For detailed explanations about HIV and AIDS, see e.g. Barnett & Whiteside 2002 (p. 25-62).
busy open markets are situated in this area, and so are a shopping area, the train station, two bus stations with mini-buses and group taxis (*cars rapides* and *cars Ndiaga Ndiayes*), and the harbour – for both international and local ships, and for transporting tourists to the former slave island of Gorée. In addition, a couple of expensive, private schools, some public hospitals, private medical clinics and laboratories, and several large mosques and a well known Catholic church are situated in the city centre. A vast array of *quartiers populaires* (popular neighbourhoods) surrounds the centre with neighbourhoods as Médina, Gueule Tapée, and a little further away Colobane, Point E, Liberté and *Baobab*. This area is known as Grand Dakar, and the majority of these neighbourhoods is residential and houses both the poor and the rich. Médina, Gueule Tapée and Colobane are among the poorer sections, whereas Point E and Mermoz are higher up the scale. In these latter neighbourhoods, one also finds the university campus with its hospital, several embassies and ambassador’s homes and offices from bigger and smaller non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The highway and the VDN start in these areas, and are the two major routes that direct traffic into and out of Dakar. Where they cross the road that comes from the airport and Yoff, one enters into the vast suburbs of Pikine, Parcelles Assainies and Guédiawaye. When one follows the highway beyond the suburbs, one passes the towns of Rufisque and Bargny. Eventually, when it reaches the mainland, the road splits into two directions: south and north. For an outsider, it is almost impossible to see where Dakar ends and the other cities begin. In that sense, the Dakar peninsula can be considered as one extensive urban space.
The suburbs were initially designed to absorb the people that could no longer find a place to live in poor and popular neighbourhoods as Médina, but in time have also offered housing to the more fortunate sections of the population, who could not find sufficient space in Grand Dakar to build their houses. The suburbs thus host poorer and more well-to-do families in buildings that vary from large and spacious villas to small apartment buildings and regular houses as well wooden barracks in slum areas (Werner 1993: 43-57; Mbodj et al. 1993: 176; Antoine et al. 1995: 33-40). At some distance from downtown Dakar, the suburban areas are however less well equipped with hospitals, schools, clinics, and markets, even though efforts are being made to increasingly provide those services in the suburbs themselves. Most people in places as Pikine commute every day to downtown Dakar for their work, as a result of the scarcity of - formal - employment in the suburban areas (Werner 1993: 43-57; Antoine et al. 1995: 33-40). Innumerable car rapides, cars Ndiaga Ndiayes, yellow taxis, clandestine taxis, and official blue buses flood the streets and auto routes everyday, providing transport to the many who cannot afford their own vehicles. But even those means of transport can be too expensive for some of the participants in this study, who therefore have to walk to get to their destination.

As a result of the rural exodus, the number of inhabitants in Dakar has been growing (Enquête Démographique et de Santé III [EDS-III] 1997: 2; Deuxième Enquête Sénégalaise Auprès des Ménages [ESAM-II] 2004: 211). Dakar is the most urbanised and most densely populated part of Senegal, with 22% of the total population living there according to 1997 figures (EDS-III 1997: 2; see also Mbodj et al. 1993). With a total Senegalese population estimated at 9.2 million (Human Development Report [HDR] 2001: 156), this means that...
almost two million people are living in the Dakar region (Enquête sur les Comportements de Prévention en Matière de MST/SIDA dans la Population Générale à Dakar [ECP] 1997: 5).

Religion, politics and urban poverty
Senegal is a predominantly Islamic society with 94% of its population being Muslim. Four percent of the population is Catholic, and a small portion of two percent is categorised as coming from ‘other religions and animism’ (EDS-III 1997: 2). Islamic expansion in Senegal began in the nineteenth century, at the same time that the French presence in the region grew. Although the relationship between Islamic leaders and the colonial nation state has been ambiguous - varying from accommodation to resistance - “for many of the people, Islam appeared as a useful antidote to the pressures of an alien” (Ingham 1990: 117; see also Creevey 1991; Sow 2003). In the climate of social disorder resulting from the dissolution of precolonial Senegambian kingdoms, many converted to Islam because it offered “the believer a legal system, a code of personal conduct and a well defined social order” (McLaughlin 1997: 563). Islam in Senegal belongs to the malakite law school (Abbink et al. 1997: 71-77). As a monotheistic religion, Islam has functioned as a unifying force in Senegal, “de-ethnicizing” the society by making the belief in one single god the most important connection between people (Diouf 1998: 111-123). Being profoundly Muslim, Senegal should, however, not be seen as an Arab culture, as “Islamic and Christian practices have flourished and mingled with traditional practices” that have a long history in the country’s territory (Sow 2003: 70).

There are more than 20 different ethnic groups in Senegal, although some of them are not very large. The largest ethnic groups are the Wolof (43% of total Senegalese population), the Pular (24%), the Sereer (15%), the Jola (5%) and the Mandingue (4%) (EDS-III 1997: 2). Whereas the Jola have an egalitarian social organisation, ethnic groups such as the Wolof and Pular are characterized by a strong hierarchical social organisation distinguishing between slaves (jam), the casted (that monopolized specific crafts) (ñéno), the large group of the non-casted (ger), and finally the nobles (garmi) (Diouf 1998: 66-67, 122-131; see also Hesseling 1982: 90-94). With respect to ethnicity, the percentage of Senegalese inhabitants declaring themselves to be Wolof has been rising steadily in time at the expense of the representation of other ethnic groups such as the Sereer and the Pular. This process of ‘wolofisation’ is being attributed to on the one hand, the high numbers of inter-ethnic marriages, and on the other, the tendency of a lot of people who “cannot in a precise way be linked to any of the other ethnic groups” to declare themselves Wolof (Diouf 1998: 30; see also Faladé 1963: 218). Because marabouts, that is religious and spiritual leaders, had to rely on Wolof for the Islamisation of the Senegalese peoples, Islamisation and wolofisation have gone hand in hand (Dieng 1995: 150). Wolof language is commonly used in religious ceremonies and election campaigns, is spoken by the majority of the Senegalese and has become the dominant language in popular communication (Ingham 1990: 118).

Since independence from the French colonizers in 1960, Senegal developed into “a ‘moderate’, ‘stable’ and ‘democratic’ country” (Coulon & Cruise O’Brien 1989: 163), with more or less democratic elections, that at times have been accompanied with societal unrest, protests, violence and riots. Senegal knows substantial press freedom as well as freedom of speech, a variety of civil society institutions and general respect for human rights (Ingham 1990; see also Hesseling 1982 for the political and constitutional history of Senegal). “The state in Senegal was at least not a political ‘artefact’ working in a void, with-
out effective links with society at large” (Coulon & Cruise O’Brien 1989: 145), but an authentic national political culture, with relatively viable linkages with the local, religious or ethnic communities. The Islamic Sufi brotherhoods (tariqa), which are the dominant form of organisation of Senegalese Muslims, are the most powerful mediators between state and society. The four major brotherhoods - which “are characterized by the submissive relationship of a taalibe or disciple to a spiritual leader or marabout” (McLaughlin 1997: 563) - are Tijaniyya, Mouridiyya, Qadriyya and Layenne (Diouf 1998: 122).

Senegalese politics are characterized by patronial and clientelist relationships in which the Parti Socialiste (PS) has maintained a monopoly position - with the presidencies of Leopold Senghor and Abdou Diouf - until the elections of 2000. These were won by the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS) under the leadership of Abdoulaye Wade, who had used his slogan sopi – which means ‘change’ in Wolof - to mobilize the disinterested young masses without prospects for a job and a future. Wade’s election as president was generally perceived with optimism and gave many, especially young people, hope for the future (Hesseling & Kramer 1996: 19; Havard 2001). An on-going political problem since the early 1980s is the conflict between the government and the Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC) which strives for independence of this southern region which is geographically separated from the rest of Senegal by The Gambia (Coulon & Cruise O’Brien 1989; Ingham 1990; De Jong 1995).

Unfortunately, the stable Senegalese state has been “unable to initiate an effective development policy” (Coulon & Cruise O’Brien 1989: 145). Like many African countries, Senegal is confronted with an economic crisis, and has been subject to structural adjustment policies since the early 1980s (see also Antoine et al. 1995: 148-149). The local currency - Franc CFA – has undergone a devaluation in 1994, which confronted the urban population with strongly rising prices of basic items such as food (Hesseling & Kramer 1996: 36-45). 2 Formal employment is scarce, and it was estimated that, at the end of the 1980s, three quarters of the working population was active in the informal sector (Antoine et al. 1995: 117; see also Hesseling & Kramer 1996: 45-46). Young people, especially those leaving school, are faced with difficulties in finding a job. In a similar way, the transition from apprenticeship - in which out-of-school youth ‘learn on the job’ without a salary - to a paid occupation is problematic. Substantial unemployment makes daily survival for the ordinary population difficult. Twenty-six percent of the national population lives under the poverty line of $ 1 a day, and 68% has to live from less than $ 2 a day (World Development Report [WDR] 2002: 235). These circumstances of poverty have given rise to the expression ‘vivre sénégalaisement’, which refers to “the ways of getting by, the art of making do without the situation being fundamentally modified, […] of ‘struggling along’ in precarious circumstances” (Coulon & Cruise O’Brien 1989: 160). The informal economy, relational dependency networks, tontines and other credit and saving associations have become important in making ends meet. The marabouts play a crucial role in this respect, as they have the religious duty to help their talibés. Unofficial Arabic and Koran schools for instance cater for students who are excluded from the formal educational system. Some parents also consciously decide to send their children to these schools for religious reasons,
because they are critical of formal schools, or because they seek to maintain relations with the marabout in question. Another example is the key role that the brotherhoods, especially the Mourides, have played in facilitating migration, both internally and internationally. “Brotherhood Islam is [...] a structure of aid and support, mostly materially, for destitute peasants, urban dwellers in distress, and even merchants or businessmen who can no longer count upon the assistance of the patrimonial and clientelist state of yesteryear. [...] On this point as on so many others, Islam offers recourse and an alternative solution” (Coulon & Cruise O’Brien 1989: 158, 161).

The day-to-day struggles to find money for ‘la dépense quotidienne’ are captured in the well-known cartoon character goorgoorlou in a satiric newspaper, which narrates in a comic but all so recognisable way of the difficulties of family survival in Dakar (Hesseling & Kramer 1996: 36; see also Biya 2001: 78). International migration is by many seen as a way out of the economic distress and weak future prospects (e.g. Riccio 2001). In 2004, 170,000 Senegalese left the country, and 54% of them went to the United States, Canada, or European countries such as France, Italy, Spain, and the rest to (West) African countries (ESAM-II 2004: 229, 234).

Being a meeting place for the different ethnic groups from Senegal and a metropole that serves as a host city for immigrants from other Western African countries, Dakar knows a very diverse population. Apart from national, ethnic and religious differences, Dakar is also characterized by profound socio-economic contrasts. At one extreme, one finds the spacious villas, luxury hotels and expensive cars of the local political and commercial elites and the community of expatriates working with foreign embassies, international organisations or private companies. The trendy restaurants, bars, casinos and nightclubs that can be found from the Plateau to Almadies at the service of this rich elite make that “an atmosphere of cultural and social decadence prevails over Dakar” (Biya 2001: 76). At the other extreme, one sees the homeless, the unemployed and the marginalized (Werner 1993). The largest part of the Dakarois population finds itself between these two extremes. Living in the crowded quartiers populaires and the suburbs, they try to make the best out of the always insufficient resources they have.

**Young people in Dakar**

This diverse urban context, with Islam and Wolof as homogenizing forces, is the setting in which this study attempts to gain more insight into the way unmarried girls and boys shape their sexuality and protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and infections with sexually transmitted infections, and particularly HIV. Young people make up a large part of Dakar’s population: 74% of the inhabitants is under 30 (Hesseling & Kraemer 1996: 31). This is not surprising given the young character of the Senegalese population: in 1997, 48% of the Senegalese was younger than 15 years and only 5% was older than 65 years (EDS-III 1997: 10; see also Mbodj et al. 1993: 168-169).  

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3 The total population of Senegal was 4.8 million in 1975 and is expected to rise to an estimated 13.5 million in 2015 (Human Development Report 2001: 156). It is expected that 40 % of Senegal’s population will be under the age of 15 years in 2015, and 3% older than 65 years (Ibid.: 156). For Africa as a whole, the percentage of under 15 is 45 % (1999), and estimated at 42 % in 2015. The population above 65 is 3 % in 1999, and is expected to be 3 % of the total population in 2015. The Senegalese population is urbanising: in 1999 47% of the population lived in urban areas, compared to 34 % in 1975 and an estimated 57 % in 2015 (Ibid.: 156). The urban population for the whole of Africa at different points in time was/is 21 % (1975), 34 % (1999) and 43 % (2015) (Ibid.: 157).
About half of the young people has gone to, or at least started, primary school: the net primary school attendance rate is 44% of girls and 51% of boys in Senegal (1992-2001) (UNICEF 2003a: 98). A far smaller group continues into secondary education: 15% of girls and 24% of boys (Ibid.: 98). Many secondary school students leave school before passing for their final exam, le baccalauréat, or le bac in short. Scholastic inaptitude in combination with limited financial resources to meet the school fees are the most common reasons for dropping out of primary or secondary school. Compared to in-school youth, the situation of their out-of-school peers is disadvantaged, as they are for instance less trained to speak French, even though they often know some basic phrases. For many young people, formal schooling does not take up a prominent place in their everyday lives. Some of these out-of-school youth go to Koran schools. Others, especially girls, enter into informal education centres, where they learn skills such as sewing (couture) and basic literacy such as reading, writing and calculating. Girls have few opportunities for employment, but do work as domestic servants (bonne) or for instance sell fruits or food. Girls always have responsibilities at home in terms of their assistance in household work. Boys are more likely than girls to be engaged in apprenticeships, day labour or petty trading. As apprenti they work in an atelier, as for instance a carpenter or metal worker, under supervision of a boss who teaches them the technical skills, until they are qualified enough to work on their own. The apprentis often receive little or no pay or extensive instructions from their boss, and as a consequence feel “exploited as cheap labourers”, as one of the boys in this study put it. But even apprenticeships or petty trading are activities that can be hard to obtain, and some boys pass their time ‘drinking tea’, that is, without work or opportunities to earn money.

High unemployment, combined with the difficulties in housing and accommodation, make that young men are facing increasing problems in accumulating sufficient resources to get married. This has led to a postponement of marriage (Hesseling & Kramer 1996: 52; Stol 1978; Mondain 2005). For girls as well, age of marriage is rising, especially in urban areas and among girls who have gone to school (EDS-III 1997: 59), a trend which has been noted in many African countries (Bledsoe & Cohen 1993: 16-36). As long as they are not married, young people still live with their parents, or other relatives. Girls in particular do not leave the home as long as they are not married. For boys it is less problematic to leave the parental home prior to marriage, especially when they have managed to find a stable job and earn a sufficient income to take care of themselves. Having left the home, they continue to usually contribute to the family expenses.

The postponement of marriage creates a longer period in which the unmarried can engage in intimate relationships and premarital sex, because girls and boys become physically and sexually mature before they enter into a legal union. These relationships and sexual contacts are the point of interest of this thesis. Both tradition and religion in Senegal attach high value to virginity at marriage. This in principle counts for both girls and boys, but in practice it is only the girl’s virgin status that is at stake during the wedding night (jëballe). According to Islam, sex is to take place between husband and wife within marriage. This makes premarital sexuality unacceptable. The already mentioned out-of-wedlock pregnancies and exposure to STIs suggest that young, unmarried people in Dakar often do not live up to this norm of premarital abstinence. This raises questions about what these boys and girls are up to. This thesis attempts to shed light on the sexual lives of unmarried young people in Dakar, a reality that is silenced and rendered invisible by the dominant discourse that restricts sex to marriage. It explores what kind of intimate relationships girls and boys have and under what circumstances they engage in sex. Are they sexually active? When do they have sex, and why? With respect to unwanted
pregnancies and exposure to HIV and other STIs, do they protect themselves by practising
safe sex. How do they look at condom use? Do they rely on fidelity? And what are their
attitudes towards abstinence? As the following sub-section shows, it is only recently that
young people’s sexuality and safe sex practices have become subject to interventions from
the state, NGOs and international organisations.

Policy interventions on young people’s sexual and reproductive health
Policy interventions on young people’s sexuality in Senegal can roughly be divided into
three separate, yet possibly interrelated, themes: early sexuality and pregnancies, female
circumcision, and sex prior to marriage. Early pregnancies carry large health risks and are
often the result of early marriages. In order to promote the well-being of young girls,
interventions in this field problematise and discourage early marriages. The struggle
against early marriages is extremely important (see Bruce & Clark 2004), but not the
topic of this thesis. Female circumcision is not particularly widespread in Senegal with a
rate of 28% of all women being circumcised (EDS-IV 2005: 33-34). Yet, there are great dis-
parities and prevalence is about 60% in the Casamance region in the South
(CRLP/GREFELS 1999: 152; see also Dellenborg 2004) and 62% among the Pular, the
second largest ethnic group (EDS-IV 2005: 33-34). Since 1999, female genital mutilation is
forbidden by Senegalese law which protects a woman’s right to physical integrity; those
who (attempt to) harm the integrity of female genital organs can be punished with
imprisonment (six months to five year) (Ibid.). Government policies aim at fighting the
practice in cooperation with NGOs and international organisations.

This study deals with the third theme: premarital sexuality. The policy concerns
target, on the one hand, the socially unacceptable character of premarital sex, and on the
other, the health risks related HIV infection or other STIs as well as unwanted pregnancies.
It is within these different and often conflicting parameters that little by little more
initiatives are being developped to address young people’s sexual and reproductive health,
of which I give a brief overview here.

In contrast to many other African countries, Senegal recognised the existence of HIV
among its population shortly after the first cases were detected in the country in 1986 and
acted on it by immediately establishing a national AIDS program (Joint United Nations
Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS] 1999b; Meda et al. 1999). By 1987, a system was set up
to ensure the safety of blood transfusions (UNAIDS 1999b). Considerable effort was put into
generating societal support for the AIDS programme, and the government was for instance
supported by an active scientific community. Moreover, as a result of a survey, information
campaigns and policy dialogue, religious leaders of both Islamic and Christian faiths became
active supporters of the national AIDS campaign (see e.g. African Consultants International
1997). In addition, an information campaign under parliamentarians was successful, as was
one under journalists, editors and the media in general. The tradition of active involvemen
of NGOs and community organisations in health and development issues also provided a
good basis for their responsiveness to the challenge of the AIDS epidemic (UNAIDS 1999b).
The National Committee to Prevent AIDS had an interdisciplinary character and represen-
ted doctors, biologists, as well as sociologists, NGO staff members and civil society. This
wide support for halting the spread of HIV/AIDS explains why knowledge of AIDS is high
among the Senegalese population: information has been disseminated through radio,
television, newspapers, national AIDS walks, puppet shows, theatre plays, knowledge
quizzes and competitions, poster contest, as well as through mosques or churches (UNAIDS
1999b). Apparently, young people were also reached through these various channels.
More specifically, young people have been addressed by what is called ‘family life education’ which has become part of the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools since 1992. A survey however revealed that “only nine to 15 percent of adolescents had received Family Life Education”, and that they received it too late, for instance when they were 16 years or older while the average age of first sexual intercourse was 16 (Naré, Katz & Tolley 1997: 22). Moreover, its content might be open for improvements and materials are often not readily available to teachers (see e.g. Hüsken 2002). Several studies in Africa found that despite the fact that knowledge about reproduction may increase with family life education programs, they generate little adequate knowledge on sexual intercourse or contraception use, nor a positive attitude towards them (see Naré, Katz & Tolley 1997: 22). In its report on Senegal as one of the African ‘success countries’ in AIDS prevention, UNAIDS carefully remarks:

Messages for young people have tended to focus on increasing knowledge about the risks of unprotected sex and encouraging abstinence. But there is some concern that actual provision of services for young people who do choose to be sexually active has been inadequate. (UNAIDS 1999b: 14)

In addition, an evaluation revealed the reluctance of teachers and peer educators to explicitly address questions of sexuality and condom use in their classes and activities (Population Council 2003).

Apart from the national AIDS program, young people’s sexual and reproductive health matters have also been the concern of numerous small and larger NGOs, community organisations, and international organisations and United Nations agencies working in Senegal (Nanitelamio 1997). They are engaged in interventions to spread information or provide services to young people about HIV/AIDS and safe sex, as well as other matters such as pregnancies. Some provide counselling to young people, others organise events as theatre plays, discussions and debates. One NGO targets schools through the establishment of family life education clubs. Special efforts are being made to reach out-of-school youth. Youth associations and clubs - that are organised around the same theme of family life education – are the vehicle for contacting those young people who are not in schools. Some NGOs engage in specific projects to reach special groups like migrant girls that come to work in the cities as housemaids. Finally, some programmes are involved in training teachers, community leaders, young people, or clinic personnel in issues related to young people’s sexual and reproductive health matters.

However, there are few specific clinics for young people to turn to when they have questions on sexual or reproductive health (Nanitelamio 1997). Some clinics are located within or next to hospitals, and almost all of them offer family planning services to adults as well. A study on access of adolescents to reproductive health services in Dakar (Naré, Katz & Tolley 1997) revealed that young people had difficulties in actually identifying the location of the clinics. They are also embarrassed to go to such clinics, especially as anonymity is problematic when they can be seen entering the clinic by the general public (Centre d’Etudes et de Recherche sur la Population pour le Développement [CERPOD] 1997; Hüsken 2002). Service providers are also not very helpful and open, and often display a judgemental attitude towards the young people trying to access information and services at their centres (Naré Katz & Tolley 1996; CERPOD 1997; Nanitelamio 1997). On top of that, counselling to young people reflects dominant norms of virginity and focuses on discouraging sexual activity before marriage. It was also noted that “none of the [young people in the study] received the method they requested” (Naré, Katz & Tolley 1997: 19).
The law does not explicitly exclude unmarried young people from access to contraceptives (Natelamio 1997; Narè, Katz & Tolley 1997), but until the late 1990s most clinics and services focused on married couples. In 1997, the Ministry of Youth and Sports opened special service centres for adolescents which are known as Centre Ado (Center for Reproductive Law and Policy/Groupe de Recherche Femmes et Lois au Sénégal [CRLP/GREFELS] 1999). These centres are promising initiatives, but little is known about their accessibility and quality. Unfortunately, the participants in this study did not visit those centres and did not refer to them as important sources of information or services. The exception to this were the girls from the centre social in Parcelles Assainies, whose centre was based on the compound of the Centre Ado.

In short, there is a growing attention in Senegal to young people’s sexual and reproductive health. A lot of effort is displayed in the context of the fight against AIDS. Less attention is paid to unwanted pregnancies and other STIs, even though the problem of premarital pregnancies is larger. Campaigns, services and information focus on spreading factual knowledge and on promoting abstinence. Much less effort is put into addressing contraception and condoms, sexual matters in a broader sense or improving young people’s so-called life skills to make and act on decisions with respect to their sexual and reproductive health, because sexuality and condom use are still experienced as ‘taboo’ subjects (Population Council 2003). Staff in NGOs, community organisations, the government and international organisations is committed to working in the field of young people’s reproductive health and sexuality. Their efforts are still young and their challenge is to further develop and shape their interventions in order to fully meet the needs and concerns of young people. This study hopes to add to that by, on the one hand, putting the experiences and perspectives of Dakarois girls and boys central, and on the other hand, explicitly addressing subjects that are considered ‘taboo’, such as sex and condom use.

2 The international debate

The initial ideas for this study took shape in a time when I was actively advocating for young people’s sexual and reproductive rights at the international level at United Nations conferences. In this capacity, I worked with other young people of varying ages and nationalities to convince governments to recognize the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people and respond to them by promoting and protecting young people’s rights. While working at this international level I felt a growing need to know more about the extent to which young people in their various local contexts and their daily lives actually exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. That is how I came to start up this research project on the safe sex practices of unmarried girls and boys in Dakar. In due time, my research interests have shifted from the notions of sexual and reproductive rights to a focus on sexuality and gender. Discussing this shift here helps to clarify the background of this study and why it has taken the approach it has. The notions of sexual

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4 I was a member of the Dutch Council on Youth and Population (DCYP), as well as a member of an international network advocating for young people’s sexual and reproductive rights — which took on the name Youth Coalition. In February 1999, I represented the DCYP in the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Forum on ICPD+5 in The Hague (ICPD+5 is a shorthand for the 5-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development). Later that year I was the youth representative on the Dutch government delegation to the United Nations conference on ICPD+5 in New York. In August 1998, I also represented the DCYP at the World Youth Forum in Braga.
and reproductive rights as well as attention for the specific situation of young people came about during the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that took place in Cairo in 1994. This conference marked a breakthrough in two aspects that are relevant to this study. Firstly, ICPD marked a shift from population control to a reproductive health approach. Secondly, ICPD put young people’s reproductive health needs on the agenda. Both breakthroughs have played a part in the direction this research has taken and that is why I discuss them here.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights
In the beginning of the 1990s, after many years of advocacy, the international women’s movement succeeded in putting the concerns of women at the core of the population and development agenda. The reproductive health approach evolved out of the critique of the international women’s movement on population control. Until ICPD in 1994, the population control perspective had dominated discussions about population and development, and was the driving force behind family planning. Conventional population policies focus on demographic trends and are concerned with demographic problems. This mostly meant a concern with ‘overpopulation’, in which the size of the population was considered to be too large, and as such causing economic and environmental problems. The solution is sought in a reduction of population growth by lowering fertility rates with family planning methods (Gupta 1996; Bandarage 1997; for Senegal see Mboj et al. 1993). The population control perspective consists mainly of technical interventions that emphasize long-acting, provider-dependent birth control methods. With incentives and disincentives women can be pressured to use certain methods (Hardon 1992; Watkins 1993; Richter 1994; Keysers 1994; Gupta 1996; Bandarage 1997).

Population policies have become the subject of fierce criticism that exposed their bio-medical and reductionist character, in which women are turned into fertility ‘factors’ instead of actors, and even worse, in which women with their high fertility rates are portrayed as a barrier to development. The international women’s movement criticised the population control perspective for its adverse effects on women’s health and well-being and for not paying attention to women’s needs and concerns (Hardon 1992). The reproductive health advocates turned attention to issues as maternal morbidity and mortality, unsafe abortion, HIV/AIDS, and sexual violence including rape and incest (Watkins 1993; Richter 1996). In the light of this critique, claims were made for reproductive and sexual health and rights, in which the central concerns are not demographic objectives but women’s health and bodily autonomy (Keysers 1994). As such, reproductive health has been defined as:

A condition in which the reproductive process is accomplished in a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and is not merely the absence of disease disorders of the reproductive process. Reproductive health, therefore, implies that people have the ‘ability’ to reproduce, to regulate their fertility and to practise and enjoy sexual relationships. It further implies that reproduction is carried to a ‘successful outcome’ through infant and child survival, growth and healthy development. It finally implies that women can go safely through pregnancy and childbirth, that fertility regulation can be achieved without health hazards and that people are safe in having sex. (Fathall, quoted in Cook & Plata 1994: 30)

The shift to reproductive health in the ICPD conference has fundamentally shaped three starting points of this study. First of all, an important element in the notion of
reproductive health is the so-called ‘sexuality connection’ (Dixon-Mueller 1993). The argument is that reproduction and fertility cannot be understood nor addressed without considering sexuality, as they are manifested through sexual activities and relations, and because sexual attitudes and behaviours affect reproduction. Sexual health was therefore defined as a vital element of reproductive health. It should be understood as

the integration of somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexual being, in ways that are positively enriching and that enhance personality, communication and love, and thus the notion of sexual health implies a positive approach to human sexuality. (World Health Organization [WHO] 1974, quoted in Appelman & Reysoo 1994: 9)

This study takes up this challenge of making the ‘sexuality connection’, by putting questions of sexuality central in its investigations.

Secondly, the reproductive health approach has shaped this research project in its endeavour to go beyond a merely medical and technical view on reproduction and sexuality. In criticising the population control perspective for having isolated procreation from gender relations and sexual behaviour, the reproductive health approach points to the importance of social relations and power processes. Gender is paramount in the socio-cultural relations between a woman and a man in which reproduction and sexuality takes place (Postel 1991; Dixon-Mueller 1993; Appelman & Reysoo 1994). In relation to AIDS for example, it is clear that gender plays a role, in the sense that both physically and socially women are more vulnerable to HIV infection. The chance of a woman to get HIV through sex with a seropositive man is much higher than the chance for a man who has intercourse with a seropositive woman. Biological factors for this are the higher concentration of HIV in semen than in vaginal secretions, and the larger and more vulnerable surfaces of female genitals through which HIV can penetrate more easily, compared to men’s genitals. In addition, menstruation can also facilitate HIV transmission to and from women (Berer & Ray 1993; Schoepf 1995: 30-31; UNAIDS 2000; Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 38-42; Jungar & Oinas 2004: 106; for gender and AIDS see also RAWOO 2002: 13). Apart from these biological explanations, it is also clear that social factors impact on women’s greater chances to get HIV. Such factors include women’s lack of power to determine when, where and whether sex takes place, to negotiate protection through condom use, non-penetrative sex, or to negotiate that the partner remains faithful (Berer & Ray 1993; Schoepf 1995: 30-31; UNAIDS 2000; Jungar & Oinas 2004: 106). Because of the pivotal importance of gender in matters of sex and the protection of reproductive health, this thesis puts the ‘genderedness’ of sexuality central in its the perspective on safe sex.

A third way in which this study has been shaped by the reproductive health approach is through its emphasis on sexual and reproductive rights and the underlying exposure of power relations. Feminist advocates from different parts of the world argue that women’s reproductive and sexual health is suffering from women’s lack of control over their own fertility, sexuality and bodies (Appelman & Reysoo 1994; e.g. Petchesky 1998). The basic premise is that reproductive and sexual health cannot be realised and protected without rights of individuals over the body, sexuality and reproduction. Sexual and reproductive rights define the rights of all individuals, women and men, to make decisions concerning procreation and sexuality. They encompass, inter alia, the right to the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health; the freedom to decide when, if, with whom and how to express one’s sexuality; as well as the freedom to decide on the number, timing and spacing of one’s children; the right to regulate one’s fertility safely and effectively; the right to understand and enjoy one’s sexuality and the right to make these
decisions free of discrimination, coercion and violence (Dixon-Mueller 1993; Appelman & Reysoo 1994; Gupta 1996; CRLP 1999a). The notion of sexual and reproductive rights thus points to how power, especially in terms of gender, impacts on reproduction and sexuality. This study aims at incorporating this power perspective by investigating young people’s agency to practice safe sex.

**Young people’s sexuality**

Besides the emergence of the reproductive health approach, ICPD has also been a memorable conference in terms of putting young people on the international development agenda. For a long time, young people’s sexuality had been a neglected issue in family planning and reproductive health, in policies, services and research (Hawkins & Meshesha 1994). Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, young people’s sexuality is attracting more and more attention. ICPD was one of the first international conferences where efforts were made to address young people’s sexuality, or more precisely their reproductive health. Young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights were and are among the most contested issues during this and subsequent United Nations conferences. Youth advocates and the women’s movement demanded sex education and accessible and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services for young people. They claimed sexual and reproductive rights for young people and demanded the involvement of young people themselves in policies and decision-making processes that affect their lives.

The claims to rights, information and services are motivated by the extent of young people’s exposure to unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions, as well as sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Worldwide, each year 15 million young women between the ages of 15 to 19 years give birth. The major causes of death for girls in this age group are pregnancy-related complications. Pregnancy and delivery carry more risks for younger women: girls under 18 are two to five times more likely to die during pregnancy or delivery than women between the ages 18 to 25 (WHO 1998a; WHO 1998b; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] 1999). Estimates are made that each year 1 to 4.4 million young women have an abortion (WHO 1998b). Young people are also exposed to STIs and HIV/AIDS. Globally, one in 20 adolescents attracts an STI each year. It is estimated that every day 7,000 young people under the age of 25 are infected which HIV, that is five HIV infections in young people every minute (UNFPA 1999). There are clear indications that young women are especially vulnerable to HIV infection, because of both social and physical factors: with respect to the latter, girls are more vulnerable to HIV infection because the surface of their less mature genitals and reproductive organs is more easily penetrated by HIV (Berer & Ray 1993: 45-46; Schoepf 1995: 30-31; UNAIDS 2000; Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 38-42; Jungar & Oinas 2004: 106). Unwanted pregnancies and STIs are not only a risk in terms of health, but can, as a result of stigmatisation, also have severe consequences on education, employment, marriage, sexuality and reproduction, both now and in the future (e.g. Roemer 1985).

The fact that conventional family planning and reproductive health programmes did not address young people’s needs in this field is partly related to the focus of population control programmes on reproductive couples, which were assumed to be married (Hawkins & Meshesha 1994). Moreover, in many countries legislation explicitly restricts access to contraceptives to married couples, or requires parental consent for the delivery of contraceptives to young people (Roemer 1985). Resistance to offering services to the unmarried is often related to cultural and religious values in many parts of the world that disapprove of sex before marriage. In many parts of the world, young people’s sexuality is
a sensitive subject over which strong moral claims are made (Tan 2002). Assuming that young people are not supposed to have sex, the argument is that young people do not need sex education or access to contraceptive methods (Hawkins & Meshesha 1994). In such a context, young people find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they are sexually active but lack the information and the means to do so safely (e.g. Reysoo 1999). This thesis deals with this conflict and the struggle that young people experience in giving meaning to their sexuality and themselves. The acknowledgement that the generation between the ages 10 to 19 years make up 20% of the world’s population makes the questions of young people’s sexual and reproductive health even more pressing (UNFPA 2004: 73).

Questioning premarital sexuality
When I started this research project, I was interested in how young people exercise and negotiate their sexual and reproductive rights in the specific context of Dakar. Being aware of the controversies surrounding young people’s sexuality at the international level of UN conferences, I wanted to know more about how young people in local contexts claimed such rights. But somehow I seemed to get stuck in translating the notions of sexual and reproductive rights from the international level to the local context of Dakar. During my first visits to Dakar, it occurred to me that the rights language was hardly ever used. When referring to issues of HIV/AIDS as well as unwanted pregnancies or young people’s sexuality, almost nobody spoke in terms of sexual and reproductive rights. Neither young people themselves, nor NGO staff or government documents employed these terms. During instances that I used them, my partners in conversation did not seem to be familiar with the meanings that are attached to sexual and reproductive rights in the international scene. During one discussion, an NGO staff member corrected me by saying that, in French, you cannot speak of reproductive rights (droits reproductifs), but that I probably meant the right to reproduce (droit à la reproduction). Although the right to reproduce is part of the notion of reproductive rights, they also encompass the right to not reproduce, as well as many other rights, so this was not what I meant to say. This incident illustrated that the terms sexual and reproductive rights seemed to arouse more confusion than clarity. In the context of Dakar, they functioned as top-down concepts without much connection to the local - socially and culturally specific - reality. Being out of context in Dakar, the rights language was not very helpful for my research undertakings.

I therefore abandoned the focus on rights. Yet, although the terminology seemed to be out of context, the issues of power in matters of sexuality and gender that are behind the notions of reproductive and sexual rights seemed to be extremely relevant to investigate in the Dakar context. I had to move beyond the notion of rights and hence reformulated my research interests into questions of power, sexuality and gender. To what extent are young people able to protect themselves from STI infections, including HIV, and unwanted pregnancies? To what extent can they practice safe sex? The way in which young people’s safe sex practices are shaped by the constitution of their gendered sexuality hence become central in this study.

3 Conceptualising safe sex and gendered sexuality

The theoretical and conceptual reflections in this section explain the perspective that this study takes on understanding safe sex practices. On the basis of a critical consideration of quantitative studies on safe sex, I come to formulating my approach to safe sex practices by
embedding it in the broader context of how the gendered sexuality of Dakarois girls and boys is constituted. The conceptualisation of sexuality and gender as socially constructed is crucial to my analysis, and so are the notions of discourse and agency, which therefore merit discussion here.

**Sex and safe sex**

Safe sex has become increasingly important in the light of the AIDS pandemic. The HIV virus can only be transmitted through contaminated body fluids: blood, sperm, vaginal secretions or mother milk. The virus can enter the bloodstream after it has passed an entry point in the skin or mucous membranes in sufficient quantities (Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 38). Sexual contacts are the most important mode of transmission, and HIV infection can occur through vaginal and anal sex (Berer & Ray 1993; UNAIDS 1998; Barnett & Whiteside 2002). The chance of HIV infection in vaginal unprotected sex is 0.33-1 for female-to-male transmission and 1-2 for male-to-female transmission (per 1,000 exposures). In comparison, the probability to become infected with HIV through male-to-male unprotected anal sex is 5 to 30 (per 1,000 exposures). The chances of transmitting HIV through oral sex are small, and infection can only occur “if a person has abrasions in the mouth or gum disease” (Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 38). Other – non sexual – modes of transmission of HIV, that are not the focus of this thesis, are mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding and blood contact through transfusions or injections of blood (products) or the use of non-sterilized needles, razor blades, etcetera (Berer & Ray 1993; UNAIDS 1998; Barnett & Whiteside 2002). In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS mainly spreads through sex between women and men, that is through heterosexual contacts: an estimated 90 percent of HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa results from heterosexual sex or from mother to infant infection (UNAIDS 1998; Barnett & Whiteside 2002; Stillwaggon 2003: 810). In other regions of the world HIV has spread through male-to-male sex or through drug injection. Because heterosexual contacts are the main mode of transmission in Africa, women are more heavily affected by the HIV pandemic in Africa than in other regions: “four out of five HIV-positive women in the world live in Africa” (UNAIDS 1998: 10).

Up to this day, there is no cure for AIDS, either in the form of a protective vaccine or of effective medication. New medications are being developed and used in Europe and North America: the so-called triple combination therapies suppress the further replication of the HIV/AIDS virus. If HIV infected persons take the medication according to prescription, they are assured of longer and healthier lives, and AIDS does not necessarily result in death (Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 25-62). However, these therapies, also known as antiretroviral treatments, are far too expensive for and consequently inaccessible to the majority of the people in sub-Sahara Africa. They also require close medical supervision, which is often not available in health care systems in African countries. Against this background, prevention from HIV infection has been and still is a central strategy in protecting one’s health and slowing down the AIDS epidemic (Cleland & Ferry 1995). Prevention efforts have mainly focused on safe sex.

Safe sex is about protection from unwanted pregnancies and from infection with STIs and HIV. Pregnancies and infections can be avoided in two ways: by not having sex and by having sex while using a contraceptive. There is a wide range of contraceptives, such as different sorts of pills, the condom, the intra-uterine device (IUD). Most contraceptive methods have been designed – in the context of birth control and family planning objectives - to protect against unwanted conception, but do not provide protection against
HIV infection. The only method that protects against both pregnancies and infections with HIV, or any other STI, is the condom. Abstinence, or not having any type of sex, also protects against both risks. Unsafe sex are sexual contacts in which no protection is used, and which consequently carry a risk of STI/HIV infection or unwanted pregnancy. A common way to define safe sex is through the ABC of three protection strategies: Abstinence, Being faithful and Condom use (e.g. UNAIDS/UNICEF/WHO 2002: 13; see also Barnett & Whiteside 2002; Welbourn 2002; Sinding 2005). In this ABC, abstinence stands for having no sexual relations. Being faithful implies having sexual relations with one partner only, of which you know, and this is very important, that (s)he is ‘safe’, meaning not carrying an STI or HIV. Condom use refers to having sexual intercourse while using a condom, and as such offers protection against infection from a possible seropositive partner.

The safe sex ABC is not as simple and straightforward as its format suggests (see also Sinding 2005). A first point of confusion is what is understood with the term ‘sex’ – which is a question that has also been raised in broader contexts (e.g. Kulick 1995: 6-7). Is kissing and caressing sex? Touching genitals? Is sex only the sexual act where the penis enters the vagina? Or is oral sex also considered to be sex? What about manual stimulation of the penis or clitoris? Does sex include the practice of anal sex? The ‘safety’ of the ABC strategies varies according to the sexual acts that are included and excluded in the definition of sex. If sex is commonly understood as penetrative vaginal sex, what does that imply for abstinence? Does abstinence then mean that penis-vagina penetration does not take place, but that other sexual acts are practiced? In that case, what risks do manual, oral or anal sex carry? Is it necessary to protect the latter with condoms? One of the issues that this thesis addresses is how young, unmarried people in Dakar look at sex: what does it mean according to them? Moreover, how do they understand the three safe sex strategies captured in the ABC format. What do they consider safe sex? And what does the practice of abstinence, fidelity and condom use mean to them?

Another way to put the straightforwardness of the safe sex ABC into question is by specifying the protection of the strategies in relation to different sexual practices. I already mentioned how the working of many contraceptives is directed towards avoiding pregnancies, but not at protecting against infections with HIV or other STIs. With respect to fidelity it has to be noted that, if practiced properly, it can provide protection against HIV and STIs, but does not help against unwanted pregnancies. In a similar way, the risks to pregnancies and/or HIV/STIs have to be considered for different sexual acts. Pregnancies can be conceived through penetrative vaginal sex, where the semen enters the vagina and the womb. Anal, oral or manual sex do not constitute a risk of unwanted pregnancies. Opting for anal sex in an attempt to avoid pregnancies can however mean a substantial exposure to HIV infection as I noted earlier. Protection against HIV and STIs does not always fall together with avoidance of conception, as for instance becomes clear in the case of couples who seek to have a baby: where does that leave protection against HIV? Given these complexities behind the ABC format, it becomes relevant to consider what young people in Dakar want to protect themselves against. Are they concerned about premarital pregnancies or HIV, or both? What strategies are available to them? What are their attitudes towards the different options, and why do they practice or not practice them?

**Safe sex in surveys**

This thesis is not the first study into safe sex. With the growing interest in reproductive
and sexual health, and in the context of the AIDS pandemic, more and more research is being done on sexual behaviour and safe sex. Many of these studies are based on surveys and approach sexual behaviour from a quantitative perspective (Kippax & Crawford 1993; Cáceres 2000; MacPhail & Campbell 2001).

Typical questions in such surveys are for instance on knowledge about AIDS and STIs, knowledge about and attitudes towards contraception, contraceptive use, prevalence of premarital sex, age of first sexual intercourse, frequency of sexual intercourse, and so on. Findings are processed into statistics, percentages and tables about sexual behaviour.

Although these studies that calculate behavioural occurrences are valuable in their own right, they are also problematic, because they give "only a partial picture of the complex factors shaping sexuality" (MacPhail & Campbell 2001: 1614). "They more often tell us how much, when, and how often events occur than why or how things come to pass" (Cáceres 2000: 246).

This type of survey and KAPB studies on sexual behaviour has been criticised on both theoretical and methodological grounds:

The limitations of [dominant] paradigms [in such research] are perhaps most glaring at a theoretical level, as sexual behaviour research within the context of AIDS has almost never been driven by a theory of sexual behaviour. Indeed in most instances, it has not been driven by any theory at all – the emphasis has been on the urgent need for descriptive data. (Parker 1995: 259)

KAPB studies are part of a tradition of sex research whose concern was “to ‘naturalize’ human sexual behaviour [... and to] describe, as exhaustively as possible, the forms of sexual expression that exist ‘in nature’” (Parker 1995: 259-260; see also Simon 2003 on the 'naturalization of sex'). They were a response to the general lack of understanding of sexuality in the early 1980s, when the emerging AIDS epidemic required information about sexuality, sexual behaviour and practices (Parker & Aggleton 1999). The so-called naturalist tradition has succeeded in transforming sexuality from a domain of morality and religion into a field of scientific investigation, and has shaped the approach of public health and health sciences to sexuality. Demographic research on population concerns and family planning has also contributed to this quantitative orientation in safe sex studies (Cleland & Ferry 1995: 3). The, unfortunate, focus on individual behaviour grows out of the fact that in mainstream medicine and psychology ‘the individual’ and ‘behaviour’ have often formed the basic unit of analysis (Kippax & Crawford 1993: 256). This emphasis on individual determinants of sexual behaviour is problematic, because “the diverse social, cultural, economic, and political factors potentially influencing or even shaping sexual experience have more often than not been ignored” (Parker 1995: 261). The assumption that “sexual behaviour is the result of rational decision-making based on knowledge” is therefore incorrect (MacPhail & Campbell 2001: 1614). Policy discourse, that has taken shape in this naturalist tradition, has come to falsely see behaviour change as the outcome

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of intervention programmes (Kippax & Crawford 1993: 256).

In contrast to the KAPB studies, this thesis departs from the premise that questions of meaning and culture are of central importance in understanding sexuality and safe sex practices:

The AIDS pandemic has brought to the fore the essential and extremely problematic nature of sex and sexuality. Perhaps for the first time in living memory, we are faced with the imperative of having to examine what sex and sexuality really mean in their numerous socio-cultural contexts; how sexuality is constructed and played out in both the public and private areas of life; what the relationships are between health/wellness and disease/unwellness and their relevance in our sexual behaviour. (Mc Fadden 1992: 158, emphasis added)

KAPB studies fail to consider the cultural meanings of sexual actions and behaviours in their larger social contexts, but the complexity of a phenomenon as sexuality cannot be captured in decontextualised quantifications of individual behaviours (Kippax & Crawford 1993; Cáceres 2000; Parker 2001; MacPhail & Campbell 2001; Simon 2003). Put differently, “not all that counts can be counted, and not all that can be counted counts” (Nyamnjoh 2005: 297). A qualitative perspective that takes the socio-cultural aspects into account is pivotal for a fuller understanding of sexuality and the practice, or lack thereof, of safe sex. This fuller understanding can be a valuable starting point for the design and implementation of health promotion and education strategies that aim at encouraging safe sex in order to avoid further infections with HIV/AIDS and other STIs as well as unwanted pregnancies (see also Van Eerdewijk & Spronk 2004a, 2004b). I therefore underline that

a rational HIV-prevention policy cannot only be concerned with the specific practices in which HIV transmission occurs. For human sexuality does not consist of separate, isolated items of behaviour. In real life, a person’s sexuality involves a complex of actions, emotions and relationships. Particular practices [...] always occur in a wider repertoire of sexual and social activities. (Kippax & Crawford 1993: 256-257, emphasis in original)

It is one thing to know how often people have sex and with which partners, but without knowing the cultural and social context in which sexual intercourse takes place nor understanding the meanings that are given to sex and relationships by the people engaged in them, the design and implementation of intervention strategies becomes a difficult task (Parker 1995; Brummelhuis & Herdt 1995; MacPhail & Campbell 2001; Van Dijk 2002).

Before looking at the safe sex practices of young, unmarried people in Dakar, this thesis therefore starts with investigating the way girls and boys shape and give meaning to their sexuality, intimate relationships, gender identities, and sexual encounters. This generates an alternative understanding of safe sex practices, in which these are not considered as purely medical issues, nor as individual matters. From a medical perspective it is difficult to understand why people would have unprotected sex and thus expose themselves to unwanted pregnancies or infections with HIV; public health has often perceived the unsafe behaviour of young people as ‘irrational’ (Schoepf 2001: 348). But once the real life context of the people concerned is taken into account, it becomes clear that other factors than medical ones impact on sexual behaviour. Some of these factors may provide a reasonable basis for not practising safe sex, for not using a condom, for having unprotected sex. Because “the hallmark of sexuality is its complexity: its multiple meanings, sensations and connections” (Vance 1984: 5), it is extremely useful to approach
safe sex practices as embedded in these multiple meanings of sex. This study therefore looks at safe sex in the broader context of the gendered sexuality of unmarried girls and boys in contemporary Dakar. How is the gendered sexuality of these young people constructed, and where can safe sex practices - or the lack thereof - be placed and understood in this context? The starting point is not safe sex, but an understanding of premarital sexuality, of the importance of sex and sexuality to the Dakarois girls and boys concerned and the meanings given to sex and sexuality. It is only in such a broader and contextualised understanding of sexuality that decisions about practising or not practising abstinence, fidelity of condom use can be understood (see also Van Eerdewijk & Spronk 2004a, 2004b; Cáceres 2000). This is the basic line of reasoning of this thesis. In approaching sexual activity as a social practice - as “socially constructed, relational, situational and culturally specific” – it can be understood how “actions are not the outcome of individual reflection, but are constituted in the shared meanings negotiated in interactions with others” (Kippax & Crawford 1993: 259, 262). The rules of the game in which individual Dakarois girls and boys frame their gendered sexuality are not defined by themselves, but in a larger social whole. Safe sex practices are hence not just individual affairs (see also Paiva 1995; Bardem & Gobatto 1997). In order to realize this alternative approach to safe sex practices, this study builds on the growing body of literature and knowledge that approaches sexuality in a social constructionist perspective.

**The social construction of sexuality**

Sex is an ambiguous term, referring “both to an act and to a category of person, to a practice and to a gender” (Weeks, 1986a: 13). The term sex points to the categories of women and men, but is also used in the phrase ‘to have sex’. This makes the triangle sex/gender/sexuality a complex and interesting one. This study takes sexuality and gender as two distinct but related organizing principles or systems of difference. I first go into the concept of sexuality, and then turn to gender.

Academic attention to sexuality is a relatively new, but highly relevant and exciting phenomenon. Feminist theory, critical of biological determinism and exploring the social construction of differences between the sexes, is one of the points from where sexuality studies developed. In ‘Thinking sex’, Gayle Rubin’s (1999) called for radical perspectives on sexuality that could differentiate between gender and sexuality and pointed to the need to deconstruct sexuality and gender as two different, though strongly linked, systems.

Most prior feminist analyses considered sexuality a totally derivative category whose organization was determined by the structure of gender inequality. According to Rubin’s formulation, sexuality and gender were analytically distinct phenomena which required separate explanatory frames, even though they were interrelated in specific historical circumstances. Theories of sexuality could not explain gender, and taking the argument to a new level, theories of gender could not explain sexuality. (Vance 1999: 41)

Research on homosexuality, lesbianism and sexual identities has been another rich academic field that fuelled sexuality studies in a social constructionist perspective (Vance 1999). Sexuality studies have developed into a broad field covering topics ranging from marriage, prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, legal and medical regulation of sexuality, morality on sexuality, women’s bodies and health, rape and sexual violence, birth control, the evolution of sexual identities, historical research into the politics of sexuality in specific time periods in specific contexts, etc. I use sexuality to refer not only to sexual
practices and acts, but also to norms, beliefs and ideals that people have about sex as well as their sexual identities and individual subjectivities (cf. MacPhail & Campbell 2001: 1614). Sexuality thus includes cultural ideals and actual practice of sex, public and private conduct, and prescribed and voluntary behaviour (Parker, Herdt & Carballo 1999: 420).

The social constructionist perspective on sexuality is based on two assumptions (Weeks 1986a, 1986b; Di Leonardo & Lancaster 1997; Rubin 1999; Vance 1999). The first one is the rejection of a biological deterministic view. Sex and sexuality are not seen as a purely biological phenomenon, a natural force that exists before social life and needs to be controlled by social institutions. On the contrary:

Far from being the most natural element in social life, [...] I would go so far as to say that sexuality only exists through its social forms and social organization. (Weeks 1986b: 24)

Sexuality cannot be understood in purely biological terms, but must be seen in its social and historical context (Rubin 1999: 149). The rejection of an essentialist understanding of sexuality does not deny the relevance of biology in sexuality:

Clearly sex does have a biological basis – after all human bodies are biological! But those bodies are enveloped in meaning: their postures and actions are not ‘instinctive or ‘natural’, but function as signs in a complex communication system. (Horrocks 1997: 107)

Biological aspects are the preconditions or potentialities that are given meaning and transformed by social forces (Hastrup 1978). I agree that “the bare biological facts of sexuality do not speak for themselves; they must be expressed socially” (Ross & Rapp 1997: 153), and therefore start from the position that the biological can only be known through the social. The second characteristic of the social constructionist perspective is the rejection of transhistorical and transcultural arguments. The attention for the social and cultural construction of sexuality allows for recognition of the high diversity and variation in sexual practices, beliefs, behaviour and ideologies (Di Leonardo & Lancaster 1997). In understanding sexuality as a social construct, I am interested in seeing how sexuality of young people takes shape in the specific social and historical context of contemporary Dakar.

When sexuality becomes a matter of the social, two processes of power are at play: “One is the power exercised simply through the process of categorization; the other, the power to cause that categorization to have social and material consequences” (Crenshaw 1997: 189). Categories of difference are constructed, often in binary oppositions: for instance homosexual versus heterosexual, marital versus premarital sex, female versus male sexuality. These categories are not neutral, but are given meaning and valued differently in society. As hierarchies and hegemonies, they have social consequences, in the sense that some sexualities are privileged, while others are excluded. In such processes of normali-zation, ‘good’ sexualities are acceptable and ‘bad’ sexualities become subject to exclusion and punishment (on categorization and normalisation of difference, see Foucault 1978; Horrocks 1997; Jansen 1987).

The effects of categorisation and normativity are captured in Rubin’s notion of the ‘sex hierarchy’. This concept is helpful in getting a grip on how the differences between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexuality are characterised.

According to [the Western] system, sexuality that is ‘good’, ‘normal’, and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial. It
should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home. It should
not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys of any sort, or roles other than male and
female. Any sex that violates these rules is ‘bad’, ‘abnormal’, or ‘unnatural’. Bad sex may
be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial. It may be
masturbatory or take place at orgies, may be casual, may cross generation lines, and may
take place in ‘public’, or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of
pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles. (Rubin 1999: 152)

Sex hierarchies are contextual and dynamic social constructions of acceptable and un-
acceptable sexuality. Premarital sex can be acceptable in one society, and be highly pro-
blematic in another one. The importance attached to virginity can weaken or strengthen
in time, as a result of which sexual relations prior to marriage can become more acceptable
or more contentious. It is important to note that multiple sex hierarchies exist in each local
context. A religious discourse might value virginity and abstinence before marriage, while
a medical discourse values safe sex over unprotected sex. Individuals in any local context
are thus confronted with multiple and dynamic sex hierarchies, of which they have to
make sense in their everyday lives.

This study investigates what hierarchies are constructed around young people’s sex-
uality in Dakar. How is sex before marriage valued in for instance religious and cultu-
ral traditions? How do young people themselves look at and define premartial sex? Moreover,
is there a distinction between sex between partners in a love relationship or in a transac-
tional context? What about sexual contacts between members of the same sex? The safe
sex definitions, that I presented earlier, can also be read as a specific sex hierarchy. Largely
based on a medical perspective, ‘good’ sex is defined as protected sex, and ‘bad’ sex as
unprotected. Safe sex discourses promote protected sex by promoting abstinence,
fidelity or condom use, and aim at discouraging ‘bad’ practices such as sex without a
condom with somebody whose HIV status or sexual history you do not know. Taking
medical safe sex discourses as one of many sex hierarchies defining ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sex, the
normalising effects of it can be questioned and addressed (e.g. Herdt 1992).

The social constructionist analysis of sexuality and safe sex cannot stop here. Social
structures and discourses are circulated by individuals. It is only through the circulation,
reproduction and reworking of discourses of sexuality – or any other for that matter – that
embodied individuals exist as subjects (Giddens 1987; Kippax & Crawford 1993; Brouns
1993; Villarreal 1994; Weedon 1997). My analysis therefore has to include how people make
sense of and relate to different sex hierarchies. In order to conceptualise the dynamic of the
individual in its social context, I rely on the notion of performativity (Butler 1990a, 1990b),
in the sense that I consider young people’s gendered sexuality to be socially constituted in
an on-going and repetitive process in which subjectivities are created. This needs some
clarification of how I understand the notions of discourse, subjectivity and agency.

**Discourse, subjectivity and agency**

Discourses can be understood as systems of meaning that construct truths about the
world that we live in: a sort of collective story about reality (Brouns 1995b: 69). I define
discourses as historical, social and institutional structures of propositions, concepts,
categories and ideas (see also Tempelman 1993: 97; Van Eerdewijk 1998). Discourses are
specific, and therefore *partial*, interpretations of the world and encompass norms,
language and practices. Thinking about discourses in these terms came about in the
context of a criticism on dualistic conceptualisations of power (Mills 1997: 29-47). Since the
so-called postmodern crisis, power is no longer seen as static and “neatly distributed over
two positions: oppressors and oppressed” (Davids & Van Driel 2002: 68; see also Foucault 1978; Villarreal 1994; Brouns 1995a, 1995b; Davids & Van Driel 2005). Instead power came to be seen as fluid and dynamic, and as only existing in its circulation. By conceptualising discourses as productive forces, in the sense that they create subjectivity, attention was drawn to the normalising and disciplinary effects of discourses. This conceptualisation of discourses is based on the decentralisation of the subject which implies that subjectivity only gets meaning in specific discursive practices: the subject is not a fact nor a given that exists prior to discourses, but is realised by and the effect of them (Foucault 1978: 92-97; De Lauretis 1987: 11-21; Brouns 1993; Mills 1997). This also means that the individual becomes a multiple constituted subject and takes up different subject positions.

Although in principle “the individual is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society” (Weedon 1997: 91; emphasis added). In order to be effective, the specific - and partial - interpretation of reality that a discourse produces has to be seen as the only, or at least most acceptable one. Discourses are claims to the truth and are built on common sense – which fixes interpretations as ‘obvious’ and ‘natural’ - and the denial of specificity and partiality (Foucault 1981, in Weedon 1997; De Lauretis 1987: 9-11; Butler 1990a, 1990b). The hierarchies and categories produced are not stable and fixed, but subject to – internal – collapse and subversion. Conflicting views on reality are excluded by representing them as ‘illogical’, ‘unnatural’, ‘false’ or ‘impossible’. By fixing meaning, approved modes of subjectivity are more accessible and acceptable for an individual than alternative subjectivities. By excluding and punishing alternative subject positions, behaviour can be controlled and possibilities for action and change limited. Every discourse thus both constrains and creates modes of subjectivity. Interpretations of dominant or hegemonic discourses materialise in - and give legitimisation to - the way social relations and institutions are organized.

Discourses do not live a life of their own, but “are propelled by actors” and only exist in their circulation (Villarreal 1994: 216). Meaning is the outcome of interpretation processes that are actively carried out by actors, and the agency of embodied individuals is central to the operation of discourses (Weedon 1997; see also Hollway 1995). I understand agency as “the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments [...] which [...] both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 970). Butler’s notion of performativity of gender and sexuality is useful, because it points to how the understanding of subjectivity as socially constructed, rather than existing prior to discourse and social reality, implies an act, a performance, a doing (Butler 1990a, 1990b). This element of performativity and doing not only relates to gender and sexuality, but to subjectivity in the broadest sense. The production, reproduction and transformation of norms and subjectivities can only be realized in their circulation, that is their embodiment and enactment by actors. That means that actors by definition exercise agency, because without embodiment and circulation, they would not be subjects at all. The strength of Butler’s notion of performativity is that it conceptualizes agency not as issuing from an inner source of the individual, but as the materialization or transformation of dominant norms through the embodiment and enactment of dominant or alternative subjectivities. This conceptualisation of subjectivity as performative is a fruitful theoretical starting point for the way I approach the constitution of gendered sexualities, because it allows me to access and analyse the construction of young people’s gendered sexualities in their doing, that is their narratives and practices. That means that I analyse the girls’ and boys’ narratives about their lives and intimate relationships as cultural patterns in which
dominant and alternative subjectivities are constructed.

It is important to clarify that my questions into young people's agency to practice safe sex do not concern this abstract notion of agency in the performativity of discourse. I am not investigating whether young people have agency in the creation of subjectivity; this is the theoretical assumption from which I start. My questions into young people's agency concern the specific capacities to act that are ascribed to them in specific subject positions. For answering such questions, it is important to highlight that agency also has to be understood as the product of discourses, in the sense that it is constructed by them:

People create rules of the game and subject each other to them. However, in analysing the ways in which 'actions constitute and reconstitute institutional conditions of actions of others' and in which people subject each other to rules of the game, it is important to conceptualise agency as socially constructed. [...] Agency and power are attributed to social categories based on class, ethnic status or gender; to resources such as capital or land or to institutions as the state. [...] One can extend the argument to explore how agency can be bestowed on categories, objects, people and institutions. (Villarreal 1994: 216, 217, 218; emphasis added)

Agency is concerned with events in which agents could have acted differently, and has been defined as the capacity to act and induce structural change: "agency not only refers to the intentions people have in doing things, but their capacity of doing those things in the first place" (Giddens 1984: 9; see also Villarreal 1994: 166 on intentionality). This is a 'situated agency', "one that is shaped and practiced through converging past and present discourses" (Ghorashi 2003: 32). Agency is "embodied in the individual, but embedded in social relations through which it can become effective" (De Haan 2000: 22). As discourses produce certain meanings of gendered premarital heterosexuality and exclude other definitions, they create subject position in which certain forms of agency are ascribed to individuals and other capacities to act are not. This thesis explores what agency to shape intimate relationships and practice different safe sex strategies is ascribed to unmarried girls and boys in the - socially and historically - specific constitution of gendered sexuality in contemporary Dakar. That is to say, it seeks to understand how different notions of female and male premarital sexuality in contemporary Dakar allow for or restrain girls' and boys' agency to shape their intimate and possibly sexual relationships and practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use.

**Gender, girls and boys**

Premarital sexuality and young people's practice of safe sex are highly gendered (Gage 1998; Spencer 2000). For example, virginity does not have the same value for girls and boys, condom use poses different problems for the two sexes, and the particular way sex is connected to love and money differs for boys and girls.

Gender is a concept that is based on Simone de Beauvoir's claim that 'one is not born, but becomes a woman' (Andermahr et al. 1997: 237). Feminist theory and research aims at exposing science's blind spot on women and challenges the existing relations between women and men. The claim that one becomes a woman opened up the window for addressing and analysing the position of women not so much in biological terms, but in terms of social and cultural processes. This gave rise to the distinction of sex and gender, where sex referred to the biological elements and gender encompassed the socio-cultural categories of femininity and masculinity (Harding 1986; De Lauretis 1987; Scott 1991; Tonkens 1998). The sex/gender distinction corresponds with the social constructionist...
perspective on sexuality, in the sense that both are organizing principles in society. The basic premise is that women are *made into* women - and men are made into men - (Jansen 1987: 46-47), because differences between women and men are not naturally determined, but produced in social and cultural processes that set the boundaries of femininities and masculinities. Recently, feminist theories have questioned the category 'sex' in the sex/gender distinction, and have suggested that "perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender" (Butler 1990a: 7; see also Delphi 1993; Moore 1994; Braidotti 1994; Fausto-Sterling 2000). This falls in line with my earlier presented position that the biological exists, but can only be known through the social.

Although the gender concept carries the capacity to address both masculinity and femininity, it has mainly been applied to women in both feminist and non-feminist writings. In the feminist struggle to improve women's position, the category 'woman' was the logical starting point for women's studies and feminist politics (Andermahr et al. 1997: 66, 237-238; see also Van Eerdewijk 2003). With the shift from sex to gender, women's studies was "no longer about women, but about sex/gender as ordening principles of society and as identities of people" (Brouns 1995a: 37). The acknowledgement that gender also incorporates men created the very much needed space for addressing questions on masculinities and men (e.g. Connell 1993, 1998, 2002; Horrocks 1997; Whitehead 2002; Kimmel & Messner 2004; see also Spencer 2000). The tendency to reduce gender to women is also visible in the field of gender and development, where men and masculinities have only recently and on a limited scale entered the picture (examples are Silberschmidt 1992, 2001a; Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994; Morrell 1998; UNAIDS 2000).

Without dismissing the need for gender equity and women's empowerment, and without downplaying the role men play in achieving this, I think questions on men and masculinity should not only be addressed from the perspective of women and women's issues. Or put differently, interest in men and masculinity cannot be reduced to women's concerns only. This thesis therefore incorporates both boys and girls into its analysis and investigates the construction of both masculinities and femininities.

I analyse gender and sexuality in an intersectional way (Crenshaw 1997; Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992). An intersectional perspective departs from the acknowledgement that multiple categories of difference operate in society, such as gender, sexuality, race, age, class, and ethnicity. In real life, these differences intersect with each other. An intersectional analysis goes beyond merely recognizing the multiplicity of differences and adding one onto the other, but seeks to analyse the intersections among these categories in a meaningful way. The challenge is to see how these different differences are “intertwined in the concrete experience and practice of disadvantage and exclusion”, and thus to get a grip on how they construct each other (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992: 128). With respect to gender and race, Davis explains intersectionality as follows:

[Intersectionality theorists] have argued that gender and race are not separate systems of domination, but rather intersecting and mutually constitutive features of any social practice or historical context. This view [...] suggests that the task facing feminists today is not deciding whether gender or race is more important, but rather how these and other categories of difference intersect to produce specific constellations of hierarchy, exclusion and exploitation. (Davis 2003: 88; emphasis added)

Although in real life experience there is no limit to the number of categories of difference that intersect, analysing all differences intersectionally in relation to a specific contextualized issue is a hard task. Therefore, an important step in intersectional analysis is to work
out “which differences matter” in a specific context (Crenshaw 1997: 187).

In this study, the core differences that matter are sexuality and gender, more precisely, it analyses gendered prematual sexuality. This can be further tied down by specifying that this thesis is concerned with heterosexuality, a choice which is based on several considerations. To begin with, all participants claimed to have heterosexual relationships. That does not necessarily mean that they do not have experiences in same-sex relationships, because although many Senegalese wish to believe otherwise and find it unacceptable, homosexuality does exist in Dakar (e.g. Niang et al. 2002; Niang et al. 2003; Teunis 2001; Murray & Roscoe 1998). It is of great importance to further study same-sex relationships, homosexuality and lesbianism in Senegal, especially because of its marginalization, but this is beyond the scope of this study. This thesis limits itself to analysing dominant heterosexuality, because I think it is important to come to a closer understanding of how the ‘norm’ of heterosexuality works as an ordering principle for the majority who claims to conform to it. The heterosexual norm also merits critical investigation because of the already mentioned fact that heterosexual contacts are the main route of transmission of HIV in sub-Sahara Africa. Notions of homosexuality play a role in this thesis in the way they construct young people’s gendered prematual sexuality, especially with respect to boys.

4 Research questions: safe sex reconsidered

The core of my alternative approach to safe sex is that it seeks to understand its practice, or lack thereof, as embedded in the construction of gendered prematual heterosexuality. This is expressed by the reference to the alphabet in the title of this thesis: The ABC of unsafe sex. Although one might think that the ABC refers to the three safe sex strategies, it does not as such directly. The ABC in the title points, first of all, to the search this thesis undertakes for explanations of unsafe sex. Secondly, it indicates where answers are being looked for: in language, that is the discursive, yet embodied and materialized construction of gendered sexualities. The central question of this thesis therefore reads as follows: how does the construction of the gendered sexuality of young, unmarried people in Dakar (Senegal) shape their safe sex practices? This question is broken down into two main parts.

The first part deals with the constitution of the gendered sexuality of unmarried girls and boys in Dakar. Insight is required into what it means to be a youth in Dakar: what is adolescence, what is a youth? How does this manifest itself in a gender specific way for girls and boys? An important issue is where sex and sexuality fit into this. What role does marriage and especially the wedding night play in the construction of prematual sexuality? And, how do young people think about prematual sex? This thesis explores how sexuality prior to marriage takes shape for both girls and boys by looking at the ideals of feminine and masculine prematual sexuality that young people express and relate to. What do these – multiple – ideals look like? How do girls and boys construct their own sexuality and gendered sexual identities in relation to these ideals? Moreover, the thesis investigates what kind of intimate relationships young people find themselves in. Is love a factor in these relationships, and if so, what does it mean according to the young participants and what role does it play? In addition, I look at whether these intimate relationships involve transactions of money or gifts. I question what these transactions signify according to the girls and boys, in particular in the cultural context of contemporary Dakar. Furthermore, I look at how money and gifts are connected to love and/or sex.

A central concern of this thesis is to explore whether the unmarried girls and boys in
these intimate relationships engage in sex. If not, why not and how do they manage to abstain? If so, when do young people have sex and with whom? Why do they have sex and what does it mean to them? In what ways is sex about sexual pleasure and the satisfaction of sexual needs? Do young people have sex with the partner they love? Do boys have sex to be considered a 'real man'? Do girls have sex because they are being put under pressure, e.g. in exchange for money? An important question is of course, what they consider to be sex, or put differently, what kind of sexual acts they practice. In analysing female and male pre-marital heterosexuality, a point of attention will be in what ways and to what extent girls and boys exercise agency. Are boys in control of girls and their own sexuality? When and how do girls exercise agency in sexual matters?

The second part in the research question turns the spotlight onto safe sex practices. What – sexual and reproductive health – risks do Dakarois young people identify? And what strategies do they adopt to protect themselves against those risks? How do they look upon the three strategies of the safe sex ABC? What are the advantages and problems of condom use, fidelity and abstinence for them? Which strategies do they actually practice, and which factors facilitate this, or maybe make this more difficult? Having addressed these sub-questions, an analysis can be made of how safe sex practices, or lack thereof, are embedded in the construction of the gendered sexuality of Dakarois girls and boys. How does the constitution of female or male premarital sexuality facilitate or impede unmarried young people to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies or infections with STIs, including HIV? Put differently, in what ways are Dakarois girls and boys ascribed agency to practice abstinence, fidelity and/or condom use?

These research questions were studied through a combination of research methods. To begin with, participant observation, informal conversations, and key informants proved to be highly valuable during fieldwork. In addition, focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews formed an important part of the data gathering process. Finally, answering the research questions also required literature review and the collection and analysis of secondary statistical data. This thesis largely draws on qualitative research methodology given its focus on the meanings of intimate relationships, sex and sexual contacts, and safe sex to the young people concerned. The aim of this study is not to place young people’s sexuality into an already existing framework, but to “uncover the lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Reysoo 1998: 93). Fieldwork in Dakar was done during three periods. The first was a preparatory visit to Dakar in February-March 2000, which served to make contacts, get to know the city and explore how the data collection could be organized. The main fieldwork period ran from October 2000 to October 2001. A third visit of three weeks was made in September 2004 to discuss the preliminary results and collect additional information.

As Chapter 2 will provide space to discuss methodological issues in a more elaborate way, I limit myself here to some brief remarks on the characteristics of the young people in the research group. I worked with seven groups of young people who were selected with five criteria: (1) marital status, (2) age, (3) sex/gender, (4) educational level, and (5) place of residence. All participants – 47 in total - were unmarried, and their ages varied from 16 to 23 years. Both girls and boys were included. Their ethnic backgrounds vary, but all but two declared themselves to be Muslims. Half of the participants was in the pre-final year of secondary school, and half had left school at an earlier age. Half of the participants came from the neighbourhoods in Grand Dakar, and half of the participants lived in the suburbs.
5 Choice of Dakar - Senegal

This study is limited to Dakar. The most important reason for this is the higher visibility of premarital sex in urban areas. Dakar is the most urbanised part of Senegal compromising 80% of the total urban population (EDS-III 1997: 2). Traditional and religious values concerning sexuality of the unmarried are most challenged in urban areas where processes of change and external influences are most strongly felt, even though other cities and the rural areas cannot escape from them either. Differences between rural and urban areas manifest themselves in, for instance, the level of education of women: 58% of women in urban areas have received some schooling, in contrast to only 14% in rural areas (EDS-III 1997: 18). Dakar also distinguishes itself from the whole of Senegal through a lower desired ideal number of children, and a higher knowledge and use of contraceptives. Moreover, women in Dakar marry later: the median age of first marriage for women is 19.6 in urban areas, compared to 16.3 for rural areas (EDS-III: 60). As a result of the rising age of marriage, the age of first sexual experience is also higher in Dakar than in Senegal nationwide. The important point is however that the difference between the age of first marriage and age of first sexual experience is larger in Dakar than in Senegal as a whole: in Dakar, the median age of first sexual experience is at 18.5, while the median age of first marriage is at 19.8 (for women aged 20-49) (EDS-II-Dakar 1992/1993: 15). This in contrast to Senegal as a whole where the two almost fall together at 16.4 and 16.6 years respectively (ibid.). As a consequence, Dakar knows a higher percentage of young, single women: in Dakar 91% of the women in the age group of 15-19 years is single, and 55% in the ages 20-24, compared to 71% and 32% respectively for Senegal as a whole (EDS-II-Dakar 1992/1993: 17). Most importantly, the prevalence of female premarital sex is higher in Dakar than in the rural areas: 22% and 16% respectively for girls at the age of 20 (CERPOD 1997: 7, 9). It is because of these greater shifts in young people’s sexuality in urban areas that this research focuses on Dakar.

Apart from this, Senegal as a country is an interesting context for this study. For one thing, Senegal is often cited as one of the ‘success countries’ in the fight against AIDS (UNAIDS 1999b). At the end of the 1990s, Senegal had one of the lowest HIV infection rates of sub-Saharan Africa: in 1997, HIV prevalence among adults was estimated at 1.8%. Figures on HIV infection among young people are difficult to obtain, but “between 1989 and 1996, only one out of more than 400 pregnant teenagers screened for HIV was found to be infected with the virus” (UNAIDS 1999b: 20). It is only the most recent Enquête Démographique et de Santé in Senegal that presents detailed figures on HIV prevalence. In 2005, nation-wide HIV prevalence was found to be 0.7% (for the age group 15-49), with a higher rate for women (0.9%) than for men (0.4%) (EDS-IV 2005: 37). There is no difference between the rural and urban areas, but there are differences between the regions of Senegal: Ziguinchor and Kolda have the highest HIV prevalence (2.2 and 2.0% respectively), where Diourbel and Thies know the lowest rates (0.1 and 0.4% respectively). Dakar finds itself between these extremes with an HIV prevalence of 0.6%. Age is also an

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6 Ideal number of children is 4.6 in Dakar, compared to 5.9 in Senegal. With respect to contraceptives 94 % of the women in Dakar know about it, compared to 70 % nationwide. Of the women in Dakar 30 % has (ever) used a contraceptive, compared to 11 % for Senegal (EDS-II 1992/1993: 27, 21).

7 18.5 years for women in Dakar, 16.4 for Senegal (EDS-II-Dakar 1992/1993: 15).

8 HIV infection rates have been stable between 1989 and 1996 and do not suggest an upward trend. Among male STI patients, HIV patients also remained stable under 5 %. Prevalence of HIV has only risen among female sex workers, although this does not count for Dakar, where the infection rate has remained stable at 17 % since 1993 (UNAIDS 1999b: 19-20).
important factor that transects with gender: as Figure 1.1 on the next page shows, for the age groups between 15 and 29 years old, HIV prevalence is higher and also rising much faster for women than for men. It is only for men older than 30 years that HIV prevalence reaches similar levels as those of young women. The younger age groups are of specific interest for this thesis: in the 15-19 age category, HIV prevalence is low for both women and men (0.2 and 0.0% respectively). Whereas it remains low for men in the ages 20-24, it starts to rise for women of that same age category (0.8 and 0.2% respectively) (Ibid.: 37-40).

In a context where 70% of the HIV infections worldwide occur on the African continent, Senegal with its low rates is called the ‘Senegalese exception’. Why are HIV infection rates that low in Senegal (Meda et al. 1999; UNAIDS 1999b)? UNAIDS identifies the early and swift response of the government, as a result of which knowledge about AIDS and its prevention is generally high, as one of the reasons.10 Besides that, other factors that are beyond government control such as male circumcision, low alcohol consumption or the prevalence of HIV-2 instead of HIV-1 contribute to the limited spread of HIV in

![Figure 1.1: HIV prevalence in Senegal according to age](image)


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9 These figures on HIV prevalence per region differ for women and men. Ziguinchor: 3.4% of the women (15-49 years) and 0.8% of the men. Kolda: 2.7% for women, and 1.1% for men. Diourbel: 0.1% for women, and 0.0% for men. Thiès: 0.4% for women, and 0.3% for men. Dakar: 0.7% for women, and 0.5% for men (EDS-IV 2005: 37-38).

10 Important elements of the swift response of the Senegalese government to HIV/AIDS, besides the wide societal support mentioned earlier in this chapter, are: a nation wide campaign, the inclusion of some sort of sex education in school curricula, the high accessibility of condoms, and the screening of blood transfusions. The STD (sexually transmitted diseases) control programmes have also been important in keeping track of the spread of HIV and of treating men and women with STDs. The fact that prostitution has been legalized since 1969, and that female sex workers are being screened on a regular basis and have access to health services, information and counselling, has also played a positive role (Meda et al. 1999: 1402-1404).
Senegal. A final and very important factor that is mentioned is the ‘strong social cohesion around religious beliefs’ that control sex before and outside marriage (Ibid.; see also UNAIDS 1999b). However,

Schooling, urban development and modernization, and economic migration, all of which are increasing in Senegal as elsewhere, shake the moral foundations of the sexual practice established by tradition and religion. [...] The indicators examined suggest that premarital sex has become the norm among young people in Senegalese cities, and casual sex is relatively common among men in urban areas. (Meda et al. 1999: 1403)

Other sources are less sure about which factors have lead to the low spread of HIV in West Africa in general and claim that the reasons for these differential rates of epidemic development remain unclear (Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 125-126; see also Schoepf 2001). In fact, they state that “the epidemic may take off in West Africa as it has elsewhere on the continent” (p. 126). This risk of a future epidemic is also underlined by a study in south Senegal that pointed out that several factors are present that contribute in principle to a rapid spread of HIV: intense seasonal migration, late marriage, frequent multiple partnerships and low condom use. These factors have not (yet) lead to a high number of HIV infections, because of the low prevalence of both HIV and STIs among the general Senegalese population and because of the limited occurrence of sexual risk behaviour among young unmarried women (Pison, Lagarde & Enel 1996). When these girls become more sexually active, or when STI and HIV infections rise, a rapid spread of HIV is very well possible. It is thus not the absence of risk behaviour, but the low presence of HIV that is behind the low HIV prevalence in Senegal.

Worrisome is that although casual sex is to some level protected through condom use, there are also indications of avoidance of condom use by substantial groups of women and men that rely on fidelity and having one partner (Lagarde, Pison & Enel 1996: 331). The safety of these methods is questionable in a context where discussions about one’s sexual partners and history is difficult, and multiple partnerships are not rare, as I also address later in this thesis. The focus on encouraging abstinence will in such circumstances fall short in HIV prevention, as has for instance been reported recently in Uganda (Human Rights Watch 2005). The pressing matter is of course whether current prevention campaigns are sufficient if premarital sex is going to rise in the future: if premarital sex is on the rise, will it be safe? A study in a rural area highlighted that behaviour change only comes about very slowly (Becker 1997), and this can be an argument for developing campaigns that go beyond the promotion of abstinence, anticipating possible future trends of an increase in premarital sex. Hopefully this study adds to knowledge about sexuality and safe sex among young people and sheds some light on the direction that AIDS prevention
in Senegal could take to maintain its success status.

Some other characteristics make Senegal an interesting case for addressing the questions on premarital sexuality and safe sex of young people. Within sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal for instance stands out in terms of the age of first sexual experience of women, which has risen faster and to higher ages compared to other African countries (UNAIDS 1999b: 21). Premarital sexual activity of girls is on the rise, but still lower among Senegalese women than in other countries. In general, sexual activity outside marriage is less frequent in Senegal than in other African countries (see also CERPOD 1997). Condom use in these extramarital encounters is however relatively high in the context of sub-Saharan Africa: twice as high in Dakar than in other African cities, with the exception of Uganda where this level of frequency also exists. The comparatively good availability of condoms has played a role in this (UNAIDS 1999b). Despite the lower levels of premarital sexual activity in Senegal in comparison to other sub-Saharan African countries, the number of pregnancies and births before marriage is not necessarily lower. In fact, they are comparable to the levels in other West-African countries where premarital sexuality is more frequent (CERPOD 1997: 15-17). It is also striking in this respect that contraceptive use among adolescents in Senegal is lowest, although the country is more urbanised than for instance Burkina Faso, Mali, The Gambia or Niger (CERPOD 1997: 18-25). These exceptional and in some ways contradictory features make Senegal an interesting case for a more in-depth study of young people’s intimate lives and safe sex practices.

In addition, the choice to carry out this study in Senegal was also strengthened by the desire to overcome the bias in Anglophone scientific circles against Francophone Africa. Language problems for predominantly English oriented researchers, including myself, complicate working in this region. The higher HIV infection rates and greater visibility of the AIDS pandemic in Eastern and Southern Africa have resulted in an overwhelming amount of research on HIV/AIDS in these regions. A large part of AIDS-related and reproductive health research is conducted in countries as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria or Ghana. The Francophone countries of West and Central Africa are less represented in this field (Orubuloye et al. 1993: 860), and this void needs to be filled. The predominant Islamic character of Senegalese society, the history of colonisation by the French and continuing relations with France, as well as diverse ethnic population make Senegal a different and interesting context for questions on premarital sexuality and safe sex among young people.

6 About this thesis

The empirical findings of this study are presented in Chapters 3 to 6. Before getting to those, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis in more detail. The theoretical reflections start with looking at the extent to which questions on sex and sexuality have been addressed in anthropology. This is followed by a discussion

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13 Besides Senegal, Uganda is also labelled a ‘success country’ in the fight against AIDS.
of the dominant approach to the study of AIDS in Africa. After having identified major flaws in such research, I outline my own approach to studying gendered sexuality in relation to safe sex. The theoretical starting points behind my approach to safe sex require a qualitative research methodology. The second part of Chapter 2 therefore provides more detail about how the study was conducted. Talking about sex was the main source of information, and I will discuss with whom I spoke, about what, and in what ways. I will also discuss the specific difficulties of talking about a sensitive topic like sex.

The empirical chapters have been set up in a specific sequence. Since I seek to embed safe sex in the gendered sexualities of young people, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are devoted to their life worlds and intimate lives. Chapter 3 seeks to understand what it means to be a youth in Dakar. It starts with a discussion of the notion of adolescence, and how this life stage is generally understood in the literature in terms of 'being in-between'. This is followed by an analysis of how Dakarois girls and boys themselves see their life stage. Issues of responsibility and dependency are highlighted, and attention is paid to how peers and the institution of marriage and the wedding night shape adolescence. The chapter then turns the spot light on sexuality. I discuss how virginity is an omnipresent norm with respect to premarital sexuality, and that this norm has a rather different meaning for girls and boys. By taking a closer look at the wedding night, the ideals of the 'virgin girl' versus the 'potent boy' come forward. The chapter ends with a first look at the sexual reality that young people live beyond the dominant norms. Statistical surveys are presented and analysed in order to see whether the ideal of premarital abstinence is lived up to in reality.

The intimate relationships and sexual experiences of Dakar boys and girls are central to Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. I have chosen to start with the experiences of boys for two reasons. Firstly, during fieldwork boys were more explicit about sexuality and their own sexual experiences than girls. This makes it relatively easier to get an impression of sex and sexuality in their lives. The girls, by contrast, were far less explicit about their sexual lives, and the analysis of their empirical material requires sensitivity and the ability to read between the lines. The more explicit material from the boys is helpful in this effort. Secondly, as will become clear in the course of this thesis, female sexuality takes shape in relation to a male-centred construction of sexuality. In order to gain insight into how female sexuality is shaped in this male dominated context, it is helpful to have an understanding of this male norm. This does of course not mean that normative masculine sexuality is taken for granted and left unquestioned. On the contrary, having the girls’ experiences and perspectives follow the boys’ narratives allows for a critical assessment of the male norm.

Chapter 4 on boys starts with the multiple intimate relationships of the 21 year-old Moussa. He identifies different types of girls, and this typology of ‘real girlfriends’ versus ‘easy girls’ is further explored. The actual sexual behaviour of boys is subsequently discussed by looking at a number of sex accounts, which make the link between sex and masculinity visible. This link, which is central to hegemonic masculinity in Dakar, is explored by focusing on central notions in the boys’ sexual narratives, such as sexual needs and ‘seizing the occasion’. Boys come forward as active sexual actors seeking satisfaction through sexual contacts with girls. But hegemonic masculinity is not the whole story, and I explore when boys are insecure and embarrassed and where they lack control and agency with respect to sex and girls. This brings forward that boys have to balance two conflicting norms with respect to their sexuality: hegemonic manhood valuing potency and virility versus the ideal of ‘seriousness’ and abstinence.

In Chapter 5, the focus shifts to the life worlds of girls. The chapter opens with the 19 year-old Aida and her different boyfriends. The themes of love, money and sex come
forward out of Aida’s narratives, and these three are central to the remainder of the chapter. I discuss the girls’ ideals of love, as well as their disappointments in this respect, and assess what these signify. Next, the issue of money in relationships is addressed. The judgemental attitudes towards girls’ alleged materialism merit a closer look and critical consideration of the role that money plays. The chapter then turns to something that girls do not easily talk about: sex. I elaborate analyse how girls talk about sex. A first analysis suggests that girls do not have sex, and that pleasure and satisfaction are not among the reasons why ‘other girls’ might be sexually active. A second look reveals that girls do have sexual needs and long for pleasure, and exercise agency in sexual matters, albeit within a male framework. The chapter ends with more theoretical reflections on the way Dakarois girls frame their female premarital sexuality and intimate relationships, specifically focusing on questions of agency and power.

Following this profound analysis of gendered premarital sexuality, Chapter 6 turns to young people’s safe sex practices. The first part of this chapter uses statistical survey information in order to assess young people’s knowledge of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS and their use of contraception and condoms. The second part of Chapter 6 looks at young people’s perspectives of and experiences with the three strategies in the safe sex ABC: abstinence, being faithful and condom use. Special attention is paid to how processes of interpretation and giving meaning affect their practice. The third part of the chapter explores the embeddedness of the practice of safe sex in the construction of gendered sexualities. It investigates how girls and boys come to be positioned with agency to practice the ABC strategies.

Chapter 7 returns to the research question as formulated in this introduction. I will present the empirical findings and theoretical conclusions. The chapter comes back to the construction of female and male premarital sexuality, and shows how these affect young people’s safe sex practices. The last pages are reserved for a reflection on the implications of my approach and findings for policy interventions on young people’s safe sex practices, both in Senegal and elsewhere.

Before ending this introduction, one final remark needs to be made. In the empirical chapters that will follow, I regularly use quotes from the transcriptions of focus group-discussions or individual interviews. What has been said by me (A) or the research assistant [(K) or (R)] will be put in italics. For all quotes, I indicated the age, sex and educational level of the speaker as well as in which group discussion or interview the remarks were made. In the transcriptions of some (parts of) focus group discussions it was not possible to recognize the exact person who was speaking. In those cases, I could not provide a name, nor the exact age of the speaker. The Annex provides a list of all focus group discussions (FGD) and individual interviews (INT) and gives background information on the participants. In some quotes, I summarized part of what was said in order to make the text more readable; such summaries are put between brackets [ ]. When reading this thesis, it is important to realize the translation sequences that have preceded the current text. Data collection was done in French and Wolof, but the writing process was carried out in English by a Dutch native speaker. All quotes of individual or group interviews in this thesis have been translated at least once - from French to English by me -, and some of them twice - from Wolof to French by the research assistants. Some quotes will not run smoothly according to English grammar. This is sometimes done deliberately. The French spoken in Senegal and Wolof carry some typical characteristics in terms of their grammatical structure. In Wolof, sentence construction can vary according to the emphasis one wants to place on either the subject, verb or object. These types of
constructions in Wolof are also frequently applied in Senegalese French. Because it is such a typical mode of expression in Senegal, I kept that element of emphasis in the English translations whenever it was relevant. In order to make this thesis as readable as possible I attempted to translated as much as possible in English, but on some occasions Wolof or French terms are used, because "language is data" and local terms are key concepts to understand the meanings attached to specific subjects (Reysoo 1998: 99).

15 Take for instance the very simple sentence: 'I eat rice'. This is a neutral construction that can also literally be expressed in the same way in Wolof. But Wolof has at least three other ways of expression for the same sentence, emphasizing different aspects of it. The subject can be emphasized when by saying: 'It's me who eats rice'. The verb, or the action itself, can also be stressed through a construction which in English would sound like: 'It's eating rice that I am doing'. Then there is also a construction that emphasizes the object: 'It's rice that I eat'. 
This chapter elaborates in two ways on ‘studying sexuality’. In the first part the theoretical concerns of ‘studying sexuality’ are discussed. The second part deals with the methodological aspects of studying sexuality during fieldwork in Dakar. Both parts aim to position this study. This chapter hence presents a more elaborate discussion of some theoretical and methodological issues that were brought up in the introductory Chapter.

The first part of this chapter discusses how sexuality has been studied in Africa. Many studies on sexuality in that continent have been conducted from a medical or public health perspective (Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994), fuelled by the scale and impact of the AIDS epidemic. I therefore examine the dominant - yet controversial and criticized - discourse on AIDS in Africa. Although my critical analysis of this discourse is not new, it is important to present and discuss it here, as it clarifies the position and perspective of this thesis. This part starts with a description of the African permissiveness thesis as brought forward by the Caldwells, and subsequently discusses the critiques on this work. Next, I consider the problematic way in which culture came to be perceived in this hegemonic AIDS discourse, and this leads me to the identification of an alternative approach to the study of sexuality, in sub-Sahara Africa and elsewhere.

The second part deals with how I studied sexuality in Africa, more precisely with how I studied the gendered sexuality and safe sex practices of young, unmarried people in Dakar. I address a variety of issues, ranging from the selection criteria of the research groups, and a description of the research techniques, to reflections on intersubjectivity, positionality and performativity, and a discussion of the specific difficulties of and solutions to talking about sex in the field.

1 AIDS discourse and ‘African sexuality’

A logical disciplinary field to turn to when one wants to learn more about the cross-cultural study of sexuality is anthropology. However, it has been noted that “sex is curious [...] in that anthropologists seem unable to decide whether they know too little or too much about it” (Tuzin 1991: 867). Some authors state that “sexuality has rarely been a dominant theme in ethnographic research” (Lyons & Lyons 2004: 2), that “human sexuality is not yet a coherent subspeciality of anthropology” (Davis & Whitten 1987: 88), or that “anthropology has been far from courageous or even adequate in its investigation of sexuality” (Vance 1999: 39). Others argue that “sex is far from taboo or new in anthropology. Quite the opposite: anthropology has always trafficked in sexuality of people we study” (Kulick 1995: 2) and that “there is a paucity of anthropological literature on sex and
sexuality in Africa” (Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994: 50). A closer look reveals that sex
and sexuality were prominent topics until the 1920s, but that they were abandoned in
a long period of – relative – silence which started in the early 1930s. This silence and
abandonment came about in the context of the domination by the deterministic theo-
retical approach in anthropology since that time, which paid little attention to behaviour,
but was more concerned with “normative and propositional statements, symbolic
structures, and other such abstractions” (Tuzin 1991: 867). In that period of silence, sexuality as a topic was decentralized and redefined in nonsexual and disembodied terms
of kinship, family, and social structure, as a result of which “sex came to be treated either
anecdotally or as an appendage” to such abstractions (Ibid; see also Lyons & Lyons 2004).

At the time when anthropology was seeking to establish itself as a legitimate science, the
subjects of sex and sexuality were considered too controversial, not serious and not
respectable, and anthropologists working on sex were professionally marginalized for
being “overly interested in sex” (Suggs & Marshall 1971: 221; Davis & Whitten 1987; Tuzin:
1991; Lyons & Lyons 2004). In the 1980s, anthropology ‘rediscovered’ sexuality, in the terms
used by Vance (1999). The growing body of work on homoerotic practices and feminist
anthropology helped put sexuality on stage within anthropology, and the AIDS pande-
mic further added to this (Vance 1999; Lyons & Lyons 2004). However, anthropology was
slow in reacting to the initial impact of the AIDS epidemic, and this gave room for the
medical and behavioural perspectives to become dominant in discourses on AIDS in
Africa, and consequently on research on sexuality (Parker 2001).

The Caldwell thesis and ‘African AIDS’
It is estimated that worldwide 42 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in 2002
(UNAIDS 2002). Of these, almost 30 million (over 70%) live in sub-Saharan Africa. In
2002, that same region saw 3.5 million new HIV infections and 2.4 million AIDS deaths.
The scale of the pandemic and of its impact in Africa and the world as a whole resulted in
a worldwide effort to stop the spread of AIDS. Although Senegal has relatively low HIV
infection rates, it has reacted to the epidemic by formulating a national AIDS program. In
that sense Senegal has been affected by the global discourse on AIDS. Medical perspectives
dominated the original AIDS agenda, and continue to do so (Packard & Epstein 1991;
approaches to sexuality through the repeated association of sexuality with disease” (Vance
1999: 47). The hegemonic medical discourse is a short-term view, that

is concerned with symptoms, with depersonalised ‘seropositives’. [...] Medical discourse
has shaped the cultural agenda of AIDS in which the Person with AIDS, as a full human
person, is absent. [...] [T]o think in terms of exclusive, fixed categories, of a fixed relation-
ship between sex and gender, and to advance monocausal explanations for extremely
complex social phenomena, is to be blind to the flexibility of sexual behaviours and to the
interrelatedness of risk. [...] The hegemonic medical paradigm has been deaf to women’s
voices, and altogether reductionist. (Seidel 1993: 176)

The first (mainly medical) studies on AIDS in Africa highlighted a different epidemiology
of HIV than what had been seen in the West, with (1) high HIV prevalence (in contrast to
other regions in the world), (2) a 1:1 ratio of male to female cases (in contrast to the 13:1 ratio
in the West, meaning predominantly male infections), and (3) the absence of known risk
groups such as intravenous drug users or homosexuals (Packard & Epstein 1991; Patton
WHO developed a geographical categorisation of HIV infections in Pattern One and Pattern Two (Seidel 1993; Patton 1997). Pattern One refers to Europe and Northern America, where most infections occur through drug injection or homosexual contacts. Pattern Two indicates Africa as a place where HIV is mainly transmitted through heterosexual sex. The effect of this geographical categorisation is the “invention of African AIDS” (Patton 1997), as if it were a distinct tropical disease.16

With this epidemiological categorisation, an explanation was being sought for this ‘African AIDS’. It was a time - the early 1980s - when HIV was not yet known to cause AIDS. Moreover, the search for answers could only rely on limited knowledge of African cultures and societies, because much of the existing literature on sexuality in Africa dated from the colonial period and was ethnocentric and evolutionist (Packard & Epstein 1991; Stillwaggon 2003; Lyons & Lyons 2004). Higher levels of sexual promiscuity were put forward as explanation for the high levels of HIV infection in Africa: the middle class business man with his string of lovers, the truck driver with his sexual contacts all over the continent, the female prostitute with hundreds of contacts each year (Packard & Epstein 1991). A very influential work that set the stage for thinking about AIDS in Africa is the 1989 article ‘The social dimension of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa’ of Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin (Stillwaggon 2003; see also Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994; Lyons & Lyons 2004). This article explains Africa’s high HIV rates from a distinct African sexuality that is characterized by high rates of partner change and sexual networking: the African permissive sexuality thesis. The authors’ argument can be briefly summarized as follows: on the basis of a comparison of sub-Saharan Africa to the Eurasian system the conclusion is drawn that “there is a distinct and internally coherent African system embracing sexuality, marriage and much else” (Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin 1989: 187). Referring to publications of Jack Goody, the Caldwells argue that Eurasia and Africa differ in their economic systems.17 The Western system historically developed from Eurasia the area “with its ancient heartland stretching from the Mediterranean lands to the Gangetic Plain [including China]” (Ibid.: 187, 191). In Eurasia, the introduction of the animal-drawn plow allowed for the production of agricultural surpluses, which stimulated an interest in property of both the surpluses and the land. Private and inheritable property were best guarded and defended by “families organized around a strong and usually indissoluble bond” (Ibid.: 191). In order to prevent undesirable claims from offspring to property, Eurasia developed into a stratified society in which two things were important: “a proper and stable marriage to a person of the same social class, and its ensuring by controlling female premarital and extramarital sexuality. Sexual behavior, especially female sexual behavior, moved to center stage in morality and theology” (Ibid.: 192). Sexuality became linked with “only the noblest and deepest emotion” and had to be delinked from commercial and transactional elements. In sub-Saharan Africa, by contrast, developments did not take this path. With its poor soils, control over property and land were not the key to control over agriculture, but instead control over people was. In this system, which has been called “wealth in people” (e.g. Bledsoe & Cohen 1993: 70-71), reproduction becomes the central concern. Marriage

16 Another effect of this categorisation in Pattern One and Two is that heterosexuality in the West (North America and Europe) remains invisible and unchallenged: the fact that the virus affects heterosexuals in the West and that heterosexuals need to modify their behaviour to protect themselves from HIV infection is obscured (Patton 1997; Seidel 1993).

between different status groups (for instance class, caste) is not discouraged. The centrality of lineage makes fertility important, but the marriage bond is weaker than lineage links. Because non-marital births or marriage dissolution are not greatly feared, there is little need to control sexuality and the sexual act. In addition, polygyny is possible in this context. Moreover, whereas transaction is an anathema to Eurasia’s romantic love, transactions relating to sexual activity are considered normal (Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin 1989: 187-194).

The point of the Caldwells is to illustrate that sexuality has been organized and valued differently in Africa than in the West; or as Stillwaggon puts it, that “African sexuality is a special case” (2003: 813). The Caldwells highlight the combination of a great emphasis on ancestry and descent and the centrality of lineage as typical characteristics of the African system, in which “virtue is related more to success in reproduction than to limiting profligacy” (Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin 1989: 188). They conclude that, in contrast to the West, “Africans neither placed aspects of sexual behaviour at the center of their moral and social systems nor sanctified chastity” (Ibid.: 194). While focusing on women in particular, the Caldwells argue that the weak conjugal bond makes that premarital and extramarital sexual relations are not problematized: sex is surrounded with little guilt and substantial permissiveness and there is no strong religious and moral focus on sex. Drawing on social data on Africa they argue that unmarried girls have a certain degree of sexual freedom and that virginity is not very desirable. They indicate that there is hardly any data on boys engaging in sex before marriage, because “it is so universally assumed that all boys want sexual adventures and that little or no restraint is placed upon them” (Ibid.: 206). With respect to extramarital sex a similar point is made, namely that it is taken for granted for men and that female adultery is common. The implication of their thesis is:

that sexual promiscuity, particularly among women, is the norm in Africa, and that the lack of “control” of women’s sexuality is the key to the AIDS epidemic in that region. (Le Blanc, Meintel & Piché 1991 : 501)

The conclusions of the Caldwells is that the high degree of permissiveness and little morality on sexuality in Africa allow for multiple partnership and high rates of partner change, and that this level of sexual networking makes it easy for HIV to spread.

**Critiques on the African permissiveness thesis**

This permissiveness thesis has evoked heavy criticism (Le Blanc, Meintel & Piché 1991; Ahlberg 1994; Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994; Heald 1995; Spronk 2003, 2006; Stillwaggon 2003; Arnfred 2004a). A first major critique addresses the way the Caldwells use (anthropological) sources to verify their theory. Studies that indicate lack of moral value for sexuality are brought forward as evidence, whereas the reliability of sources that highlight a moral restraint are being questioned. Moreover, the Caldwells acknowledge that the data are very limited, scattered and partial, but nevertheless make strong claims on their basis. And worse, on the basis of a limited number of examples they extrapolate to the totality of sub-Saharan Africa. Additional criticisms point out that the Caldwells have adapted, distorted and rejected data that do not support their hypothesis (Stillwaggon 2003: 819–820), that the selection criteria for the literature used are not clear (Le Blanc et al. 1991), and that important references are missing (Ahlberg 1994: 223). Moreover, the Caldwells refer to studies from 1920 to the 1970s with no regard for the historical contexts to which they refer and without recognizing historical change (Le Blanc et al. 1991: 498-499;
also Ahlberg 1994). Data from the early 20th century can however not unproblematically be used to explain the behaviour of contemporary Africans (Stillwaggon 2003).

The most profound problem with the Caldwells’ thesis is that their claim of African sexual permissiveness cannot be supported by empirical evidence (Stillwaggon 2003). Not surprisingly, the critical assessments of their hypothesis bring forward a different view on sexuality in Africa. Central elements in this alternative interpretation are, firstly, that there are restrictions on sexuality and that sexual behaviour is being regulated by moral codes, and secondly, that these normative and regulatory patterns are highly variable across the continent and change through time. It is therefore impossible to speak of a monolithic ‘African sexuality’ (Le Blanc et al. 1991; Ahlberg 1994; Heald 1995). In relation to this, the debate between the Caldwells and their critics evolves around the matter of change. The Caldwells state that the African system is resistant to change, because it has remained largely intact throughout the centuries despite the assaults from the Eurasian system in the form of colonialism, Christianisation and Islamisation (e.g. Caldwell et al. 1989: 222). Critics, however, pointed out that there have been changes in regulation and norms of sexuality (e.g. Ahlberg 1994). Le Blanc et al. conclude with that “if anything, sexual patterns and control over female sexuality were much stricter in the past than at present” (1991: 503). Inquiries into and claims about sexuality in Africa thus have to be contextualised in time and place in order to have substance.

The response of the Caldwells to these critiques is that they never said that moral and institutional limitations on sexual practices were absent in Africa, as their point was that Eurasia had an obsession with the enforcement of female chastity to the extent that it had incongruously become a central tenet of religious behaviour. Africa had had the good fortune to have been bypassed by this. (Caldwell et al. 1991: 513)

In other words, moral codes and regulation of (female) sexuality do exist in Africa, but not to the ‘obsessive’ extent that is found in Eurasia. Eurasian control of “unconforming women” was more extreme and inevitable, and resulted in outcasting “of those who are beyond redemption”. In Africa, control did not consign “the guilty to a moral area beyond redemption [...]. Sexual escapades did not lead to damnation, but only to punishment, that made them possible if sometimes dangerous” (Caldwell et al. 1991: 508, emphasis mine). Although it clarifies their position, this reply does not disqualify the alternative perspectives on sexuality in Africa that insists on insist on diversity, change and contextualisation. It also shows the limits of the Caldwells’ analysis and claim:

That sexuality is regulated differently by different moral considerations in Africa than in Europe is evident, but it is regulated and ordered socially. (Le Blanc et al. 1991 : 501 ; emphasis in original)

A primary shortcoming of the Caldwells’ thesis is then that it does not provide any insight into the - many and diverse - ways in which sexuality is organized, ordered and regulated in African societies. And this is exactly the kind of insights that are needed to understand the social context in which HIV spreads.

It is important to see that the controversy surrounding the Caldwells’ thesis goes deeper than a disagreement on the interpretation of sources and findings. Their analysis has a profound eurocentric and racist character, according to Stillwaggon (2003). Although the Caldwells themselves refer to this danger of projection of Western stereotypes and
prejudices onto African cultures and problematize that Western notions are pervasive in thinking about Africa (Caldwell et al. 1989: 186-187), they seem to fall into this trap (Heald 1995: 490). Their thesis tunes in neatly with the racist history of science and with popular racial stereotypes in which ‘Africa’ is a homogeneous whole that is radically different from ‘Europe’ (Stillwaggon 2003: 811-822; Packard & Epstein 1991; Treichler 1992; Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994; Lyons & Lyons 2004). The Caldwells’ thesis on ‘African sexuality’ was more a re-vitalization of these age-old images fed by sexual anxieties and fears than an introduction of something new. It is all there: the unbridled black female sexuality, excessive, threatening and contagious, carrying a deadly disease. (Arnfred 2004b: 67)

‘Africans’ are represented as the social ‘Other’, and this exceptionalisation is for a large part constructed around sexual differences between the ‘races’: the myth of hypersexualised Africans opposed to idealized European sexuality – a myth that has a long history going back to early anthropological work (Lyons & Lyons 2004). This myth could only be (re)produced by omitting the commonalities and overlooking similarities between Africa and other regions of the world. It is evolutionist in the sense that it is suggested that the – allegedly exotic and primitive - African worldview originally also existed in Europe, but it has been replaced by a new social system. The implicit presence of racist prejudices in the history of Western science itself provide a conformative ring to the permissive African sexuality explanation (Stillwaggon 2003).

**Hegemonic AIDS discourse: ‘cultural barriers’**

The critiques on the heavily biased representation of African sexuality have not affected mainstream discourse on AIDS in Africa. The Caldwell thesis has been very influential in framing the debate on AIDS in Africa: it became a truth, even though the facts did not support the hypothesis (Stillwaggon 2003). There is no empirical evidence for a correlation between high HIV prevalence and high rates of sexual partner change and sexual networking. In fact, a WHO study found the opposite: no relation between higher levels of sexual networking, multipartenariat or permissiveness or promiscuity, and higher levels of HIV transmission (Cleland & Ferry 1995; see also Schoepf 2001; Parker 2001; Barnett & Whiteside 2002). Some authors argue that poverty, poor health and malnutrition might be more important explanations for Africa’s high HIV prevalence levels:

> [T]he characteristic that most distinguishes sub-Saharan Africa from Europe and North America is widespread poverty. Like other infectious diseases, HIV is more easily transmitted to persons whose immune systems are compromised by the effects of poverty. To understand the heterosexual spread of HIV among poor people, we must consider not only sexual behaviour and the social and economic factors that influence behaviour, but also the biological factors that increase the risk of infection with each exposure, regardless of the number of sexual contacts. (Stillwaggon 2003: 810)

I fully agree that sexuality and sexual practices should not be the only factors considered

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18 Stillwaggon (2003) gives the example of family pressure to bear children and double standard regarding sex, that can indeed be found in Africa, but also in many other places in the world, and therefore cannot be considered as evidence for a pan-African culture distinct from the rest of the world, as it does not specify Africa’s exceptionality (p. 820).
to explain HIV epidemiology. I also think that AIDS prevention has to follow two tracks: decreasing exposure to HIV and reducing vulnerability to it. With respect to the latter, combating poverty and improving general as well as sexual health will contribute to reducing physical vulnerability to HIV infection in case of unprotected sex with a seropositive partner. This thesis is however concerned with reducing sexual transmission of HIV, because this remains important to AIDS prevention. Although I remain within this sexual focus, this thesis differs from dominant thinking about AIDS and sexuality in Africa because it approaches safe sex from a different perspective. In order to clarify my perspective, I need to elaborate on the way culture has been approached in hegemonic AIDS discourse.

As a consequence of the Caldwell thesis becoming a ‘truth’, both research and policies on AIDS in Africa have been directed into a behavioural paradigm in which ‘culture’ came to be approached in a specific, and problematic way. The paradigm focused on identifying cultural aspects of sexuality that could contribute to the spread of HIV: polygamy, adultery, premarital sex, wife sharing, widow inheritance, circumcision and scarification rituals (with shared knives and needles), dry sex, and witchcraft beliefs (Gausset 2001). In the state of ‘emergency’ of the AIDS epidemic, practices that carried a risk of HIV infection were highlighted and “taken out of context, exaggerated, distorted or invented” (Treichler 1992: 390). Unfortunately, the local meanings of such practices, the importance attached to them as well as their embeddedness in cultural, social, economic and political contexts were often not considered. At the same time, those behaviours that were not or less risky did not receive much attention (Packard & Epstein 1991). This is problematic, because it generates a distorted image of sexuality in diverse African contexts, an image of a radically different ‘African sexuality’ that requires a different prevention approach.

From the identification of these cultural practices, it is only a small step to blame ‘African cultural practices’ for the spread of AIDS in Africa. Gausset (2001) exposes a hegemonic AIDS discourse in which beliefs and practices of African cultures became ‘cultural barriers’ to AIDS prevention (see also Schoepf 2001). Accordingly, campaigns targeted these practices with the aim of eradicating them:

AIDS prevention campaigns [in Africa] tell people that they should be monogamous, stop inheriting widows, stop practising dry sex, witchcraft, etc., without reflecting upon both the ethics and feasibility of such changes. (Gausset 2001: 512)

By contrast, Gausset notes, AIDS campaigns in Europe and North America do not aim at the eradication of practices that are associated with higher risks of HIV infection, such as drug injection or homosexual sex, but are concerned with making these practices safer. There is a double discourse on prevention in the sense that

When a correlation is found between HIV and the use of modern facilities, the facilities have to be improved and made safer; but when some correlation between HIV and an African cultural practice is found [or assumed], it is to be eradicated. (Gausset 2001: 511; addition mine)

Dry sex is a heterosexual practice - at several locations in sub Sahara Africa, e.g. Zimbabwe, Congo, Ghana, Cameroon, Zambia - in which substances are introduced into the vagina in order to make it dryer or more tight with the aim of increasing male pleasure (Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994: 62-63; Ferry 1996: 123). The higher friction as a result of the drying agent may increase the risk of tears and abrasions, and therefore facilitate HIV infection (Barnett & Whiteside 2002: 41).
In contrast to this discourse, local discourses in various African contexts put the blame for AIDS not on traditional practices, but on modernisation. In these views, Western lifestyles and practices, urban life, and modern education are held responsible for the breakdown of social and moral control and consequently for the spread of HIV (Patton 1997; Gausset 2001; Dilger 2003; see also Chapter 6 of this thesis).

Both discourses make sense, and both miss the point:

To think that restoring cultural traditions or, on the contrary, fighting traditions, will solve the problem of AIDS is [...] naïve. Both discourses focus on the wrong targets. [...] Traditional or Western behavior and ways of thinking are not what prevents the spread of AIDS. Safe sex and safe practices achieve this aim. (Gausset 2001: 512)

It is not the practice itself that causes HIV infection, but the unsafety and lack of protection with which it is practiced. Practices as polygamy, dry sex, or circumcision, as well as homosexuality or drug injection, do not in themselves cause HIV infection, but unprotected sex with an infected partner or use of unsterile needles or razors do. The concern should hence be with safe sex and safe practices, and not with fighting cultural practices, whether so-called modern or traditional. The value of this thesis lies in the way it involves culture into the analysis of (un)safe sex, without falling into the trap of conceptualising ‘culture’ in a generalizing and accusative way.

An alternative perspective and the notion of ‘culture’

By approaching safe sex from the perspective of the meanings of gendered premarital heterosexuality, this thesis provides an alternative perspective to biomedical and behavioural orientation of the hegemonic AIDS discourse. My approach starts from the premise that the understanding and study of culture is highly relevant to the study of – gendered – sexual behaviour (see also Ten Brummelhuis & Herdt 1995). Incorporating culture into sexuality research is not merely aimed at overcoming ignorance. My point is to go against seeing culture as an obstacle for the promotion of safe sex and behaviour change (Schoepf 1995). This thesis fits in with the – slow and late, yet important – response of anthropology to the AIDS epidemic. This anthropological contribution has claimed attention to cultural meanings and structural violence (Parker 2001; see also Schoepf 2001). The growing attention for the interpretation of cultural meanings, as opposed to the calculation of behavioural occurrences, provided a highly needed alternative approach to research on sexuality and AIDS. “The focus of much important research on sexuality in relation to HIV and AIDS over the course of the [1990s] has moved from behaviour, in and of itself, to the cultural settings within which behaviour takes place – and to the cultural symbols, meanings, and rules that organize it” (Parker 2001: 166-167). For anthropology itself, this AIDS stimulated work on sexuality met the need to “study sexual practice in terms of both local norms and local variation”, which was necessary because “anthropologists have too often regarded the ideal as the real practice”: “more fieldwork is needed, HRAF [Human Relations Area Files] studies, literature reviews, and mass surveys are no substitute for participant observation. Too many societies have been described without mention of local sexual practice” (Davis & Whitten 1987: 79; see also Vance 1999; RAWOO 2002). This thesis is based on an understanding of culture in terms of local meanings and local practices.

I agree with Gausset to be careful not to turn AIDS prevention into a fight against ‘cultural practices’. A point that I want to clarify in this respect is that the notion of ‘culture’
as I understand it has to be distinguished from customary traditions. It is important to make this distinction given the way in which the notion of ‘culture’ is constructed in the development discourse, in which the AIDS discourse as well as the sexual and reproductive rights and health discourse operate. As I discussed more elaborately elsewhere (Van Eerdewijk 2001a), the “development enterprise”, to speak in terms of Parpart (1995), creates the dichotomous and hierarchical categories of the developed and modern North versus the un(der)developed and traditional South. Within the parameters of the North-South divide, the North is implicitly taken as the standard of world morality in contrast to the South. In this conceptualisation of development, cultural traditions and practices are easily seen as obstacles and barriers to development in the South (Huizer 1999: 6).

Modernity carries the positive connotation of being dynamic and progressive, while tradition and culture carry the negative connotation of being backward and static. When considering development in the North, culture is not an issue, because the North either has “a monopoly of high culture” or is “without or beyond culture” (Oloka-Onyango & Tamale 1995: 713). For the South, by contrast, culture is seen as a hindrance rather than as a context for development processes. The notion of culture is often used to refer to traditional customary practices and beliefs, as if modern ideas and practices are not cultural. I however prefer a notion of culture as the complex of norms, symbols, meanings and practices that shape people’s behaviour. The social constructionist perspective allows for understanding sexuality and gender as cultural practices and beliefs, regardless of whether they can be labelled ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’ (see also Kolawole 2004: 254). When I argue for the incorporation of culture in studying sexuality and safe sex, this therefore means that, firstly, I look at the construction of gendered premarital heterosexuality in Dakar in both norms and practice, and secondly, that safe sex practices are embedded in this gendered sexuality.

The risk of conceptualising and approaching ‘culture’ as in the dichotomous and hierarchical notion of the development concept is that of ethnocentrism. This is problematic because “Western, and specifically European, discourses construct themselves as subject, in the process marginalizing or othering non-western discourse” (Andermahr et al. 1997: 68). Northern women are often depicted as actors, in the sense that their individual decision-making power is emphasized when looking at their sexual and reproductive behaviour. Southern women are easily presented as ‘cultural dopes’ whose rights are violated by threats coming from ‘culture’, tradition and religion. Mohanty (1991) exposed the normative categories in Western feminist writing on so-called ‘third world women’:

A homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an ‘average third world woman’. This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, family-oriented, victimized, etc). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions. [...] Western feminists [...] all construct themselves as the normative referent of such a binary analysis. (p. 56)

This oversimplification can take place because with respect to the South, culture and religious aspects are overemphasized, meanwhile disregarding other processes that impact on for instance sexual and reproductive practices. Oversimplification is also the result of studying ‘culture’ and religion in an abstract and general way which leads to homogenisation, essentialization and fixation (Jansen 1989; Abu-Lughod 1993). In an attempt to
counter the problematization of cultural traditions in hegemonic AIDS discourse, this thesis pays attention to differences, internal conflict, and heterogeneity, because these bring the self-evident character of the self-other dichotomy into question. Taking agency into account, as I did in the introductory Chapter, is crucial in trying to minimize ethnocentrism, because it makes that women, girls – and for that matter men and boys – come forward as active subjects, taking up multiple subject positions.

Against the background of these elaborations, I need to make two final points about 'culture' in this thesis. Firstly, my perspective on culture and social construction of gendered premarital heterosexual implies that what are called traditional, customary and religious beliefs and practices are not by definition an obstacle. Nor are they automatically the opposite, that is, the solution. The same counts for what can be considered modern ideas and practices. In fact, both 'modern' and 'traditional' can be an obstacle to as well as a source for the practice of safe sex (and this makes questions as to whether modernity or tradition are causes of AIDS not a fruitful nor relevant line of investigation). Secondly, it follows out of the conceptualisation of gender and sexuality as social constructs that behaviour change towards safe(r) sex implies cultural change, because behaviour only takes shape as a cultural performance. Put differently, while I oppose to the oversimplified identification of 'harmful cultural practices' and an accusative view of culture as a barrier to development, I do put culture central stage as the complex of local meanings and practices plays a crucial role in the shaping of safe, or unsafe, sex.

It is in relation to the theoretical debate on the African permissiveness thesis of the Caldwells that the conceptual framework of this thesis as outlined in the introductory Chapter gains relevance. It aims to offer an alternative to the behavioural paradigm of KAPB studies that have dominated thinking about AIDS, reproductive health and safe sex. Contextualised meanings and interpretations are central in my framework that looks at safe sex as embedded in the construction of young people’s gendered sexuality. Core concepts in my framework are the social construction of sexuality, which considers sexuality as a social phenomenon and looks at both processes of categorization and their social consequences (Weeks 1986a, 1986b; Hastrup 1978; Jansen 1987; Kippax & Crawford 1993; Rubin 1999; Vance 1999). In what terms do young people speak about sexuality and safe sex? Or put differently, in what categories is premarital sexuality constructed, what do these categories mean and what are their social consequences? Sexuality is considered in its intersections with gender (Harding 1986; Scott 1991; Jansen 1987; Crenshaw 1997; Davis 2003). By seeing gender as performative – as a doing –, the embodiment of gendered sexuality subjectivities comes to the fore and girls and boys become active subjects; this makes that justice is done to both norms and practice (Butler 1990a, 1990b). In the enactment, young people are in specific ways ascribed agency to practice safe sex. This thesis looks at how girls and boys are positioned in those gendered sexual subjectivities to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STI infections. In the next part of this chapter, I will discuss how I investigated the gendered sexuality and safe sex practices of young people in Dakar.

2 Notes on methodology

Rather than seeking to answer how many young people engage in sex or use condoms, this thesis seeks gain insight into why young people have sex, what intimate relationships and sex mean to them, with whom they have sex, how they look upon condom use or
abstinence, what words they use when speaking about these issues. Statistical, quantitative studies cannot answer these questions in a satisfactory manner (MacPhail & Campbell 2001: 1614-1615; Bardem & Gobatto 1997; Reysoo 1998; Cacéres 2000). I therefore explained in the introductory Chapter that qualitative research methods are invaluable in the attempt to study safe sex practices as a more than a medical or individual matter. I gathered data through a variety of methods, ranging from informal conversations, participant observation and key informants, to semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), to literature study and the analysis of secondary statistical surveys.

This section will indicate with which young people I worked and will discuss how I talked with them about sex, sexuality and safe sex. It starts with describing the selection criteria of the girls and boys who participated in the study. This is followed by some reflections on intersubjectivity, positionality and performativity in relation to fieldwork, data gathering and the production of knowledge. Next, I address how I came to ‘talk about sex in the field’. What difficulties did my research assistants and I encounter, and how did we try to deal with them? The next issues that I consider briefly are related to access and consent. The section ends with a description of the research methods and techniques used during fieldwork.

**Young people participating in this study**

The selection of the young people that participated in this research project was based on five criteria: marital status, age, sex/gender, schooling, and place of residence. The first criterion is the most distinctive. As the tension between young people’s sexual activity and the dominant norms that do not allow premarital sex are the focus of this study, the girls and boys who participated obviously had to be unmarried. The lives and experiences of married young people would make an interesting subject for another study (e.g. Bruce & Clark 2004). Only one girl that was in the process of getting married ‘slipped’ into the research group, but her exceptional marital status confirms the rule. With respect to the other girls, some had been asked for marriage, but have refused or were still negotiating a postponement of the marriage with their parents. None of the boys was actively pursuing a marriage at the moment the fieldwork was done, as they lack the means to do so. Being unmarried, the girls and boys were expected to be sexually inactive. As is common for unmarried youth in this age range, all participants lived with their parents, or other relatives, and not on their own.

The second selection criterion is sex/gender. The earliest research questions were mainly focused on girls, but I soon decided to incorporate both girls and boys into the study. As I explained earlier, this thesis applies its gender analysis to both sexes, because the understanding of heterosexuality that it seeks to generate requires the involvement of both parties, girls and boys. In order to understand how the gendered expectations and behaviours in the field of sexuality work out in safe sex practices, both sides of the story need to be included. All participants claimed to be heterosexual, and were, in the general context of homophobia that exists in Dakar, critical of same-sex relationships (on stigma on homosexuality in Senegal see Niang et al. 2002; Niang et al. 2003; Teunis 2001; Murray & Roscoe 1998).

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20 The young Senegalese man to which this girl – Aminata - was married, lived in Italy. Since the conclusion of their marriage at the mosque – at which neither the bride nor the groom were present – they had not met face-to-face. The wedding night had not yet taken place, nor had there been a party to celebrate the marriage. Given that the marriage process was not yet completed, and that Aminata was still living with her parents, I did include her in the research group.
The third characteristic of the participants is age: all were between 16 and 23 years of age. In the preparatory phase of fieldwork, it seemed to my research assistants and me that it would be more difficult to do research among younger girls and boys, given that they would have less sexual experience and that, as a result of that, it could be more difficult for them to talk about sex. In order to catch an age group that would hopefully be confident enough to talk about their sexual experiences, we decided to work with slightly older young people, in their late teens and early twenties. We started with in-school youth, and choose to approach girls and boys in the pre-final class of secondary school, because we expected that those in the final year would be too pre-occupied with their exams and homework. The students that we ended up working with, were in the ages 16 to 23. When approaching out-of-school youth in a later stage of the fieldwork, we remained within these age brackets. The vast majority of the participants is either 18, 19 or 20 years old. Only a few were younger (16 or 17 years old), or older (21, 22 or 23 years of age) (see also the Annex for detailed information on ages of participants).

The fourth and fifth selection criteria are schooling and place of residence. I used these criteria to catch young people in the lower or low-middle classes. The families of the young people that I worked with are constantly struggling to meet their financial needs: in vivre sénégalaisement, they have to balance their resources in order to pay the rent, electricity, and water, and cater for food and clothing for the different family members. Parents do their best to pay for their children’s school fees, and sometimes older sisters and brothers jump in to deal with these expenses. Half of the research group (both girls and boys) has quit school, because of a combination of limited resources and disappointing performances. The occupation of the parents varies from teachers to government officers, from marabouts to small traders. In some cases, a relative living in France or another foreign country is able to send money 'home'. Some families are relatively better off than others, but none of the participants belongs to the rich and elite part of the population and for instance does not attend the costly private schools that are based in downtown Dakar (cf. Spronk 2004, 2005a, 2006). Neither are they part of the extremely marginalized groups, such as drug users, prostitutes or homeless (cf. the study ‘Marges, sexe et drogues à Dakar’ [Werner 1993] or street children [e.g. Samu Social Sénégal 2004a, 2004b]). That means that the participants cannot be categorized as the poorest of the poorest, nor as the privileged elites, but are in the low income and lower middle income groups.

With respect to the criterion of schooling, private schools were excluded from the research, as these are too much part of the elite to fit this study. I worked with four groups of in-school youth from two of the largest secondary public schools in Dakar that both cater for at least 6,000 students: Lycée Blaise Diagne and Lycée Seydira Limamoulaye. The
out-of-school girls that participated in this study were contacted through two informal training centres: a Centre Social and the Restaurant des Filles Unies. The out-of-school boys had grown up in the neighbourhood where I also lived, Fann Hock, and were not enrolled in an informal training. They had been invited to participate by Raphael, my male research assistant, who also lived in Fann Hock. It is important to note that the out-of-school participants are not completely uneducated, since most received at least a few years of primary education.

A lot of studies on young people and adolescents are carried out in school contexts, most probably due to practical accessibility. Contacting out-of-school groups is more complicated, given that they are less institutionalised. Moreover, out-of-school youth mainly speak local vernacular, which makes it difficult for foreign researchers to speak with them directly. I decided that it was important to include both in- and out-of-school youth in my study, because the life worlds and experiences of both groups can differ substantially (Kirumira 1998: 83). The activities of young people attending school are for a considerable extent focused on their education: they go to classes, do their homework, and sit for tests and exams. They are often dependent on relatives for their daily needs and for their school fees to be paid. For girls, schooling can function as a postponement of marriage. The lives of out-of-school youth look rather different: they often have taken up more ‘adult’ responsibilities and roles. Girls are expected to take part in the household work (such as cooking, cleaning, washing) and boys often have the responsibility to find work and earn some money. As such, out-of-school young people make their contribution to the maintenance of the family. Another difference between the two groups is that it is generally taken that in-school young people are more exposed to information on for instance AIDS or safe sex than those not attending school. The two informal training centres of the girls in this study did however also provide information on AIDS or unwanted pregnancies. Although on a general level the exposure of in-school youth to information is true, one has to be careful not to be prejudiced about out-of-school youth and assume that they are by definition ill-informed and less capable to make informed decisions about their lives than school attending youth.

With respect to the fifth criteria of place of residence, I worked with young people from different areas of Dakar and included those living in popular neighbourhoods of Grand Dakar as well as those in the suburbs, which are as I mentioned earlier neither elite, nor extremely marginalized. The Centre Social is located in Parcelles Assainies and is visited by girls from that suburban area. Lycée Seydira Limamoulaye is based in the distant suburb Guediawaye, and attracts students from other suburbs as Pikine and Parcelles Assainies as well as neighbouring small towns as Keur Massar. The Restaurant des Filles Unies can be found in Grand Dakar and the girls who come there, live in Gueule Tapée, Medina or Rebeuss. The neighbourhood Fann Hock, where the group of out-of-school boys was residing, can also be considered to be part of Grand Dakar. Lycée Blaise Diagne, finally, is also situated in Grand Dakar, and attracts students from the surrounding quartiers populaires, such as Colobane, Liberté and Castors, but also from the suburbs. Most participants to this study were born in Dakar, and only a few lived in the rural areas, and came to Dakar at a later age.

I could have chosen to limit my inquiry to one area, but decided not to, as I wanted to grasp a diversity of living conditions and backgrounds. By including different neighbourhoods, I hoped to avoid being biased. Both the criteria of schooling and place of residence served the purpose of creating diversity in the research group. I want to stress here that the distinction between and inclusion of the different groups was not made with the objective of comparison. This study does not aim at investigating differences and
similarities between in- and out-of-school youth, nor between young people living in the suburbs or Grand Dakar. The concern is not with making statements about the populations, but with coming to an understanding of the lived experiences of heterosexuality and safe sex practices. Depending on the conditions, these take different shapes, and I wanted to include this variety of practices. The criteria of place of residence and schooling are tools to consciously incorporate different groups of young people and, as such, reduce bias. In retrospect, it can be concluded that place of residence did not substantially impact on the sexuality and safe sex behaviour of the girls and boys in this study. Schooling did play a role in the sense that it was more difficult for out-of-school girls to delay a marriage than for those in-school. Working in the different circumstances and settings was valuable because it allowed me to get to know many of the Dakarois neighbourhoods and their varied living conditions.

Based on these five selection criteria, I came to work with seven groups of young people, varying in size from 4 to 12 participants. The characteristics of the different groups of research participants are schematically represented in table 2.1 below. I originally intended to work with eight groups, but in the end did not select a group of out-of-school boys in the suburbs. After it had proven to be difficult to contact out-of-school boys, as they were less connected to institutions and organizations, I decided that the group of boys from Fann Hock provided sufficient data for the study. Table 2.1 indicates that in addition to these seven groups, I also conducted several additional interviews, which are summarized in the table under the heading ‘various’. These include in-depth interviews with: (1) an unmarried teenage mother, (2) a young woman who had two children prior to marriage, (3) the mother of this second woman, who also happened to be the mother of one of the boys from the Fann Hock group, and (4) a father, who was not related to any of the young participants. The teenage mothers [(1) and (2)] were explicitly included because I had encountered serious difficulties in having girls talk about their own sexual experiences, and I wanted to see whether it would be easier to talk with teenage mothers, who could no longer claim to be virgins. The formal interviews with a father and mother [(3) and (4)] were conducted to learn more about the perspective of parents – of which I had also come to learn through informal contacts with some families that I was close to.

The findings of this research are however not merely based on these seven groups of participants, but build on information from a broader research group. These include for instance numerous informal contacts with friends and neighbours, or even people that I met only once. Moreover, staff from NGOs were also an important source of information. Finally, key informants have played a pivotal role. I elaborate on these different contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Schooling</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blaise Diagne I</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>in-school</td>
<td>Grand Dakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaise Diagne II</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>in-school</td>
<td>Grand Dakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limamoulaye I</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>in-school</td>
<td>suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limamoulaye II</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>in-school</td>
<td>suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant des Filles Unies</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>out-of-school</td>
<td>Grand Dakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Social (Parcelles Assainies)</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>out-of-school</td>
<td>Suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fann Hock</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>out-of-school</td>
<td>Grand Dakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- various -</td>
<td>girls, mother, father</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>suburbs + Grand Dakar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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and the information they generated at the end of this chapter when I discuss the research methods and techniques. But first I turn to the difficulties in talking about sex and sexuality.

**Intersubjectivity, positionality and performativity**

How did I investigate the gendered premarital heterosexuality and safe sex practices of these girls and boys? I could only in a limited way make use of one of the major routes of qualitative data collection, namely observing people’s behaviour (see also Ahlberg 1994: 225). Sexual contacts, sex, condom use and other core aspects of this study could not be investigated by means of participant observation, as I was not able to actually observe intimate and sexual encounters, nor did I (or was willing to) participate in them. Of course, I was able to observe other aspects of young people’s lives, and of life in Dakar in general, as I will describe in the research methods and techniques section below. Notwithstanding, the limited utility of participant observation with respect to intimate relationships and sexual encounters left me with the option of talking about sex. Talking was not an evident matter either, because in many ways, sex and sexuality are sensitive issues for people and researchers to talk about (Tuzin 1991; Kulick 1995). Sexuality and sexual practices are such laden subjects – connected to identity and status – that the reliability of people’s reports on their sexual behaviour can be seriously questioned (see e.g. Ahlberg 1994: 225; Lagarde, Enel & Pison 1995). In fact, “what people say and do in public with regard to sexuality may differ greatly and even contradict their private sexual behaviour” (Parker, Herdt & Carballo 1999: 420). Here I focus on what this ‘talking about sex’ meant for me, the young participants and the research assistants, and what kind of ‘data’ came out of the dialogue that evolved between us.

I did not conceive of fieldwork and qualitative research as a fact finding mission, but rather as an intersubjective affair, in which knowledge is not discovered by me, but created in the encounter between me and the young people in the field (e.g. Hastrup 1995). I follow Haraway in her critique on the idea of science as infinite and disembodied ‘vision’, which she qualifies as “the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (1991: 189). In contrast to aiming for closure and finality – supposedly based on transcendence –, she argues for the partial perspective, for location and situated knowledge because “the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (Ibid.: 196). For this study, I was interested in seeing how the girls and boys, with whom I spoke in the conversations, construct and reconstruct their lives, give meanings to certain elements, legitimate certain behaviours, and judge other behaviour, people or themselves. I understood knowledge as something that is created through the shared social experience, through the actual encounter between me and the young people. I analysed the conversations as representations that the young people made of their own lives and reality. This thesis, in turn, is my representation of what I found and learnt in the conversations with the girls and boys.

The narratives that evolved during fieldwork are the product of the dialogue between the participants, me and the two research assistants that I worked with. Talking about sex was a special experience for all of us. Acknowledging that “fieldwork is highly personal: without a fieldworker, one has no data” (Herdt & Stoller 1990: 18), it is important to understand how I was, in many ways, an outsider: a white, European woman, at that time aged 28. I had gotten married a year earlier, but did not (yet) have children. I spoke French, but not perfectly, and attempted to speak Wolof, but this remained a constant struggle. I presented myself to the participating girls and boys as someone who was interested in the sexual and reproductive health of unmarried young people. I underlined that I was
particularly interested in their experiences and ideas about the controversial topic of premarital sexuality, on which the voice of adults was predominantly heard. With my explicit interest in their side of the story, I hoped that they would have enough confidence in me to make me in some ways an insider to their life worlds.

My background and perception of gender and sexuality were reflected in the questions that I asked. My interest in sexual and reproductive rights and gender issues made me bring up issues such as safe sex, sexual pleasure, consent and force, and power relations between girls and boys. Prior to this research project, I used to speak of sex and sexuality mainly with my partner and some close friends. Fieldwork confronted me with my own sensitivities and embarrassments (see also Reysoo 1998: 103). I for instance had to search for the right words and questions that would allow me to raise issues of sex, especially actual sexual experiences. I had to find a way to ask explicit questions on private matters without offending the girl(s) or boy(s) that I was talking to. In addition, although many people were reluctant to explicitly talk about premarital sexual experiences, especially girls, I for example had to get used to the straightforward and detailed way in which people could talk about wedding night practices, vaginal penetration and the bride’s hymen.

For most of the young people that participated in this study, talking about sex and sexuality was also an exceptional experience. They indicated on multiple occasions that they had hardly ever talked with anyone about the issues we raised, at least not in the way we addressed the matter. In general, it was much easier for them to talk about how things should be, than about actual behaviour, especially if that conduct did not conform to the dominant norms. This is influenced by the way people generally talk about religious values. As my Wolof teacher once explained to me, the will to obey God is more important than the results of one’s actions. He suggested this in the sense that God knows that human beings are imperfect and that the things he asks from them are a guide or an ideal. He cannot ask people things that are beyond their capacities, so the desire to obey counts more than the actual behaviour. If you seriously wish to follow his demands, but the conditions do not allow you to do so, God can forgive you. In this understanding of the religious guidelines and demands, it is important for people to express their knowledge about what is considered proper conduct as well as the desire to follow the ‘rules’. This stimulates talking about norms rather than actual behaviour. In that respect, discretion also plays an interesting role. At multiple occasions, it was as if the actual talking about premarital sexual matters made them ‘real’. “As long as you don’t talk about a certain [sexual] affair, nobody has to take action against it” (Arnfred 2004b: 74). In our conversations, both boys and girls therefore made an effort to come across as someone who knows the norms and who acts accordingly. Only after having established themselves as ‘good’ girls and boys with proper character and decent behaviour, space could open up for alternative and sub-dominant versions of the ‘truth’. All this made that not everything could be said and discussed.

The dialogue took a rather different shape with girls than with boys. Prior to fieldwork I had imagined that, because I was a woman, it would be easier to speak with girls than boys, but reality turned out to be the opposite. As will become clear in the later chapters, girls and boys have to relate to highly gendered norms on premarital sexuality. In short, I can say here that the silencing of female premarital sexuality makes it very difficult for girls to explicitly talk about their sexual experiences, and that they were rather suspicious and defensive to me questioning their sexual experiences. For boys, by contrast, talking about their sexual experiences is part of the hegemonic masculinity that they have to conform to, and I provided an audience for whom they could play out this role. For
them, however, it is harder to talk about the fact that they might have few sexual contacts
or that (some of) their sexual experiences were not positive or satisfactory.

The two research assistants played a crucial role in the fieldwork dialogues. I was very
fortunate to find both a female and male assistant. Both were 25 years of age and had lived
their whole life in Dakar. The female assistant, Khady, was finishing her university degree
in philosophy and had been active in the Groupe pour l'Etude et l'Education de la Population
(GEEP), the NGO that was ‘my base’ in Dakar. Raphael, the male assistant, was my
neighbour in Fann Hock. He had started university courses in law, but time and financial
constraints had made it impossible for him to transform his talents into a degree. Both
Khady and Raphael were critical discussion partners, open to take up the challenge of
conducting this research project. Neither of them was used to asking the questions that I
wanted to pose to the young participants. During the discussions and preparations they
however developed a clear idea of what I was interested in, and together we set out ways to
organize discussions and interviews around these topics. During the actual meetings with
the participants, Raphael and Khady played an important role in finding the right tune
and language in the debate and functioned as brokers between me and the participants.
They not only translated Wolof for me, but also in a less literal sense translated my
questions and ideas into words and expressions that resonated with the life worlds of the
young people. Together we developed a language to talk about and understand young
people’s sexuality.

Through our conversation, we created a ‘niche’, a space in which the young people,
the assistants and I could talk about premarital sexuality and sex. The discussions and
interviews themselves were already acts of distancing myself and the participants from the
dominant discourse that silenced premarital sexuality and young people’s voices. As an
outsider, I had some room to disagree with and distance myself from dominant norms on
sexuality without immediately losing credibility – that is without being labelled a prostitu-
tute, a deviant, or as dangerous. Their image of me, and of western society in general in
which they thought that young people’s sexuality was ‘less taboo’ or ‘more promiscuous’,
enabled a space in which we could talk about sex. One of the boys explained to me that
he could talk about these sensitive topics with me, because he thought that I was used to
talking about it since this was my work. At some points I explicitly stated that, coming
from a different background, I did not necessarily share the same values on for instance
premarital virginity or gender relations. When the occasion arose, I explained that I had
not entered marriage with my Dutch partner as a virgin, and that I opposed to being forced
to sex by my husband. But even without making my position on many issues explicit, I
have no doubt that the participants figured out or imagined my views and related them-
selves to this. My presence in that sense invited, or confronted, them to look upon their
lives in specific ways, sometimes questioning aspects that they had taken for granted
before. In a similar yet different way, their stories and experiences made me reconsider my
own (intimate) life and sexuality as well as theirs. This often lead to confusion on my part,
which I shared in long discussions with Raphael and Khady and which also fed into new
conversations with the participants. The confusion was not necessarily pleasant, but
always useful, as it pushed me to formulate new questions and open up my mind.

An important question is whether my position as an outsider facilitated or impeded
talking about deviant ideas and behaviour. I think that in some ways, it was easier for them
to talk with this woman from abroad about such conduct, as I did not judge them the way
they were used to. Yet, in other ways, it is also possible that they were more inclined
to highlight dominant norms and expected behaviour in their contacts with me. Within
the intercultural communication between us, they have an interest to establish themselves
as ‘good’ girls and boys, and their country and ‘culture’ as respectable. Indeed, the earlier
contacts with participants were dominated by hegemonic meanings and norms. Only
in a later stage, after having met several times, it became easier to see deviant and
sub-dominant perspectives and identities. In that respect, the confidence build over time
facilitated the expressions of alternative views and experiences. Moreover, as a researcher
I became more sensitive to indirect clues and openings in the hegemonic discourse, and as
such was better able to see alternative versions.

The matter of discovering the ‘truth’ about young people’s sexuality merits some
more attention. I often had to deal with ‘different versions of the truth’. Different people
could share different stories about the same event or person, or even worse, the same
person could tell different versions of the same story. This is first of all the result of the
fact that people not necessarily always have complete and correct information. Moreover, I
came to learn that people also interpret experiences and events in particular ways, with
each person having her or his own interests in this – largely unconscious - process. These
interests vary with the time and place where the story is told. Of course, the shape
and content of the story also depend on the audience, the person to whom the story is told,
as I already addressed above.

Some versions of the ‘truth’ had little to do with what really happened. In this
respect, it is interesting to consider the circular character of so to speak ‘natural’ conversa-
tions in Dakar: after the opening greetings, people ask how things are with the family,
work, school, health and so on. In most cases, exact information, especially about less
positive developments or deviant issues, does not surface the first times a subject is talked
about, when more socially desirable attitudes are enacted and expressed. In the circular
movements of the conversation, relevant subjects will however re-surface at later stages,
sometimes even more than once. At such later stages, when identities have been esta-
blished and a safe environment has been created, alternative and sub-dominant versions
of a story can unfold. Each new time that an event or experience is being discussed,
additional or new information can come forward, sometimes contradicting what has been
said before. This can even occur within the same conversation or interview, as for instance
happened when one girl came to talk about her first sexual experiences during the same
interview in which she had claimed to be a virgin.

Coming back to the earlier made point of the limited reliability of reports on sexual
behaviour and the differences between public claims and private conduct, I argue here
that it is not directly a problem that the girls and boys might not have revealed the ‘truth’
about their sexual lives to me. In fact, I sometimes had the distinct impression that the
participants were telling me lies. But lies are not by definition worthless information. As
Nencel put it:

Lies serve to protect, to deny, to fantasize and to be accepted. A simple lie hides messages
about somebody’s identity. It is a means to model that identity. (Nencel 1999: 20; transla-
tion mine)

Interviewing, whether individually or in group settings, is hence not a matter of revealing
the ‘truth’, but of learning about the variety of truths people create for themselves and the
reasons why they do so. In this respect, it is fruitful to understand the interactions and
conversations in fieldwork as ‘performative’:

Information is not there, ready in the native’s head to be called up and expressed in
discursive statements which can then be collected by the ethnographer and taken home
as 'data'. It has to be made present through enactment, *performance*. (Pool 1991: 70; emphasis in original)

In the enactment – in embodied social practices - cultural knowledge is made present and as such produced (see also Nencel 1999). The answers that participants give to questions are “not really responses to questions”, but cultural performances, that are catalysed by the presence of the researcher (Fabian 1990, in Pool 1991: 70). The information participants shared during individual interviews or group discussions is embedded in the performative enactment of their identities at that very moment and the construction of the meaning of the relationship between them and me. Rather than collecting factual reports on sexual behaviour, attitudes and perspectives in the interviews and group discussions, I was looking for an understanding of what is at stake in the way the young people in the field spoke with me about their sexual experiences and ideas. In that respect, I was – and am - not only interested in seeing what the Dakarois girls and boys with whom I spoke tell about their intimate relationships, their sexual contacts and experiences, but also in how they talk about these issues. What meanings do they give to sexuality and safe sex? What behaviour and which ideas were rendered normal or unacceptable, how were these perspectives legitimised or problematized? What issues are talked about and what is being silenced? What subjectivities are created and excluded in their narratives?

**Talking about sex in the field**

Before going into the field, I was warned more than once of the difficulties I could meet when trying to talk about sex with young people. I was actually surprised to see how many “adults […] argue that adolescents have not sufficiently grown up to have an informed opinion” (Kirumira 1998: 83). I had the distinct impression that in these warnings the ‘cannot’ was often confused with the ‘should not’ talk about sex, and I wondered to what extent the discomfort and embarrassment of adults was projected onto young people. This convinced me even more of the necessity to go ahead and find ways to talk about these sensitive but important issues with a silenced group. With ‘sensitive’ issues I refer to “behaviours or attitudes which would normally be kept private and personal, which might result in offence or lead to social censure or disapproval, and/or which might cause the respondent discomfort to express” (Wellings *et al.* 2000: 256; see also RAWOO 2002: 24). Despite the warnings, it turned out that it was possible to talk about sex, sexuality and safe sex. That does not mean, however, that my assistants and I did not encounter problems in the conversations. How did we deal with such difficulties?

In order to facilitate talking about sexuality and safe sex, I decided – in consultation with the research assistants – to start with focus group discussions and only in a later stage conduct individual interviews. I assumed that talking about sexuality would be easier in a group discussion than in an individual interview, because the groups are not as direct as face-to-face situations. In the group, participants had some room to dissolve, keep quiet, and hide behind the others. The group provided a space where the girls and boys could get used to talking about sex and get over their initial discomfort and unease by making jokes, laughing amongst each other and observe how the debate developed. Moreover, it was not necessary for the participants to talk about their own sexual experiences if they did not want to. In practice, this varied between the groups: in some groups, especially those of boys, participants were rather eager to discuss their personal experiences, and in others, mainly girls, but also to some extent boys, participants talked from a more general perspective. Another advantage of the group discussions is that the participants had the
opportunity to check me out. During the sessions they could observe me, my behaviour and my reactions towards the discussion and them, and could see what questions I was asking and what I was interested to learn more about. This allowed them to develop an idea of who I was and what I wanted to do, and to get used to me. In short, the group discussions provided the opportunity for both me and my research assistants as well as the young people participating to get to know one another and develop a relation of trust and confidence in which we developed a manner to talk about the subject of sexuality.

A common criticism on group discussions is that they are not appropriate for research on sensitive topics and intimate behaviour, as the group format cannot guarantee the privacy, confidentiality and non-condemnatory attitude that are needed for making people talk about such issues. Yet, focus groups can also be very beneficial to studying sensitive issues (Wellings et al. 2000: 256). In order to realize this, one has to reconsider what counts as data:

Individuals in a focus group are constantly undertaking several simultaneous tasks; they express their own opinions and describe their own behaviour, and they also edit these to render them congruous with and acceptable to the perceived group or social norm. [...] The expression of the personal viewpoint and the recognition of its social acceptability in the same utterance provides simultaneously insight into individual attitudes and social norms. [...] The dynamics of the group are to be regarded, not as a problem or nuisance, but as data. (Wellings et al. 2000: 265)

The focus group discussions thus offer important insights into social expectations and ideals, and processes of normalization and silencing. In fact, the group dynamic between the participants, researcher and assistants can be understood as an enactment of identities and norms, and this understanding of data falls in line with the notion of performativity on which this study relies. Tensions between individual attitudes and social expectations are then not problems in data collection, but valuable data of how young people’s sexuality is constructed and produced. An additional advantage of focus groups is that they also make the researcher part of how individuals deviate from hegemonic patterns and attempt to deal with such discontinuities. For these reasons, the focus group discussions proved to be valuable for this study, especially since they were combined at a later stage with individual interviews. The rapport build during the group discussions was a fruitful basis to conduct individual interviews that were more directed to personal experiences and ideas.

Within the focus group sessions, we tried to facilitate talking about sex in a number of ways. First of all, most focus groups were single-sex, as it was assumed that girls and boys would talk more easily about sexuality amongst themselves. Within the schools, we organized two mixed focus group discussions in which we brought the boys and girls together. This was not possible in the other research locations. As we had expected, the antagonism between the sexes dominated the mixed discussions, and this confirmed our assumption that in mixed settings both girls and boys were less able to express their views. Notwithstanding, the mixed discussions were valuable in their own right for the insights they provided into the antagonism between girls and boys with respect to the issues of intimate relationships, sex, and responsibilities for unwanted pregnancies and STI infections. Secondly, we organized multiple focus group discussions with each group, hoping that in time the process of building a confidential relationship would be strengthened and that this would allow for a more profound discussion (see also Kirumira 1998: 85-86). On average, three meetings were organized with each research group (see also
later). Thirdly, we started with the more neutral and less sensitive topics and slowly moved to discussing more personal and explicit issues (see also Wellings et al. 2000: 257). Fourthly, in order to promote confidentiality, no other people than the participants, the assistants and myself were present during the sessions, and nobody could overhear our discussions. Teachers and NGO staff were not allowed into the room where the discussions took place. Fifthly, I brought drinks and biscuits to consume during the sessions and this stimulated an informal ambience to the get togethers, of which we hoped that it would make the young participants feel more at ease.

Finally, we introduced some principles that served as guidelines for the debates. A first principle was that we considered the participants to be experts on their own lives and that we had come to learn from them. For this reason, I made sure that the assistant and I would not sit next to each other, but were spread in the circle and mixed among the group, in order to avoid a class room situation with us as ‘the experts’ on one side, and the participants at the other side of the table. I explained that I was interested in hearing about their experiences and opinions, because most of the time adults, such as politicians, teachers, or parents, talk about young people’s sexuality without including young people themselves in the debate. I stressed that the goal of the research was to understand from young people’s perspective how they live their lives and their sexuality. A second important principle was that we had not come to tell them what to do and what not to do, or to judge whether their behaviour was acceptable or not. In addition, we underlined that we intended the discussion to be an open debate, in which there were no ‘false’ or ‘correct’ answers to questions because it is not a test. We invited everybody to share their ideas and experiences with us. I also asked them to respect each other’s positions and views, and not judge each other. This also meant that we asked to let everybody speak freely without being interrupted (ne pas couper la parole). A third principle was that of confidentiality. We promised to never reveal who had been saying what, and that in the presentation of the findings nobody would be recognizable or depicted with their names or photographs. We stressed that respect of confidentiality was not only up to us, but that we asked them to respect it among themselves, and not to talk about what was said by whom with other people.

With these principles we hoped to make the participants feel at ease to express their opinions and views. Despite the fact that they were importance points of departure for the discussions, there were limits to the extent they could be put into practice. For example, while we wished to approach the participants as experts, literature highlights how the participants in focus group discussions often view the moderator “as a source of authority” and regularly seek validation for points of information as well as points of view (Wellings et al. 2000: 258). My desire to approach the girls and boys as experts in combination with the principle that there were no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers made me reluctant to give such confirmation and validation. Moreover, in some ways the incorrect and false statements and social acceptability of attitudes and opinions were findings in themselves. Nevertheless, both me and the research assistants intervened at multiple occasions to provide information on for example the menstrual cycle or contraceptives or to engage in a discussion about for instance the importance of consent in sexual

23 It is common in Dakar to cater for drinks and snacks for people attending a meeting or get together, as a means to thank them for their presence and as compensation for their time. Because the FGDs at Lycée Blaise Diagne took place during the ramadan, the participants were given milk powder and dates which are commonly consumed to break the fasting at the end of the day.
relationships. With respect to the principle of respecting each others views and being non-judgemental, the paradox is that “tension may need to be managed; yet unless it seriously threatens the dynamic of the group, it can be viewed as a resource” (Welling et al. 2000: 265). In many ways, the participants were critical of each others ideas. Moreover, the group dynamics often actually entailed normalization and correction, as this is virtually central to all social interaction in which people are constructing their – multiple - identities.

By having the individual interviews follow the group discussions, I hoped that interviewees would feel more relaxed and at ease in the face-to-face interview. In contrast to the group discussion, the objective of the individual interviews was to collect information on the personal experiences and ideas of the participants, especially with respect to their sexual history and safe sex practices. Nevertheless, I stressed in each individual interview that they were not obliged to talk about things they preferred to keep to themselves or did not feel comfortable talking about. By ensuring confidentiality, I however hoped that they were willing to share private experiences and views with me. Moreover, just as in the group settings, I intended to stimulate talking about personal issues by ordering the topic list in such a way that the more sensitive issues were placed at the end of the conversation. In many interviews, I also asked the interviewee to indicate in which order they preferred to talk about the subjects that I wanted to address.

Access, consent and risks of participation
Before we could talk to the participants, a first challenge was to actually establish contact with groups of young, unmarried people who would be willing to talk to me and my assistants. At both of the schools and at the Centre Social at Parcelles Assainies, I had been introduced to staff members by the director of GEEP (Groupe pour l’Etude et l’Enseignement de la Population). These staff members presented us to a class or group of on average over 30 students, where I could explain the research and invite them to participate. With the girls and boys that responded positively to my request (one third or half of the class), an appointment was made for a first meeting. Contacts with the girls from the Restaurant des Filles Unies were established through an acquaintance of Raphael. The staff from the restaurant selected five girls with whom we could meet. As mentioned earlier, Raphael invited the boys from ‘our’ neighbourhood Fann Hock directly. This point about access to the research group brings me to some ethical questions and the matter of consent.

In none of the groups, consent was asked from the parents. Although some ethical codes of conduct argue for the need of consent of the legal representatives of vulnerable groups such as children, it has also been noted that this claim for consent has social and power dimensions which make that some groups – such as wives, daughters, young people – cannot speak for themselves (Van Gog & Reysoo 2005: 18-19). In such cases, the required consent of legal (or moral) representatives such as parents or husbands can function in such a way that it allows those guardians to silence, rather than protect, those more or less vulnerable groups. In my fieldwork, I was particularly interested in hearing from such a silenced group, and therefore I decided that it was up to the girls and boys themselves to decide whether or not to participate. With the exception of Fann Hock, the channel through which we came into contact with the participants of course functioned as a consent mechanism on the part of the staff members who agreed to let me carry out my research project with ‘their’ students.

The matter of consent points to a broader field of ethical questions related to the effects that research and fieldwork might have for the participants. It specifically points to the researcher’s responsibility to minimize the risks that participants are exposed to when
they take part (Van Gog & Reysoo 2005: 12-16). I will briefly consider the psychological effects of the interviews and the impact of participants’ contact with the researcher on other social relations in their – daily – life. With respect to the latter, the fieldwork can be seen as a ‘niche’, in the sense that in most cases I did not get into contact with parents, sisters, brothers, and friends, nor with the boy- or girlfriends from the participants. At the end of the individual interviews, I offered all participants a ride home with my car, as a way to compensate their transport expenses. It also created the opportunity to talk a little more in an informal way, and gave me the chance to get an impression of where and how they lived. In most cases, I dropped them in front of their home, and did not come in and meet relatives, only when they invited me to do so. In other words, I did not take the initiative to become part of their social networks. I felt this was important for two reasons. Firstly, they did not need to account for who I was and what they were doing with a researcher working on sexuality, as this might have raised too many questions. The few participants that did introduce me to their parents did not explain that I was studying young people’s sexuality and safe sex practices, but explained in general terms that we worked together on a project on young people’s lives. Secondly, by not being connected to their social networks, I could keep their confidential information safe with me, as I would not have the chance to share it with their parents, friends, or partners. Of course, I could have protected confidentiality even when being part of their social environments – and this is what I did when I did meet parents or friends -, but by being outside their networks, there was no chance that information could so to speak leak into their daily lives. This decision not to integrate into their social networks also meant that I was not in the position to check information that the girls and boys had shared with me, but I felt that their confidentiality and safety were more important in this respect. Some girls and boys, however, did take the initiative to invite me to their homes and introduced me to their relatives.

A second risk of participating in this study concerns the psychological effects of the interviews. My questions on young people’s lives, sexuality and safe sex practices could have both a negative and positive effect on their well-being. On the one hand, the conversations – either in groups or individually – provided a platform for the participants to share their ideas and experiences where they were listened to and taken serious. Some people said that they found the occasion to talk about young people’s sexuality exceptional and that they enjoyed it and learned a lot from it. Other participants indicated that they found it important and useful to reflect upon their lives and sexuality, and concluded that it had helped them make better decisions about their relationships and safe sex practices. On the other hand, my questions sometimes also confronted them with disturbing memories. I tried to respond to such situations by taking the time to talk things over, and by inviting them to contact me whenever they wanted to. Some boys and girls actually came to see me later. In two cases, I facilitated contacts with medical services: once I obtained medication from a pharmacy, and once I accompanied a participant to the hospital for STI tests.

Another set of risks that participants are potentially exposed to is related to the publication of the results and conclusions. I already indicated how staying outside their networks enabled me to safeguard confidentiality. I made clear to them that neither me nor the two assistants would reveal the things we discussed with anyone, and that nobody would be personally recognizable in the results and publications of the findings. That also means that I do not use their photographs, that I use pseudonyms for all participants, and that I, when necessary, change details about their background and experiences without doing harm to their stories and experiences. Of course, I hoped and hope that publication of the results will have a positive effect, in the sense that it makes their voices heard to those who make decisions that affect their lives.
Research methods and techniques

The variety of methods used to gather data included: (1) participant observation and informal conversations, (2) key informants, (3) focus group discussions, (4) individual interviews, and (5) literature study and secondary data analysis.

Participant observation and informal conversations were important methods during fieldwork. Despite the limitations of participant observation to study actual intimate and sexual contacts that I addressed earlier, I could observe many other aspects. Parties, restaurants, nightclubs, dance contests as well as beaches were for instance occasions to observe the interaction between girls and boys, women and men. I was also able to observe the way girls and boys, as well as adults dressed and behaved at different occasions: at school, in the street, or at home. I got a good impression of daily life in Dakar by living in a ‘regular’ neighbourhood with a predominantly local population in the low and middle income groups. I lived in a two-storey building (cité) that consisted of 14 two-room apartments which shared a central courtyard. Through contacts with the different neighbours in my cité, of whom I got to know some rather well in the course of time, but also by just looking at how each day evolved, I learnt a lot about family life and relations, gender expectations, the sexual division of labour and responsibilities, religious practices and the daily struggle to make ends meet in the context of poverty. Through closer contacts with some neighbours as well as other friends, I in a way participated in their lives and learnt about, amongst others, the relations between family members (parents and children, sisters and brothers), the difficulties and importance of education and employment, or the existence of out-of-wedlock children and their place in family life. Interaction with boys and men of different backgrounds and ages exposed me to part of the gender and sexual dynamics between the sexes in Dakar, and I became aware of the commonalities and differences in for instance the flirting and dating practices that I was used to in the Netherlands.

Informal conversations about all kinds of subjects provided a wealth of information and insights on a broad range of themes and issues. These included informal get-togethers with the participants from the group discussions, either at my home or at other locations. Then there were of course the chats in the street with my neighbours or young people living in the neighbourhood. I also had plenty of time to chat with the two girls who at several occasions plaited my hair. Other revealing informal conversations concern two boys who had approached me for assistance; one was worried his girlfriend had fallen pregnant and another was afraid he had attracted a sexually transmitted infection. Khady, the female research assistant and I had also gotten involved in the problematic situation of a 14 year-old recently married girl who was about to deliver her first child. Other important informal conversations took place with female and male friends who shared their experiences (and sometimes problems) in intimate relationships with boy- or girlfriends with me. I did not directly ‘use’ these in this thesis, but they have added to my understanding of the issues that are at stake in the intimate relationships of young, unmarried people.

Apart from participating and talking in and during everyday life, I was also able to make useful observations at special occasions. Important feasts were for instance baptisms and (religious) holidays such as Tabaski, Korité, Christmas and New Years Eve. They showed me how people celebrate life and in what manner they define themselves as religious people. Other special occasions, although of a different kind, were the festivals and youth activities that I attended: the manifestation at World AIDS day, the theatre contests or quizzes organised by NGOs or international organisations, and the bi-annual festival of GEEP bringing together school youth from all over Senegal. They made me...
aware of the challenges for young people who are involved in sexual and reproductive health matters.

Several people have played an important role for this study as key informants. One is the family Ndior, who lived in my cité in Fann Hock, and who have made me feel part of their family during – and after - my stay in Dakar. I spend a lot of time in their home, enjoyed – and learnt to cook – their meals. I discussed all kinds of issues with different members of the family: the mother and father in their sixties, the youngest sons in their late teens, the two daughters in their twenties and thirties, the older sons in their thirties who lived on their own, and the 12 year-old cousin who lived with the family. It was of great value to learn about the particular preoccupations and perspectives of each family member. Secondly, several young people that participated in the focus group discussions and individual interviews also developed into key informants. A group of three boys now and then came to pay me a visit at home, and would spend some time chatting and making jokes. On a more or less regular basis I saw one of the in-school girls, who invited me several times to her parental home where I met her mother and cousins. Moreover, I spent a lot of time with one particular boy who appreciated our conversations as a moment of reflection on his life and past, and who was trying to get his life back on track. After I left Dakar, I remained in contact by e-mail or regular with several young participants. I met some of them again when I returned to Dakar in 2004.

The most important key informants were without doubt Khady and Raphael, the two research assistants. We did not only discuss all interviews and group discussions, but also shared our personal lives and private time. I got to know their sisters and brothers, and their parents. I learn a lot from another important key informant, my Wolof teacher, with whom I could discuss urgent questions. I tried my best to learn Wolof, and although I never managed to speak it, his private lessons were invaluable in developing a feeling of the language. Very importantly, the elaborate discussion of matters of sexuality, religion, family and honour made me understand the cultural meanings of important terms. Last but certainly not least, the director of GEEP has also proven a knowledgeable and important key informant given his experience in the field of adolescent sexual and reproductive health in combined with his knowledge of historical development in Senegal and his extensive network of contacts with NGOs and international organisations.

To turn to the more formal research methods, I conducted two or three focus group discussions with each of the seven original groups (table 2.1 above). In total, 22 focus group discussions took place, with in total 47 girls and boys (see table 2.2 below). The size of the groups varied from 4 to 12 participants. In practice, a group size of 5 to 6 participants worked best, in the sense that this was big enough to allow for interaction between the participants, and small enough to have everybody join in while maintaining some structure in the debate. The focus group discussions consisted of girls or boys only, except for the two mixed group discussions in the two school settings.

During each focus group discussion, I was accompanied by one research assistant: Khady when working with girls, and Raphael with boys. The focus group discussions were held in a room, class or office at the schools or centres where we contacted the young people. The only exception to this is the group of boys from Fann Hock, that met in the living room of my home. The dates and hours of the sessions were set in consultation with the groups themselves during the preparatory session, and were adjusted to their obligations and time tables. On average, the sessions took approximately 1.5 to 2 hours each. The focus group discussions with the out-of-school youth took place in Wolof, whereas the discus-
sions with the in-school participants were held in French. The sessions in Wolof were trans-lated by the assistants, and even during the sessions where French was spoken they now and then helped out by translating in case the participants could not find the right words in French. Despite my efforts and private courses in Wolof, I never managed to speak Wolof, but was able to understand the line of the conversation, and could ask the assistants to explain specific sentences or expressions. With permission from the partici-
pants, all sessions were recorded on tape, and later transcribed. Although at the onset the tape recorder drew their attention, they forgot about it most of the time in the course of the discussions. In some cases, the participants notified me that the tape had finished and that I had to turn the cassette.

The first ‘real’ focus group discussion was always preceded by a preparatory session, in which we introduced ourselves, the research and the reasons why I was interested in talking to them. We asked the girls and boys to introduce themselves and possibly share why they wanted to participate in the discussions. This preparatory meeting was also used to explicitly address the principles that I explained above. After the preparatory session, three focus group discussion sessions were conducted with each group. Because of practical reasons and time constraints only two focus group discussions were conducted with the girls from the centre social in Parcelles Assainies. The groups of girls and boys from the two Lycées participated in four group discussions, as we organized an additional mixed session with them.

The focus group discussions were semi-structured in the sense that a guide of open questions was prepared for each session in advance. This guide served as “beginning guidelines only”, in the sense that we did not “adhere to them rigidly” during the group discussions, but used them in a flexible manner, in order not to “foreclose the data possibilities in the situation [and] limit the amount and type of data gathered” (Strauss & Corbin 1990: 180). This also meant that the guide was not standardized, but developed over time (see also Reysoo 1998: 97). In the course of the fieldwork, new objectives and questions were added, and others became less prominent. Each first session with a new group addressed questions on what it means to be a youth in Dakar, what differences and similarities exist between girls and boys, and what friendship, love and sex mean to them. In the second and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of FGDs</th>
<th>Number of FGD participants</th>
<th>Number of individual interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blaise Diagne I (girls)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaise Diagne II (boys)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limamoulaye I (girls)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limamoulaye II (boys)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant des Filles Unies (girls)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Social (Parcelles Assainies) (girls)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fann Hock (boys)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 FGDs</strong></td>
<td><strong>47 participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>33 interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mixed focus group discussions brought together the groups of girls and boys from Lycée Blaise Diagne and Lycée Seydina Limamoulaye. For these four groups this means that they participated in three single sex FGDs and one mixed FGD.*
third session the focus was turned towards love, intimate relations and sex, as well as sexual and reproductive health issues and safe sex. Questions addressed the intimate relations young people engage in and the reasons for doing that. We also discussed when sex takes place, with whom, and under what circumstances. Other questions were related to their perception of the risks of unwanted pregnancies and STIs/HIV, and the strategies to protect oneself from those through for example abstinence or condom use. The focus group sessions were loosely organized around the themes, and there was space for the debate to develop into other directions as other issues came to the surface. In order to get the girls and boys talking, it was important to create a momentum in the group. Sometimes that would mean that sensitive questions that generated little response were put aside for a while, so that the group could 'warm up'. At a later stage, we would introduce them again to see whether they would talk about it. The questions and subjects were introduced by both myself and the assistants.

At the end of the final session, I asked whether the participants were willing to meet me again for an individual interview, and we made arrangements for how to go about this. This final session was also the occasion where we proposed to organize an informal get-together, after all the hard work we had done. Most groups welcomed this invitation. With some groups I organized a *yendu*, a day to spend together with food, music, dancing and fun. With other groups I spent a day at the beach, or I visited the closing ceremony activities of their centre social. These informal gatherings were perfect occasions to take pictures of the groups and participants and obtain more contextual data.

In total, 33 individual interviews were conducted. Twenty nine interviews took place with girls and boys from the original research groups (see table 2.2). Of some groups all participants were interviewed. Of others, only some members of the group were approached for an individual interview. In these last cases, the selection of interviewees was made on the basis of on the one hand my assessment of their (sexual) experiences - in the sense of what stories they had to share -, and on the other hand my perception of how willing and able they were to discuss their personal experiences in more detail. I tried to interview people with different experiences and perspectives. One of the girls from Blaise Diagne was interviewed twice: a first time during the main fieldwork period in 2000/2001 (INT 1 in Annex), and a second time during my last visit to the field in 2004 (INT 32 in Annex).

The individual interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way. I worked with open questions to give as much room as possible for the interviewed to bring in their own experiences and issues. It was important that they could express as much as possible their own view on the matters raised. I started each interview by asking what they thought of the focus group discussions. This provided an opportunity to assess what issues were most relevant to the person I was talking to. Since a lot of sensitive issues were already addressed in the group discussions, this start of the individual interview made it possible to refer back to what was talked about and then approach these issues in a more personal sense. The interviews were conducted in a non-standardized way and the exact issues addressed and questions posed in the interviews depended on the experiences of the interviewed as well as the way the interview developed. My last question in each individual interview was whether the participants had any questions they wanted to pose to me. Some did not have anything to ask. Others did and their questions varied from information on the menstrual cycle or contraceptives, to questions on my personal life and sexual experiences. When ending the interview, I made clear that if they wanted to see me again, or if there were things that they would like to talk about once more, that they could always contact
and visit me. Some participants responded to this invitation. One boy indicated that he wanted to see me again to talk about some of the things he had experienced the past years. Some other boys and girls called me or came to see me to socialize and talk a little informally. There was also room for informal talk when I drove the interviewees home with my car after the interview.

The interviews took place at the same locations as the focus group discussions, thus in class rooms, offices, and sometimes at my private home. Most of the time, they lasted for about an hour. They took place in French with the young people who were attending school, and in Wolof with the out-of-school youth. The research assistants provided translation for the interviews in Wolof. All individual interviews were recorded on tape with permission of the interviewee. The French interviews have been transcribed by myself. Transcriptions and translations into French of the interviews in Wolof have been produced by the research assistant attending the interview.

Finally, I conducted four additional interviews with people from the category that I classified as ‘various’ in table 2.1. I contacted these interviewees on an individual basis. Both the mother and the father were interviewed in their homes (INT 30 and 31 in Annex). These interviews focused on the differences and similarities between young people’s lives now and when they themselves were young, on how they looked at the behaviour and conduct of their own (adolescent) children, and on how they saw the relationships between parents and children, especially with respect to education about sex, unwanted pregnancies and STI infections. A large part of the interview with the mother was done in Wolof, with the assistance of Raphael. I spoke with the teenage mother and the unmarried young mother in my own home (INT 29 and 33). The latter was conducted in Wolof, with assistance from Khady. These two interviews focused on their unmarried motherhood, and especially on how the girls had fallen pregnant, and how they had dealt with the situation. They also included some of the issues that I raised in the individual interviews with the young people from the seven original research groups. The unmarried mother in one of these interviews (INT 33) was accompanied by a close friend – a school attending girl who had not experienced a premarital pregnancy herself -, who also participated in the conversation. These four interviews were also taped and transcribed in French.

A final method that merits attention is literature study and analysis of secondary survey data. In addition to literature search through Dutch universities, I visited documentation centres and libraries of the university, NGOs and international organisations in Dakar. I collected literature on a variety of issues ranging from family relations, marriage, virginity, (premarital) sexuality, religion, young people, and matters of sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS in Dakar, Senegal and/or other African settings. Moreover, I was interested in the specific urban context of Dakar as well as the general political, historical and social development of Senegal as a country.

Important sources of secondary statistical data were demographic health surveys (Enquête Démographique et de Santé au Sénégal – EDS-II 1992/1993, EDS-II-Dakar 1992/1993, EDS-III 1997 and EDS-IV 2005), and a household survey (Enquête Sénégalaise Auprès des Ménages – ESAM-II 2004). A valuable survey was also the Enquête sur les comportements de prévention en matière de MST/SIDA dans la population général de Dakar (ECP 1997). I analysed these surveys in terms of what they tell (or do not tell) about young people’s sexuality and their safe sex practices.
What does it mean to be a youth in Dakar? Are young people considered children, or are they seen as adults? And, what do Dakarois girls and boys themselves think about this? Where do sexuality and sex fit into all this? Are young people allowed to be sexually active? And do they engage in sex? These are the questions that this chapter seeks to answer.

Young people in contemporary Dakar are living a life stage that is called adolescence. The first section of the chapter explores how adolescence is understood in the literature. It discusses how adolescence, which was originally a western phenomenon, is emerging in different parts of the world, including Dakar. Education, urbanization and media are discussed as the factors that play a role in this emergence. This is important because I approach adolescence not so much in its physical or psychological terms, but focus on the social meaning that is given to it. The notion of adolescence provides a way for young people to describe themselves as neither child, nor adult, but as a youth. The views of the young people themselves are central in the second section of the chapter. This section seeks to understand their views on adolescence by looking at what young people themselves have to say about their life stage. This part will show how young people situate themselves between childhood and adulthood, and consequently how they see being young as a transition to a position of independence and responsibility.

In order to understand how being young is related to sexuality, section 3 discusses how marriage and the wedding night are important reference points for the construction of young people’s sexuality. They embody idealized notions of feminine and masculine sexuality, that young people have to relate to. The question is to what extent these ideals are lived up to in reality. The final section of this chapter formulates a first answer to this by considering statistical information of sexual activity of unmarried, young people. It also looks at the occurrence of premarital pregnancies and STI infections in order to grasp whether young people are sexually active. The way boys and girls construct their sexuality in the context of these dominant notions of idealized sexuality will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4 and 5 respectively.

1 An in-between life stage

The combination of young people and sexuality is a sensitive one in Dakar, because unmarried young people are not supposed to have sex. The problematic nature of the combination sex and unmarried people is related to the way marriage customarily defines adulthood and childhood, and in relation to that, sexuality. Processes of modernisation challenge these definitions and give room to the emergence of adolescence as a stage
between childhood and adulthood, in which sexuality is ambiguously experienced. I start this section with a closer look on how adolescence has been considered in the literature. This is followed by an investigation of the extent to which adolescence exists in Senegal and Dakar, and which social trends play a role in this.

**Defining adolescence and young people**

A simple way to define adolescence is to see it as a period of transition, in which the young person is no longer a child, but not yet an adult either (Dehne & Riedner 2001: 11; Eadie 2004: 3). In fact, young people, or adolescents are between childhood and adulthood, and this ‘in-between’ element is characteristic of adolescence. There is a clear demarcation between adolescents and adults, in the sense that adolescents are preparing themselves for adult life, but are not completely and fully taking up these new roles and responsibilities. Just as significant as the transition to new roles is the exclusion of old ones: “adolescents must put away with childish beliefs and behaviours” (Moore & Rosenthal 1993: 23).

There is a variety of markers for adolescence (Bongaarts & Cohen 2001). It is tempting to define adolescence in terms of a specific age range. A common definition postulated by the World Health Organization distinguishes three categories: *adolescents* in the age range from 10 to 19, *youth* between the ages of 15 and 24, and *young people* in the ages of 10 to 24 (WHO 1998b: 2; UNICEF 1997: 7). These definitions are used, with the recognition that “the notion of youth varies across countries, in accordance to the socio-economic context” (WHO 1998b: 2). A different way to mark adolescence is by referring to physiological changes in the maturing body. For girls, these physical changes include the onset of menstruation, the growth of pubic and axillary hair, and the development of the breasts. For boys, they concern the growth of facial and bodily hair and the lowering of the voice. The growth of the testes, scrotum and penis, and the maturation of the internal prostate gland and the seminal vesicles eventually lead to the first ejaculation. Both girls and boys experience hormonal changes (Moore & Rosenthal 1993: 47-49). The physical maturation is closely related to the reproductive organs and the capacity to procreate, and as such sexuality and entrance to sexual life are elements of adolescence (Moore & Rosenthal 1993). Psychological and mental developments are also used as markers of adolescence (Moore & Rosenthal 1993; Glowczewski 1995; Davis & Davis 1989: 3). On the mental and psychological side, sexuality is also central in adolescence, in the sense that “it is a ‘critical period’ in the upsurge of sexual drives, the development of sexual values, and the initiation of sexual behaviours” and this makes “sexuality a difficult but exciting challenge for adolescents” (Moore & Rosenthal 1993: ix). These multiple definitions of adolescence convey that the transition into adulthood is difficult to capture neatly. Moreover,

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24 Adolescence is, in the West, generally taken as “a difficult period of ‘storm and stress’”, that carries with it the negative connotations of stress, problems, crisis, dangers, risk behaviour, conflict with older generations and rebellion against adult authority (Davis & Davis 1989: 4; Moore & Rosenthal 1993; e.g. Glowczewski 1995; France 2000). However cross-cultural research questioned and downplayed the conflictual and stressful character of adolescence and showed that the level of stress and conflict can vary greatly (Moore & Rosenthal 1993). Margaret Mead’s “Coming of age in Samoa” (1928) is one of the early anthropological studies on adolescence. It exposed the western bias in the understanding and definition of adolescence. Mead argues that the adolescent period in Samoa is quite different from the one in the United States, in the sense that it has a smooth and untroubled character (in contrast to adolescence as a period of ‘storm and stress’); and that there is little conflict and tension around sexual behaviour. Her analysis has been heavily criticised and contested by Derek Freeman (1983), but the message that adolescence was different in Samoa than in the United States is still accepted (Davis & Davis 1989: 4-5).
adulthood, childhood and adolescence are not so much biological facts, but social positions with different roles and statuses:

While young people around the world may experience the same physical changes and sensations during this period, the manner in which these are interpreted and give rise to social and legal proscriptions varies tremendously. (Dehne & Riedner 2001: 14)

My interest therefore is in the socio-cultural meanings that are given to these physical and mental characteristics and the social orders that are constructed around them. In other words, the question is what is being marked and what meaning is given to it.

Speaking of socio-cultural meanings, it is important to bear in mind that adolescence is originally a western phenomenon and concept, which came about in the industrial revolution in the 19th century and early part of the 20th century (Fuchs 1976; Davis & Davis 1989). In pre-industrial societies “adolescence as a special period is not well defined [and] people moved rather quickly from childhood to adulthood” (Fuchs 1976: 2; also Dehne & Riedner 2001). This meant that when children reached puberty and became physically mature, they were ready to enter into economic production, marriage and parenthood. Industrialisation required more time for training of children through education and schooling to prepare them for adult life. This prolonged period of preparation for employment and working life meant a postponement of both marriage and reproduction. The condition of adolescence is hence shaped in reproductive terms, in the sense of a “disjuncture between the physical readiness to engage in sexual activity and the social permission to reproduce” (Schlegel 1995: 16). It is interesting to note that the time span of adolescence has been growing throughout the 20th century, and that adulthood sets off later and later (Fuchs 1976: 5).

Although originally western, adolescence is no longer something that only exists in the West, but is emerging as a new life stage in many parts of the world (UNICEF 1997: 7; UNFPA 1999; Dehne & Riedner 2001; e.g. Burbank 1995). In non-Western countries as well, the time span between the moment of physical maturity and the moment of marriage and social adulthood is growing (Bongaarts & Cohen 1998: 99; see also Diop 1995a). The first menstruation is often taken as a signal of the end of childhood for girls (but there is no such indicator for boys). Worldwide, the median age at menarche varies between 12.5 years in Western societies to more than 15 years in poor countries. The age at menarche has been declining in the West since the 19th century, probably as result of improved nutrition. A similar decline is occurring in developing countries, where it is expected that improvements in diet and nutrition will further contribute to this trend. This means that girls are leaving their childhood stage at earlier ages. At the same time, young people are entering adulthood later, because the age of first marriage is rising (Bongaarts & Cohen 1998). The combination of earlier menarche and later marriage gives rise to a longer period between childhood and adulthood at many places in the world, and the number of years this period takes is increasing. Modernisation, urbanisation, modern media and communi-

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25 Some authors argue that adolescence is universal, or near-universal (Schlegel 1995), while others argue that it is not (Bongaarts & Cohen 1998; Dehne & Riedner 2001). I distance myself from the claim that adolescence is universal. Children and young people may be going through similar physical and psychological developments, but the way they experience this as well as the meaning given to it varies from society to society.

26 Wet dreams are sometimes considered an indicator for the onset of puberty for boys. They are however not included in surveys.
cition as well as education have facilitated the creation of an adolescent life stage in most societies in the world (Fuchs 1976; Davis & Davis 1989; Caldwell, Caldwell, Caldwell & Pieris 1998). In Senegal, religious and customary traditions were characterised by a rapid transition from childhood to adulthood, which left no space for a notion of adolescence. But is adolescence making its entrance in Dakar as it is in many other parts of the world?

The trend of earlier menarche cannot (yet) be detected in Senegal, where the median age of first menstruation is stable at 15 years (Diop 1995a: 49-56). This also counts for girls living in cities. Only among the youngest generation of girls, a slight decline in age of menarche can be noted for those who are in secondary education, but this is not (yet) explicit enough to indicate a clear trend (Ibid.). With respect to age of marriage, changes can be detected: the age of first marriage of women is rising in Senegal. In the course of the 1990s, the age of first marriage of women rose from 16.6 years in 1992-93 to 18.0 years in 1997 (EDS-III 1997: 58). Men marry at a much later age than women. The median age of first marriage in Dakar is 28.0 for men, in contrast to 19.0 for women (ECP 1997: 24). The Senegalese Code de la Famille specifies the minimum age for marriage at 16 for women, and 20 years for men (CRLP/GREFELS 1999: 154, 159). The rise in the age of marriage is associated with education and urbanisation: higher educated women and women in urban areas marry later (EDS-III 1997: 59). In that respect the following sub-section will consider changes that occurred in education and urbanization, as well as some other factors that contributed to, on the one hand, the emergence of adolescence and, on the other, the perception of and outlook on this life stage.

Less family, more individual

To start with education, school enrolment is rising in Senegal: during the 1990s, net primary school enrolment rose from 48% in 1990-91 to 63% in 2000-01 (HDR 2003: 200). As a result, the youth literacy rate has risen in the same period from 40% of the 15 to 24 year olds to 52% (Ibid.; 200). Urbanisation manifests itself in a rural exodus and a rising rate of urbanisation: 14% of Senegalese population was living in Dakar in 1960, and this had risen to 22% in 1988 (EDS-III 1997: 2). The urban population grew from 34% of the national population in 1975 to 48% in 2001, and is expected to continue to rise (HDR 2003: 253). Fifty two percent of the internal migrants is destined at Dakar (Nanitelamio 1997: 5; Antoine et al. 1995). The fast rise in Dakar’s population has created the large and densely populated suburbs of Pikine, Guediawaye and others (Antoine et al. 1995: 40; see also Mbodj et al. 1993). Access to education is generally higher in urban areas. It is in this social context of rising school attendance and urbanisation (see above), that the age of marriage has risen. The prolongation of the period between childhood and adulthood and the emergence of adolescence in Dakar is hence a result of social changes, and not of biological ones (see also Diop 1995a: 78-79, 128).

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27 Age of first menstruation impacts on the age at which girls marry and are pregnant for the first time. Senegalese girls that have their period at an earlier age (13 years), marry younger and have their first pregnancy earlier than girls who see their first menstruation when they are older (16 years) (Diop 1995a: 56-57).
28 EDS-III (1997) does not provide information on age of marriage for men. The information on age of marriage of men in the ECP (1997) does not generate insight into whether this has been stable, or rising or declining. The high median age of marriage of men in Dakar however indicates a long adolescence period.
29 Adult literacy is growing but still low: 47% of the men and 28% of women who are 15 years or older than can read and write in 2000 (UNICEF 2003a: 98). In comparison adult literacy rates were 38% for men and 19% for women in 1990 (UNICEF 2003a: 98).
The age of marriage of men is also rising as a result of unemployment. Many of the migrants that come to Dakar are young women and men between 15 and 25 in search for work (Nanitelamio 1997: 5; Antoine et al. 1995). For those young people, employment is scarce in the context of the economic crisis (Mbodj et al. 1993; Antoine et al. 1995). In Dakar, the actual unemployment rate was 13.6% in 2001-2002, which is substantially higher than the 9.7% for Senegal as a whole. Unemployment is higher among men than women, with rates of 14% and 13% respectively for Dakar. Young people in particular are affected, as the Dakarois unemployment is highest among those under the age of 30 (ESAM 2004: 118-119). The lack of employment and subsequent income makes that men cannot accumulate the resources needed for marriage. As I will explain in more detail below, the groom has to pay the dot and several other prestations during the marriage process. Moreover, the husband also has to buy or rent a home and furniture and equip it. Given the high amounts of money that are needed in order to get married, unemployment leads to later marriage for men (Stol 1987; Mondain 2005).

Besides the effect of prolongation, education and migration play a role in changing the meaning and context to the lives of young people. Education and school life are becoming more and more part of the lives of children and young people. In the introductory Chapter I already mentioned the net primary school attendance rate of 44% for girls and 51% for boys for 1992-2001, and the substantially lower school enrolment at secondary level with 15% for girls and 24% for boys (UNICEF 2003a: 98).\textsuperscript{30} Especially the enrolment of girls into secondary education is below the sub Sahara African average.\textsuperscript{31} Access to education is profoundly gender biased, in the sense that at all levels more boys than girls go to school (HDR 2003: 205).\textsuperscript{32} The rising school enrolment, although relatively low and gender biased, means that in contrast to the past, childhood has changed for a substantial group of children that now go to school, even though this does often not extend to secondary or tertiary education. The change has been more profound in Dakar and other urban areas where school enrolment is generally higher than in rural areas (ECP 1997: 5). Schooling contributes to the construction of an adolescence period in the sense that young people spend a large amount of time with their peers, instead of with their family: the role of parents and the family becomes less important in the lives of their children, and the role and influence of peers and a youth subculture increases. Moreover, young people are prepared for occupations different from those of their parents and can receive information at odds with the instructions of their parents (Bongaarts & Cohen 1998; Dehne & Riedner 2001; also Caldwell, Caldwell, Caldwell & Pieris 1998).

The new meaning of the life stage of adolescents and young people also comes about in a context where the growing presence and role of media and new information and communication technologies gives access to ‘other’ worlds. In Dakar, but also in the other towns and rural areas of Senegal, television and radio have made their entrance into people’s lives. They bring movies, films, soaps and television programmes with them which

\textsuperscript{30} For sub Saharan Africa as a whole, net primary school attendance (1992-2001) is a little higher at 52% for girls and 55% for boys (UNICEF 2003a: 99).


\textsuperscript{32} Despite the fact that progress is made with respect to the gender bias in education, illiteracy among women requires further attention as it affects 42% of the women in the urban areas, in contrast to 86% in the rural zones (EDS-III 1997: 18).
are often made in the West or inspired by western productions. Cybercafes, e-mail and Internet, that offer fast and direct contact with other parts of the world, have also become little by little accessible in Dakar and even in the more remote towns (see also Guèye 2003). Music is another way through which the Senegalese get to know lifestyles and youth cultures from other parts of the world. Senegal knows a rich music scene, with internationally known artists like Youssou N'Dour that work with external influences in their music and regularly work with foreign musicians (McLaughlin 1997; Havard 2001). These different new media introduce images of other worlds, with different norms and values, that are sometimes positive and enriching and in other instances disapproved of or considered threatening. The media provide an outlook on a western youth subculture, in which virginity is not valued in the same way, and where sexuality and sexual and/or love relations are part of young people's lives.

In addition, international migration affects the outlook on adolescence as a life stage through exposure to other societies and cultures. Many Senegalese live in European countries such as France, Italy or Spain or have moved to Northern America for study or work (Mbojd et al. 1993: 173-174; e.g. Riccio 2001). They remain in contact with Senegal by sending remittances, financial support, and other presents, and through return visits to their home country. Without dismissing their cultural background, these Senegalese living abroad are confronted with and influenced by the social organisation and the norms and values of their countries of destiny. As such, migration and migrants form bridges between the Senegalese traditional norms and ways of life, and the ideas, life styles, and values of western and other societies. Other external influences are the international donors, the organisations of the United Nations that work in Senegal and international NGOs. They launch programmes and campaigns in cooperation with Ministries of the Senegalese government or with national or local NGOs on for instance sexual and reproductive health or AIDS. They also bring with them opinions, perspectives and preoccupations from abroad. These include for instance the identification of adolescents and young, unmarried people as a specific age group with its own (health) needs. Such organisations might in varying degrees stress that unmarried adolescents can be sexually active, and that this brings the need for sexual and reproductive health services and information with it.

It is in this context of changing patterns of education, increased urbanisation and the exposure to and contact with other societies that other norms and values than the traditional ones come to make up part of Senegalese society. The status of young people changes, and so does the role of the family, and the relationship between people of different ages and of different sexes (Diop 1995a; 1995b). Diop (Ibid.) argues that education, urbanisation and modernisation have confronted the, what she calls, ‘traditional’ Senegalese society with the ‘modern’ society. This is not to say that traditional customs were static in the past. Senegalese society can be characterised as a dynamic context in which the customary values and practices have been influenced first by Islam, and later by education, migration and exposure to other societies. This means that meanings of marriage, virginity, motherhood, or being young are being contested by other ideas about

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33 There are 41 televisions per 1000 Senegalese and 141 radios (UNICEF 2003a: 98). In comparison, in sub Saharan Africa as a whole these figures are 47 and 199 respectively, and in the whole world they are 240 and 417 per thousand people, which means that the distribution of radios and television in Senegal is rather low (UNICEF 2003a: 99). Less than 1% of the population had a telephone line (fixed or portable) in 1990, but in 2001 this had risen to 5.6% of the population. In 2001 internet users made up 1% of the population. For every 100 people there were 0.2 computers in use in 1990, and 1.9 in 2001 (HDR 2003: 234). Telephones, computers and Internet are also accessible through phone centres and cybercafes.
adolescence, young people’s sexuality, and marriage. In this meeting of different meanings and practices, the control of the family and social environment has been weakening and young people are distancing themselves from ‘traditional’ norms of virginity and abstinence, especially in urban areas (Nanitelamio 1997; Van der Laar 1995; also Larkin 1997). It is in this way that the category of adolescence has made its entrance in Senegalese society, and the role and position of young, unmarried people has become subject to long and complex processes of societal change. “The gradual breakdown of traditional family life, the diminishing role of parents and the larger family unit, and an increasing role of peers” are commonly associated with the emergence of a distinct youth life style and adolescent life stage (Dehne & Riedner 2001: 13), and these developments can be noted in Dakar and are still on-going.

In the course of the 1990s, Dakar has seen a youth culture come into being which has been labelled as a “mouvement culturel bul faale” (Havard 2001: 64). A variety of rap artists and the wrestler Tyson are sources of inspiration for this movement. Bul faale is difficult to translate but can mean ‘laisse faire’ or ‘t’occupe pas’, or even ‘t’en fais pas’ (Ibid.: 65), and in English could be understood as ‘never mind’ or ‘don’t worry’. The rappers have given, and are giving, voice to radical criticisms of young people on Senegalese society, in particular of religious practices and the “corruption of African societies, and especially their political elites” (Ibid.: 72). Tyson is an emblem for the bul faale movement in the sense that, on his own, he managed to become a highly successful wrestler in the closed milieu of the lutte traditionelle – a spectacular Senegalese traditional wrestling contest –, which is dominated by ‘clubs’ that are affiliated to religious, spiritual and political powers. Tyson symbolizes that the key of success lies in an individual’s hard work, and as such rejects affiliation into established networks and preoccupations of the elders. Bul faale has to be understood as a cultural movement in the sense that it expresses the desire for emancipation and individual differentiation of the youth against the roads that have been set out by the older generations, especially parents and relatives, but also for instance the larger familles religieuses:

The generation bul faale calls for the emancipation and liberalisation from the cultural, social and familial yokes (carcans), and puts forward the individual who is no longer solely the product of its environment but also the product of its actions. (Havard 2001: 74; translation mine)

The revalorisation of work and effort in order to succeed is characteristic of the bul faale movement, and points to processes of individualisation at the expense of the role of family and other social networks.

With respect to matters of sexuality, a clear example of differing opinions between generations concerns the choice of the marriage partner. Most grandparents and great-grandparents of today’s youth were married to someone from the same family, same ethnic group and same caste. Ideally, the future groom would marry a paternal or maternal cousin. Marriage partners were often chosen within well defined boundaries, because

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34 Havard (2001) argues that the bul faale movement generated a political rupture and as such has contributed to the defeat of the political elite in the socialist party during the presidential elections of 2000, that were won by Abdoulaye Wade.

35 In line with the endogamous character of castes, marriage could not take place between different castes, for instance between a ñeño (casted craftsmen) and ger (non-casted).
An individual was not judged on his/her own qualities, but on the *capital de valeur* accumulated ever since his/her most distant ancestors. (M’Baye 1988: 141; translation mine)

Marriages were an affair of the family – “a union of two lineages” (M’Baye 1988: 142) - rather than arranged around the wishes of the couple itself, who often had not even met before the marriage was concluded (Faladé 1963: 220; Diop 1985: 97-144; Van der Laar 1995). The consent of the potential bride and groom was not of high relevance to this decision. Girls were often married at an early age. Van der Laar notes that, in the Casamance in the South of Senegal, marriage served mainly social functions in the past, such as the creation of bonds between (potentially hostile) families. The feelings of and emotional bond between the future spouses were of no concern for the marriage. The functions of marriage were economic (in terms of exchange of the woman’s labour for the bride price) and regulation of fertility and offspring: “marriage was a business transaction, a contract rather than a romantic bond” (Van der Laar 1995: 166). The fact that the marriage was a family affair is also visible in the prominent role relatives, and not the couple itself, play in the conclusion of the marriage at the mosque. It is the suitor’s father (or someone who represents him), in the company of two or three people, and the girl’s father, assisted by relatives as well, who discuss the conditions of the religious marriage. When agreement has been reached between the families over the payments to be made (which will be discussed in more detail below), the marriage is concluded and celebrated at the mosque. Of both families, the fathers or their representatives are present, accompanied and assisted by close relatives or friends. The suitor’s father asks for the hand of the girl in question, after which the girl’s father states he will give his daughter for marriage after the *dot* has been paid. Neither the groom nor the bride are present at the mosque.

In time, the future bride and groom have claimed a bigger say in decisions regarding marriage partners. The generation of contemporary parents expressed the desire to have a say in the choice of their marriage partner, and sometimes even want to choose one themselves. This often implied that the future husband and wife already had a chance to know each other, at least a little, before getting married. The religious identification of this generation of parents with Islam gave them the opportunity to claim that the only important thing was that the partner was Muslim; as such they were able to contest the importance of marrying within the family, caste and ethnic group was contested. Current generations of young people continue to differ of opinion with their parents about the role of social control and family responsibility on the one hand and the role of love and individual desire in marriage on the other (see also Larkin 1997 for similar frictions in Nigeria). The diminishing role of the family and the growing role of peers does come forward in those issues of choice of marriage partner as well as acceptability and desirability of premarital relationships.

The emergence of adolescence as a new life stage should not be understood as a linear process from social control towards individualisation. The new values and meanings circulate with the already existing ones. Havard in that respect analyses the *bul faale* movement not only in terms of rupture, but also in terms of reformulation and hybridisation. The ideal typical *bul faale* is a socially hybrid, that can be situated between:

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36 It is generally assumed that the influence of parents on their children’s partner choice is bigger in non-western societies than in Europe and Northern America, but Beall & Sternberg discuss the differential impact parents in different parts of the world have on the partner choice of their children (1995: 426-427).
an Islamic-Wolof model and an idealisation of black Americans, between Islamic *pudeur* and strategies of bodily and corporeal affirmation. [...] [They are] at the heart of a dialectic game between the external dynamics (*dynamiques du dehors*) that result from the contacts and exchanges, real or imaginary, with other societies, and the internal dynamics (*dynamiques du dedans*) that go back to the internal tensions in the society. (Havard 2001: 73; translation mine).

As my Wolof teacher said: “*la societe marche a plusieurs vitesses*”, society operates at different speeds. It is the challenge for all generations to balance these different speeds and deal with the discrepancies between them and the ambiguity that arises out of this.

## 2 What it means to be a youth in Dakar

How do Dakarois girls and boys themselves see their life stage as adolescents and youth? The 19 year-old school attending Aissatou explains what a youth, *un jeune*, is as follows:

> A youth, that is somebody who is not yet, who is not yet entirely adult, nor entirely little. I think that it is between adult and little.  
> (girl, 19, in-school, FGD 1)

The in-between notion is a strong component of her view: a youth is neither a child, nor an adult. Mariem, 18 years of age, during the same group discussion explained that a youth is:

> Somebody who has not yet attained a certain maturity. [...] A child is always guided by someone. And well, young people, we can say that they are guided by somebody, but also, they can do what they want. Sometimes they take their own decisions. Even so, that decision can one day not be useful or good to them.  
> (girl, 18, in-school, FGD 1)

A youth is differentiated from a child by the capacity to make his or her own decisions (whether they are good for him/her or not). But at the same time, youth are also still under their parents guidance and they cannot take decisions about everything. The position of a youth puts the notions of childhood and adulthood on a continuum, on which a young person slowly grows out of the position of a child that is characterized by not being able to take care of itself, and into an adult who takes responsibility for and decisions about his/her own life. Young people find themselves between these two extremes. A group of school-going boys explains:

- A child is silly (*faire des bêtises*). The adult has to guide it, how to do this and that.  
- We give guidance to someone who has nothing in his head. A child is new in the world. He is irresponsible, he is innocent. We cannot leave a child completely alone.  
- We guide someone who does not know what is dangerous. For example, to cross the street, you have to guide the child because he does not see the danger.  

_A: Do you think that you are adult?_
- Yes, because I can make the difference between the good and the bad. And that is it, that is an adult, he can distinguish between good and bad.  
> (boys, 19 to 22, in-school, FGD 4)

According to these boys, a youth distinguishes her/himself from a child by being able to
know the difference between good and bad: a youth knows the dangers of life. Or put metaphorically, a youth has learned how to cross the street. It is interesting to see how elements of adulthood, such as the capability to take decisions, mark the difference between childhood and adolescence. As one of these boys in that same group discussion put it: “Being adult is part of adolescence”.

**Moving towards independence and responsibility**

Yet, adolescence and adulthood are not the same, and young people explain this by referring to the relation between young people and their parents. Parents put limits on young people’s capacity to take decisions in the sense that “young people always have to obey” (girl, 18, in-school, FGD 1). Being the children of their parents, young people take up a certain position in relation to them, as is illustrated by Moussa in a group discussion:

> Moussa: We can discuss with our parents, but not about certain subjects. Sometimes when you talk about something with your father for instance, it is difficult to say certain things to him. In that case, he is the only one who speaks, and you, you just listen. Even if you do not agree with what he says, you cannot say it out of fear that he might think that you are impolite. We have been brought up in this way. By contrast, when it is your friend, when I am wrong about something, he will not hesitate to let me know, and the other way around too. A father is always right.
> (boy, 21, out-of-school, FGD 14)

The role of the parent is to tell their children what to do and how to behave. They are supposed to know what is best for their children. Parents give conseil (advice) to their children. It is important to clarify that this notion of conseil stretches further than merely suggesting what is good to do. In the relation between parents and children, the meaning of conseil contains elements of prescription of proper conduct. If children do not follow the given advice and act differently than suggested by their parents, this means that they are disobeying their parents. The role of the child can be captured in the terms of obedience and respect: they listen to what their parents say and act in accordance with what is asked from them. Children listen, but do not speak or go against their parents. A common expression is that a child has no right to speak, has no droit à la parole. Respect means that the parent is always right, whatever (s)he says is true.

In relation to parents then, young people find themselves in the position of children. Adolescence is differentiated from adulthood by pointing to the childhood elements in the position of young people. In that sense, childhood is part of adolescence. This means that according to the participants’ own views, young people are neither child, nor adult, and at the same time are both child and adult. Adolescence, or being young, then becomes a state of on-going and perpetual shifting over a continuum between the two poles of childhood and adulthood. The notion of seniority that demands respect and obedience from young people plays a role during their whole life in their relations with older family members. But when young people are maturing, growing older and becoming more adult (in the different ways that this takes shape), they little by little earn more right to speak in relation to specific relatives, and to formulate and make their own decisions. By growing older, they also reach a position in which they can be the one to give conseil, and ask for respect and obedience. So, although seniority is not something that only affects the position of adolescents, it definitely shapes the position that adolescents have.

The authority of parents is based on the fact that young people are dependent on them for housing, food, clothing, and other basic needs. The participants generally ar-
guessed that as long as you live in your parents’ home, as long as you eat their food, you are dependent on them, and therefore you have to respect them. In contrast to small children, however, young people are not totally dependent and try to balance dependence and responsibility, as Sadio explains:

We can say that we are at the same time responsible and irresponsible. Sometimes, at home, there is no sugar or no rice. Thanks to what you earn with your work, you go buy sugar or rice. We don’t have a real job, but we have our little things left and right. We can however not do what our parents do in the house. We can only participate.
(boy, 21, out-of-school, FGD 20)

The term ‘participation’ captures the in-between character of adolescence and being young. They are not in the position to entirely take care of their needs, and as such they remain dependent on their parents. The notions of dependence and irresponsibility are part of the understanding of childhood, and independence and responsibility are elements of the notion of adulthood. In moving along the continuum young people take up some responsibilities and become less dependent on their parents. But as long as the process is not completed, they are not yet entirely adult.

The reason to listen to parents is also based on another kind of dependence. Parents have more life experience, and are therefore supposed to know better. It is important for young people to maintain a good relationship with their parents through respect, because parents can help out in difficult situations. It is the obligation of parents to help and assist their offspring. Participants in this study often referred to cases where young people had neglected their parents’ advice not to smoke drugs, or not to leave the house after certain hours in the evening. In such cases, parents can take their hands off the situation and leave the youth to deal with the problems they are faced with themselves. As Babacar puts it: “Some parents will accept to get you out of this situation, but others will be so annoyed that they leave you (abandonner)” (boy, 19, out-of-school, FGD 18). When your parents have warned against certain problems and have advised not to go that direction, they might not feel obliged to support their adolescent children when they run into trouble.

It is important to note the genderedness of adolescence. The education girls and boys receive is very different, which is related to the different positions that women and men are expected to take up in society (M’Baye 1988; Creevey 1991; Mbow 1996, 1997). In Senegal, there is a profound sexual division of labour in the household and people have strong ideas about what responsibilities each sex has to take up. Everyone you meet can explain these roles and responsibilities to you. Education has to prepare girls and boys for their future roles as wives and husbands. Girls are trained in taking responsibility for caring for one’s home and are taught all the household tasks (such as washing, cleaning, cooking). Their mission is to learn how to best take care of one’s husband and family. In their adult life as women, they are responsible for all aspects of running the household (s’occuper de son foyer): they buy food at the market, they prepare meals, they wash the dishes, they wash and iron the clothes, they clean the house, and very important, the education of and care for the children is their domain. Girls are taught to accept the authority of men, especially their father and older brothers, and later their future husband. With the identification of the domestic sphere as the domain of the woman, there is also some resistance, in principle, to women working outside the home, although a lot of women are working outside the home.

Men are considered the head of the household (chef de la famille, in Wolof boroom kër). Saying that a woman is chef de la famille is a contradiction in terms, although of course
female-headed households do exist (Bop 1995; Sagna, Diallo, Faye & Fall 1994; ESAM 2004). As household heads, men are held responsible for providing a home to the family, for earning an income to cater for the household expenses, ranging from food and clothing, to rent, water and electricity bills, but also school fees and transport. The man has to maintain his family economically. As household heads, men have the authority to take decisions concerning all matters related to the household and its members. It is generally argued that he has this right to take decisions, because he brings in the money from which to feed and maintain his family, and because he has paid a lot of money to marry his wife. The wife as a result is supposed to take a subordinate position in relation to her husband, which means that she has to respect him and his authority. Common sense sayings express the dominant position of the husband by referring to the belt or pantaloon as symbols of male authority: ‘it is the man who ties the belt around his hips’ (C’est l’homme qui attache la ceinture aux reins) or ‘it is the man who puts on trousers’ (C’est l’homme qui porte le pantalon). The subdominant position of the wife is explained by saying that ‘the man has the key to paradise’ (L’homme a la clé du paradis), which implies that women have to respect and follow their husband to enter paradise, as they do not have a key to paradise themselves. With a future as household head and authority ahead of them, boys are educated to take care of themselves and to learn to reach their goals and objectives. Boys have to know how to manage themselves. Boys do not ask questions or help, they have to do it themselves. Boys are expected to go out and discover the world, and to stand up to the confrontations they run into and the challenges they meet in the outside world. In contrast, girls have to stay at home and help their mothers. These elements are mentioned by both girls and boys when explaining what it means to be a girl or a boy.

Another profound gender difference in adolescence manifests itself in the monitoring of girls and boys by parents. Generally speaking, boys have more freedom than girls. Whereas it is problematic for girls to leave the home (especially when it is not for school, work, or to buy household requirements), boys hardly have to ask their parents for permission to go out. Girls have to ask their parents’ permission for most of the things they undertake and their lives are closely monitored (see also Nyamnjoh 2005: 302). By contrast, boys are expected to do their own things and manage the situations they are confronted with themselves. In that way, the extent to which girls or boys can act independently and take responsibilities varies. Boys are more stimulated to take their own decisions, in contrast to girls, who are more stimulated to show respect and obedience. With respect to sexuality, the genderedness of adolescence manifests itself clearly in the way parents watch over the relations of their daughters with boys and men, while they do not worry in the same way about their son’s relationships with girls. The monitoring of girls is closely related to the differential value of premarital sexuality for girls and boys, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, and in the following chapters. Before going into that, I want to address the role of peers and friendship in adolescence.

37 The number of female headed households varies in different sources, but is somewhere between 15 and 20% of all families. The recent ESAM survey identifies 20% of the Senegalese households as female-headed. In Dakar, female-headed households represent 25% of all households, compared to 30% in other Senegalese cities, and 13% in the rural areas (ESAM 2004: 37). Households headed by women can be found in all socio-economic classes, but seem to be most present among the middle classes. Factors contributing to the existence and rise of the number of female-headed households are: rising age of marriage of women, rise in out-of-wedlock pregnancies, higher divorce rates, the declining support of fathers for their children, widowhood (especially in context of polygamy and differences in age of husband and wife), and national and international migration (Bop 1995: 52-57).
Peers and friends

The relationship between parents and children becomes less close and friends become more important during adolescence. Moussa for instance said:

There is another difference between a youth and an adult. During a certain period of life, it is only your friends who can tell you the truth, because your parents have no idea what your life is about. You come home just to take a bath, or to eat, and sometimes you don’t even eat at home, but only come there to sleep. Your parents do not know what you do outside the house. So, it is only your friends who can set things right in case you are on the wrong track. [...] During a certain age, especially during the age of puberty, a youth thinks that he knows all, he feels himself strong. So, he does what he feels like doing, anything that goes through his head. He does not take the advice of others into consideration, but he sticks to his own ideas. We see that with many young people. The youth thinks, during this period, that he has to live as the other young people, in order to avoid being treated as old-fashioned, as someone who is not connected. And if his parents, during this period, have set out a route for him, he will not follow it. (boy, 21, out-of-school, FGD 14)

Young people argue that it is not parents who know best, but that in fact peers who know what is going on, and therefore can ‘tell the truth’. This is in line with the view in the literature that the role of parents weakens in adolescence, when peers become more influential. Friendships are hence important in the lives of young people.

What does friendship mean to young people in Dakar? Four elements come forward in young people’s narratives on friendship. Firstly, friendship mainly exists between friends of the same sex. ‘Real’ friendship between a girl and a boy is rare, as love almost always comes to play a role in the relations between them: either one of the two is in love, or the friendship will end up in a relationship, or the so-called friends have just broken up. Secondly, friendship has to do with sharing and being together: spending time together, sharing ideas, sharing everything. A third distinctive and highly valued element of friendship is that friends are the people one can count on in times of problems. Young people often say that you learn who your real friends are in difficult situations, because for a ‘real’ friend, your problem is his/her problem. The fourth element is confidentiality and trustworthiness, which are considered of great importance. A friend is someone who keeps your secrets to her/himself. Interesting differences between girls and boys come forward with respect to these elements.

Boys evaluate the role of friendship as very positive in their lives. Their friends are the ones they turn to whenever they are in need of something. Although girls also talk about friends being there to help you out, they also seem to seek support and assistance elsewhere: either with a boyfriend, lover, fiancé or potential husband, or in some cases with their parents. Boys are however pushed to take care of themselves and be independent and they are less likely to ask their girlfriend or parents for assistance to solve a problem. They turn to friends instead. It is therefore not surprising that the so-called amis d’enfance, childhood friendship, seems to be of special relevance to boys and men. Having grown up together, these friends have a special connection with each other and their long term friendship is characterized by a strong sense of sharing and reliability. For most men, their amis d’enfance continue to be important throughout their whole life. Childhood friendships seem to be less prominently present in the lives of girls. This might be related to the fact that boys have more freedom to play outside the home, whereas girls spend more time at home and consequently develop less intensive relations with other girls.
It might also be the case that girls rather seek assistance from men (either partners or relatives) than from women, as men generally have more access to financial and material means as well as networks and contacts that can solve a particular problem. This would also explain why men turn towards male peers for help, and not towards female partners.

Another interesting gender difference with respect to friendship is that especially girls experience a lack of reliability. Both girls and boys claim that trustworthiness and reliability are important in ‘real’ friendships. In the experiences of girls in particular, reality does not seem to live up to this ideal. They often complain about the indiscreetness of friends to whom they have confided a secret. According to many girls, real friends are rare. Although this deception is also voiced by boys, girls are much more concerned about this. Girls complain that female friends do not know how to hold their tongue (elles ne savent pas tenir leur langue), and it is also generally assumed that women cannot keep secrets and talk too much. The difference in the experiences of girls and boys concerning the reliability of friends and friendships is possibly related to the fact that the reputation of girls and women is more easily damaged by stories about their conduct and character, especially when these concern their sexual lives. The reputation of boys is less susceptible to rumours, gossip and accusations. In other words, the secrets of girls are more important to keep and safeguard. An important consequence of the experienced lack of reliability of friendship by girls is that they feel that they have few people to turn to in case of problems. Boys seldom seem to run out of friends.

The gender differences notwithstanding, peers and friends are becoming more important in the lives of contemporary youth in Dakar. Young people themselves explain this from the fact that peers are closer to their lives and experiences. Firstly, the described changes in adolescence due to schooling, urbanisation and media mean that young people are nowadays confronted with different issues than their parents were in their youth. Secondly, young people also wish to distinguish themselves from the generation of their parents and feel the need to connect with peers of their generation. The gap between parents and young people in that way is also a conflict of generations, in which the latter seek to distinguish themselves from the earlier generations. Markers of difference are found in for example clothing, the appropriateness of having a boy- or girlfriend, whether it is good to know your future husband or wife well before actually getting married, or the acceptability of sex before marriage. With peers and friends becoming more important points of reference for young people, the authority of parents declines, and in that way one can speak of a “disempowerment of parents” (see also Hailonga 2003). But as Moussa’s words illustrate, there is also continuity between the generations, which means that the authority of parents is simultaneously questioned and acknowledged.

**Being young: not being married**

The most important marker that distinguishes an adolescent from an adult has however not yet been discussed: marriage. It is in marriage that young people turn into adults, take full responsibility and become independent. Marriage marks the passage to becoming a real adult. Adults are married, and children are by definition not married. Consequently, non-marital status is central to adolescence and being young. Interestingly, this makes that age is of less importance in defining adulthood and childhood than marital status. A 15 year-old who is married can be considered more adult than a 30 year-old who is single. Marriage often allows for being considered as an adult without questions, while other aspects such as education or employment are less powerful in constructing adulthood.

The link between marriage and adulthood can be illustrated by a misunderstanding I
encountered in the early stages of my stay in Dakar. During a presentation of my research proposal to a group of local and mainly Senegalese researchers and NGO staff members, confusion arose over the terminology young women and young men. I had labelled the young, unmarried people in the ages of 17 to 21, that were the targeted age group in my research, as young women (jeunes femmes) and young men (jeuns hommes). One of the participants in the meeting indicated that it was inappropriate to speak of young women or young men when talking about unmarried people. The other participants agreed that the terminology woman/man was used for those who were married, and that unmarried young people were normally indicated by the terms girl or boy. 'Young woman', or 'young man', then referred to a woman or man who was recently married. These terms were hence not to be used for the groups that were of central concern in this study. They had to be indicated with the terms garçon and fille, boy and girl.

The way in which marriage constructs adulthood turns out to be highly gendered. A study among almost 3,000 adolescents and over 1,600 parents in different parts of Senegal found that young people considered setting up a home (fonder un foyer) the most important thing in the life of a girl. For boys, by contrast, this was not the highest priority, and the most important things in their lives were considered to be having a job, getting an education and having success in life (réussir dans la vie). Employment and education were considered much less important for girls (Mané et al. 2001: 12). In line with the already made point that independence is more important in adulthood and adolescence for boys than for girls, these findings show that marriage is more central in constructing the adulthood of women than of men. This can also be understood by taking a closer look at the Wolof terms for different life stages of both sexes (see also M’Baye 1988).

To start with girls and women, the Wolof language generally provides three terms: njegemaar, jänq and jeek. Njegemaar refers to young girls, who are not yet mature and who have not started menstruating, in let’s say the age range 8 to 15 years. Jänq is the term that points to girls who have reached puberty and who are physically maturing, but who are not yet married. In contrast to the njegemaar, these girls are menstruating, and might be interested in and attracted to sex and boys, and are physically capable of having a child. Jeek is a woman who is married. The terms jänq and jeek imply information concerning virginity and sexuality. A jänq is a virgin, and a jeek is no longer a virgin. Marriage, virginity and sexuality are the central markers in the difference between a jänq and a jeek, between an unmarried girl and an adult woman. The application of the label jänq or jeek is not a reference to age, but to their marital, and hence sexual status. For girls, becoming adult, means becoming a jeek, and this implies getting married and becoming sexually active. The phenomenon of unmarried motherhood confuses these categories: non-married mothers can be considered jeek, but are - obviously - not respected to the same extent as married women.

Looking at boys and men, the terms waxambaane and mag are used to distinguish between non-adults and adults. In the past, boys made the transition into adulthood through circumcision and their initiation, which was called mbar. Different ethnic groups prepared their boys for being a man through an initiation process that centred around learning them how to live their lives. The boys spent a period in isolation from the community and were taught to be courageous, not to be afraid, to be strong and intelligent, how to live their life and how to have a wife and a family. The idea was that after the mbar these boys, who had now turned into young men, were ready to start a family and take responsibility for their lives. Although marriage is not completely irrelevant for being considered adult, it is more the capacity to be able to take care of oneself in the broadest sense that marks the difference between waxambaane and mag. A mag has to be able to
manage his own life, and to earn his own income, and he might be married and have a
family, but this does not have to be realized yet in order to be considered mag. Nowadays,
most ethnic groups do not practice the initiation of boys in the same way anymore (e.g. De
Jong, Mark & Chupin 1998; De Jong 1995): boys are circumcised at ages as early as 2 or 3
years, and this is often done in a medical setting like a community clinic or hospital. In
addition, the standards of admission to for instance the initiation ceremony of the Jola
have become more liberal, and the period of seclusion in the sacred grove has been cut
down from two to three months to a couple of weeks. The meaning of the initiation
ceremony has also shifted: it is less important in marking and establishing the transition
to adult life, but has gained significance in constituting the Jola identity (De Jong 1995:
141-144). The idea of being capable to take care of oneself – rather than marriage - is central
in defining male adulthood, despite the diminishing ritual marking through mbar.

Given that marriage is more important in constructing adulthood for girls than for
boys, it is important to realize that the options for being considered adult are more limited
for girls. Marriage is practically the only way through which they can attain this status, as
is also expressed by the common understanding that a girl can realize herself in marriage,
une fille peut se réaliser dans le mariage. Boys, by contrast, are offered multiple trajectories
to become adult, and although marital status is not irrelevant and does add to being
considered adult, it is not the only marker, nor the central one. As pointed out earlier, boys
marry at a later age than girls. If marriage would be the only route to adulthood, they would
not be held accountable for their actions, or be required to be responsible, until late in their
lives.

This background on the role of marriage in constructing adulthood for girls and boys
also helps to understand the differential attitudes of the participants of both sexes in this
study towards getting married. They all aspire the marital status, but girls seem more eager
to get married than boys.38 For most male participants in this study, marriage is part
of their future, but not of the immediate one, and most hope to get married in their late
twenties or early thirties. It is not their foremost preoccupation at present. Most explain
this from the fact that in contemporary Dakar, boys and young men have considerable
difficulties to accumulate the means that are required to actually get married: they need
a lot of money to cover the marriage payments, and to make the investments for acquiring
and equipping a home (e.g. Stol 1987; De Jong 1995: 143-144; Biaya 2001). It indeed seems
that finding work, earning an income and building a life are more immediate concerns for
boys in their late teens and early twenties than getting married.

When asking girls about their attitudes towards marriage, their common first
reaction is that they would rather get married today than tomorrow. As marriage makes
them ‘real’ women, it is their way of occupying a position in which they are respected and
taken serious. Not getting married is not an option for them and none of the girls inter-
viewed did not want to marry. It is generally taken to be extremely important for women
to get married in terms of status: “In relation to the social norms, the status of single
women takes on a negative connotation” (ESAM 2004: 36). Marriage also is a way to ensure
material and financial provisions for girls. Notwithstanding the desirability of marriage,
girls indicate that it is difficult to find a husband (e.g. Van der Laar 1995). Just to be sure and

38 This attitude of aspiring marriage seems to be fairly constant in time, or at least in the last 20 years, as a 1986 study found
that 93% of respondents to a questionnaire declared their intention to get married: marriage is part of life and “it is unthinkable
not to get married” (D’Hondt & Vanderwiele 1986: 16). The 750 respondents were secondary school pupils of different
regions of Senegal, varying in age between 17 and 22.
to prevent the situation of getting too old to get married, girls therefore often reason that it is better to have a bad husband than a perfect boyfriend. At second thought, however, girls also express some reluctance to getting married right away. Marriage brings a lot of responsibilities with it, in terms of having to look after the household and especially in the sense of getting pregnant and having children. Because women were formerly expected to remain at home once they were married, the marriage and reproductive responsibilities are not easily compatible with continuing an education or having a job outside the home. But education and earning their own income do seem to gain relevance for girls, because they meet the desires of girls to develop themselves. Just as important, the current socio-economic context and the general complaints of women about their husband’s willingness to provide for them make girls aware of the dangers of financial dependence on one’s husband.

It is far from uncommon for girls in their teens and early twenties to find themselves in a situation where they are negotiating with their parents a proposed marriage. In comparison to the past, girls in contemporary Dakar are asked more often after their opinion of a marriage and a marriage candidate, which means that girls have gained some room for manoeuvre to delay a marriage. Reasons that girls can employ in negotiating a delay with their parents are that they do not see the suitor as a suitable husband, as they for instance do not really know him, dislike him or find him too old. Girls might also indicate that they find themselves too young to get married, and that they prefer to wait a little, in order to finish their education or start working first. Depending on how important the parents find it for the girl to get married right now, and on how much importance they attach to her education and ability to work and earn her own money, parents can give their daughters more or less space to dismiss a proposed marriage. This space also depends on the marriage candidate at hand, in the sense of family connections or his financial and economic status.

The differential role of marriage in constructing female and male adulthood also affects the length of the process of transition into adulthood. For girls, the transition is more rapid, as it is linked to a specific event: their marriage. For boys, the process of transition is longer and men gradually assume more independence by finding employment, having their own income and money, acquiring accommodation, and managing their own lives. In fact, the Dakarois context seems to fit the image that for “young men [...] access to [...] prerogatives of adulthood is achieved only gradually through demonstrating worthiness” (Bledsoe & Cohen 1993: 45). In combination with the rising ages of marriage of women, this suggests that adolescence might be a newer phenomenon for girls than for boys, in the sense that boys and men have always known a longer transition period.

Before turning to the matter of premarital sexuality in the remainder of this chapter, I want to make one last point about the use of the term adolescence. It goes without saying that I follow the locally acceptable way of labelling of the research group in terms of girls and boys, rather than young women and young men. In the sense that they are not married, these girls and boys that are the concern of this study fit the label of adolescents. But I am uncomfortable to call them adolescents, because the notion of adolescence carries some problematic connotations as well. Adolescence is commonly associated with an age range that might not correspond to the research group, and can therefore cause confusion. Moreover, as I addressed earlier, there are medical and psychological connotations in the term, which I want to avoid, because my interest is in the social meanings attached to this life stage as I found them in Dakar rather than its biological characteristics. It has been useful to consider the period between childhood and adulthood in terms of adolescence,
as this brings out the in-between aspect of their life stage. Yet, although it is not incorrect to call the research group adolescents, I prefer to use the term young people. This is maybe less specific, but at the same time this terminology is more free from disturbing connotations. Labelling this group as young people allows me to differentiate them from small children, as their life is rather different from the life of a 2- or 10-year old child. By calling them young people, I intend to approach them as persons that are more and more capable of taking decisions regarding their own lives and of reflecting on their actions and decisions. It allows me to portray them in a way in which they can be taken serious.

3 Premarital sexuality and virginity: broken ideals

As marriage is a way to organize sex and sexuality, the way adulthood is linked to marriage makes that both adulthood and adolescence come to be defined in terms of sexuality. In Senegal, sexuality is limited to the institution of marriage. Sex is only allowed between wife and husband, and should not take place before nor outside marriage. The norm of virginity and the constraint on pre- and extra-marital sexuality are strong and highly valued in Senegal. Virginity comes up in virtually every discussion I had in Dakar on the subject of young people’s sexuality and its importance is stressed over and over again. This virginity norm is promoted in a combination of traditional customs and religious beliefs, both Islamic and Christian. In the predominantly Islamic society of Senegal, where 94% of the population is Muslim (EDS-III 1997: 2), the Quran is often referred to as a source that limits sex to take place between wife and husband only. The Bible, which is a reference point for the 4% Catholics (EDS-III 1997: 2), carries the same message and prohibits premarital sex (see also Jansen 1997, 2003). Although the exact values and practices might differ, the major ethnic groups living in Senegal have in common that they attach value to virginity till marriage (Diop 1985: 97-144). The similarities in this respect have been reinforced by the Islamization of ethnic customs since the arrival of Islam, and by what is called ‘ wolofisation’ of Senegalese society, i.e. the dominant and in many ways unifying influence of Wolof language and culture (Diouf 1998).

When sexuality is linked to marriage, and when adolescence and being young are defined in terms of not being married, sexuality comes to play a complex role in the notion of adolescence. In fact, sexuality becomes a contested issue for young, unmarried people. By linking marriage to sexuality, an adult is sexually active, and an adolescent, or unmarried youth, by definition cannot have sex. In times when adolescence did not exist as a separate life stage, and the transition from a-sexual childhood to sexually active adulthood was rapid, the group of sexually mature but unmarried adolescents did not exist. The contemporary adolescents and young people are sexually mature, but they are not part of the category of adults for whom sexuality is accepted. As a new category,

39 A similarity between Islam and Christianity is that both identify marriage as the appropriate context for the expression of sexual feelings and acts. Both religions however differ in the way the basic core notions value the sexual act and pleasure. Islam sees sexuality as positive and enriching for life. Sexuality is not strictly connected with procreation, but also considered as enriching and enjoyable in itself. Islam does not hold celibacy in great esteem, because suppression of sexual drives is taken to be dangerous for one’s health. By contrast, Christianity sees sexual desire as a sin, and the desires of the flesh as threats to the spiritual order. Sexuality is only valued positively in relation to procreation, and it is immoral to break the connection between the two by living out sexuality in ways that do not lead to procreation (in case of for example contraceptive use, homosexual sex, in-vitro fertilisation). In line with this, control over sexual drives and energies is highly valued in for instance celibacy (Jansen 1997, 2003).

40 Some of the smaller ethnic groups, such as the matrilineal Busari, attach less importance to virginity.
adolescent young people do not fit into the social organization of sexually inactive children and active adults. As a result, the matter of young people’s sexuality becomes subject to ambiguity. This explains why the matter is so controversial in the Dakar context. Because marriage and virginity turned out to be important normative reference points for young people’s sexuality, they merit to be looked upon a little closer.

Virgin girls and potent boys

When I asked a group of school girls what they considered to be the positive and negative aspects of sexuality, they replied that within the context of marriage, sexuality is only positive, and before or outside marriage sexuality is always negative. Although virginity is formulated in gender neutral terms (no sex until marriage), it turns out that it has rather different meanings for girls and for boys (see also Ndione 1993: 155). This can be illustrated by the perspective of the 22 year-old Idrissa, who is in school but sells t-shirts in his spare time (boy, 22, in-school, INT 6). During the individual interview he talks about his sexual history and the times he has had sex with girls. At one point we come to speak of his younger sister and I ask him what he would think if he knew his sister was having sex. He said that this would upset him and that he would give her a hard time, because she would have given away the most valuable thing she possesses: “A girl has nothing else but to safeguard her virginity, it is the most precious, you know”. It is clear that he considers his own deviance from the norm of abstinence as much less problematic than the possibility that his sister might behave in a similar way. Many people - young and old, girls and boys – share the position that “girls have to be virgins, but boys do not have to be virgins” (boy, Moustapha, 20, in-school, FGD 5). This generates a gendered picture of young people’s sexuality with, on the one hand, virgin girls and, on the other hand, potent boys.

To start with girls, there is very little space for them outside the dominant norm of premarital abstinence. The power of this virginity norm manifested itself in the fact that, in the course of almost 15 months of fieldwork and numerous discussions and conversations with girls of different backgrounds, only three unmarried girls explicitly acknowledged to have had sex. In general, it is difficult for girls to acknowledge that they are sexually active. There is no room to articulate the sexuality of unmarried girls in a non-judgmental or non-normalising manner. In all of my conversations with girls, all reasons that can be given for why girls engage in sex are considered unacceptable and immoral, and sexually active girls are always conceived as bad, weak, easy or materialist, as I will discuss more elaborately in Chapter 5. By saying that one has had sex, they become a type of girl that they do not want to be. As a consequence, there is hardly any space to express a notion of female sexual pleasure or a girl’s sexual needs.

Boys, by contrast, do have space to move away from the norm of abstinence. They often are sexually active before marriage, and also speak easily about it. They are not ashamed about their sexual experience, on the contrary, they are often proud of it. It is not only less problematic for boys not to stay virgins, they are actually expected to be the opposite, as Moussa who works as a carpenter explains:

If we tell you that we want to stay virgins until marriage, that would be a lie. When you have never had sex with a girl, your peers make fun of you. It is not interesting when on Saturday everybody goes out to visit their girlfriend, and you, you don’t move. You will be called all kinds of names, that you are an oldie, that you are impotent, etcetera. It is the others that impose on you that you go after girls. It is this that makes it a nearly impossible thing to stay virgin until marriage.

(boy, 21, out-of-school, FGD 20)
So, there is a lot of pressure among boys and men to have girlfriends and sex in order to be considered a ‘real man’. The vast majority of boys in Dakar will confirm that it is actually normal for boys of their age to have sexual experience. The following quote of Idrissa shows how important sexuality is in the construction of masculinity:

But me, what I cannot understand is how I can say to a girl ‘I am not a virgin’. What is the relevance? It is not relevant, it is not important. Because, today, we, we are all boys, right, and when I ask you ‘have you had sex?’ and you say ‘no’, but then, I will look down upon you, humiliate you. The first thing to do is that I will say that you are not a man. And that, that will influence you, and you will try to avoid that. [...] Instead of having a penis, you have ice on its place. [...] In our situation, for me, it is not important. I do not want to be a virgin.
(boy, 22, in-school, FGD 5)

Men have to be goôr, the Wolof word for man. A male who is a virgin and who is not sexually active is not goôr.

Being a man is not so much a matter of biology or nature: it is not the fact of having a penis that makes a man a man, but what he does with that penis. Men have to use it for heterosexual sex. Passiveness, impotency and homosexuality are threats to being goôr and men have to show that neither of these qualifications applies to them. In hegemonic notions of masculinity in Senegal, homosexuality is seen as unacceptable and unmanly (Niang et al. 2002; Niang et al. 2003; Niang et al. 2004; see also Teunis 2001; Biaya 2001: 81-82). The Wolof word for homosexual man is goôrjigeen, where goôr means man and jigeen means woman. A homosexual man is labelled as a man who is a woman (Murray & Roscoe 1998: 107-108). The term doxaanante expresses the perceived contradictory character of homosexuality. Doxaan refers to having sex, and the suffix –ante implies reciprocity. Doxaanante thus literally means having sex with yourself, with somebody of the same sex. This is taken as a contradiction in terms. Men should not have sex with men, but with women: the ‘other’ sex. The sexuality of boys centres on being sexually active and having sexual experience with women. In conclusion, dominant notions of premarital sexuality limit sex to marriage, but they are highly gendered. For girls, the notion of virginity falls together with hegemonic femininity. For boys, however, sexual activity and experience are core elements of dominant notions of masculinity.

The emergence of an adolescent life stage created a context of ambiguity with respect to premarital sex. Both young people themselves and adults (such as parents, teachers, and religious leaders) are confronted with different and sometimes conflicting values on sexuality before marriage. Religious leaders, both Islamic and Catholic, preach abstinence until marriage, and most parents reinforce these expectations for their children (Nanitelamio 1997). As I will work out throughout this thesis, young people sometimes share these ideals and put them into practice, but they also might not conform to this norm and engage in premarital sex. Nevertheless, the dominant notions of premarital abstinence remain central reference points for the construction of young people’s sexuality. Their importance can be understood by looking at the ideals about the wedding night. This is done in the next sub-section. The expectations of women and men in the wedding night also shed light on the gendered character of premarital sexuality.

The wedding night: jéballe
The wedding night, called jéballe in Wolof, is a very charged part of the marriage cere-
monies. In Dakar, as in many other African contexts, the conclusion of a marriage is a long process covering several years, which can roughly be divided into five steps (Faladé 1963; Diop 1985 97-144; Bledsoe & Cohen 1993: 45-47; Van der Walle & Meekers 1994: 57). The first stage entails the choice of a marriage partner, which, if the parents on both sides agree, will lead to the engagement of the couple. The religious marriage at the mosque—takk in Wolof—is the second step in the process. The takk is predominantly of Islamic origin, although elements of Wolof tradition are also present in it. The third phase consists of the preparations for the consummation of the marriage. The wedding night itself (jéballe) is the fourth step. During the final stage, the eggale, festivities mark that the wife joins the conjugal home (for details on the eggale, see Diop 1985: 123-141). The wedding night is supposed to be the first sexual contact of the couple and centres on the question whether the bride is a virgin. It is successful when the marriage is consummated, thus when husband and wife have had complete sexual intercourse.

In the jéballe, a woman has to prove that she is a virgin and that she has not been penetrated before. The blood that a woman is supposed to lose the first time she is penetrated by her husband is taken as the sign of her virginity. Whereas in the distant past the husband came to the bride’s home for the defloration ceremony, it later became a custom that the bride is taken to her husband’s place, where she is going to spend the night (Diop 1985: 119). Relatives and friends of the bride, especially female ones, prepare her by bathing her with special water, shaving her pubic hair, doing her make-up, clothes and hair, putting together her luggage, and sometimes giving her amulets for protection. The bàijan (bride’s paternal aunt) plays a central role in the wedding night ceremony, and she is the one who gives conseil (advice) to the bride: obey the husband by consenting to the sexual act. After the ceremonies, the bride is left with her groom, and the next morning the aunts of the bride, in particular the bàijan, come to see whether the white sheet (that she has been laying on) is stained with blood. When she turns out to be a virgin, drums are played and griots sing to the honour of the girl and her family. The husband will give money to her parents and her aunts, to show his appreciation of how their daughter is a good wife (Ibid.: 119-123). When the woman cannot prove her virginity and when the husband complains that he is not satisfied with the new wife, the wedding night is unsuccessful. This can be a reason to dissolve the marriage.

The blood stain is the most important sign of a woman’s virginity. Besides that, some degree of difficulty for the man to penetrate the vagina is also taken as a sign that this is the first time for the woman to have sexual intercourse. It is generally assumed that the vagina of a woman who has never had sexual intercourse, is narrow and tight, and consequently difficult to penetrate. As a father explained it: “if it was tight, it was new” (INT 30). A smooth penetration can cause suspicion. Next to this, it is also generally taken for granted that the next morning the newly wedded woman is in a weak condition. The general image is that, after the wedding night, a woman has pain, which makes that she sometimes has difficulties to walk and sit, and for which she needs to be looked after by her (female) relatives. Generally she goes to her family, where her mother, aunts and sisters take care of her: they give her massages, wash her, and give her food and do everything to treat her well. In the evening she goes back to her husband. For women, the wedding night is strongly

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41 The description of the marriage process provided here is largely based on the Wolof (Diop 1985: 97-144), as they are the dominant ethnic group in Senegal. The vernacular terms given are in Wolof. The major other ethnic groups follow more or less the same process, although some ceremonies may differ (and the ceremonies are called differently in other languages).
There is no need for the groom to prove his virginity: it is not relevant whether he is a virgin or not. Although the largest part of the wedding night is centred around the woman’s virginity, the groom also has to prove something: his potency. He has to prove that he can penetrate a woman. A consumed marriage in combination with the tiredness and pain of the woman are taken as indicators of the man’s virility and potency. The biggest fear of men is failure to consume the marriage, that is not being able to have sex with the wife. If a man fails to penetrate his new wife, this can be a reason for the woman’s family to dissolve the marriage. Afraid of failing during the wedding night, men fear what is called *xala* in Wolof. *Xala* is a form of black magic that is designed to prevent a man from having an erection (Uru Iyam 1986: 81-82; see also Bryce 2001). On request, a marabout can for example link the husband’s name to a frog, and because the frog is considered to be a cold-blooded animal, the man’s penis will also be cold and cannot turn into an erection. A *xala* can come from relatives of the woman who are against the marriage, from other men that are interested in marrying the woman or from the woman herself when she opposes to the marriage (see the novel ‘Xala’ from Sembène Ousmane, 1973).

The importance that is given to the bride’s virginity has to be viewed in relation to the payments and prestations that are being made during the five stages of the marriage process (Diop 1975: 97-144). In the first stage, the suitor (*prétendant*) visits the family of the girl to present *les cadeaux de salutation* (*nuyóó*) - one or two kilos of cola nuts, and a small sum of money - to the girl and her mother. In the past, the communications during this first visit were very indirect, but in time the dialogue has become more open and direct. The girl’s father, who is informed by the mother of his daughter’s opinion of the marriage, gives the family response to the suitor. When the response is positive, the suitor returns a week later with *le cadeau de fiançailles* (*ndàq far or may gu jëkk*) - a more substantial sum of money and often some jewellery – which signifies the engagement of the couple. During the religious marriage in the second stage, two payments are made: one to the father of the bride - *the béyu baay* (the father’s goat, *chèvre du père*) - is not a large sum, and another more substantial one, called *alali farata*, to the girl to be married. Without the latter, the marriage is not valid according to Islamic standards. After the conclusion of the marriage at the mosque, cola nuts are distributed among those who have attended the ceremony. Before the marriage can be actually consumated in the wedding night, the husband has to make some important payments in some ceremonies in the third phase. These include what is called the opening of the suitcase, *tijji gaal*. The contents of the suitcase, which consists of clothes, cosmetics and other gifts, is distributed between the bride, female relatives and friends. Before the suitcase is opened in the presence of those, the husband has to pay a small amount as *prix d’ouverture de la valise*. Another ceremony that has to be performed before the marriage can be consumed is *samp lal*: the posing of the bed. The husband gives a bed, and presents several payments to female relatives of the bride. I already mentioned that during the fourth step, the wedding night, the husband gives money to the bride’s family, especially the paternal aunt (*bàjjan*), when the bride has shown good character by preserving herself. Finally, in the fifth stage multiple ceremonies are performed and different kinds of payments are made by and to various actors in the marriage process. It can only start after the husband has paid the *waajtaay*, a sum of money from which the wife can buy what is needed to equip the kitchen and her new household. After her arrival at the husband’s home, payments are an element in the different ceremonies and festivities that take place over a couple of days.

During the complete marriage process, different payments are made by and to different people. Most are presented by the husband and his kin. A key payment is the *alali*...
farata, “which represents the real dot” (Diop 1985: 106; translation mine). The *alali farata* is required for a valid marriage according to Islamic law and is also known as the Islamic *sadâq* (Ibid.: 111; Jansen 1994). It is however also worthwhile to note that during the marriage process the relatives of the bride also receive substantial prestations. Female relatives, more specifically her mother and her paternal aunt (*bàjjan*), are the main recipients in the ceremonies of the preparation of the consumption of the marriage and the wedding night itself (step three and four). The matter of recipients is important because it points to the stakeholders in the marriage process, and thus the virginity of the bride. More specifically, it shows that the bride’s mother and the *bàjjan* (paternal aunt) have an interest in safeguarding the virginity of the girl: they benefit materially when the groom marries a girl of good character, or they loose out when they, so to speak, have failed to raise a good wife. In that light, it is interesting to note that the payments of the *tijji gaal* and *samp lal* recently have gained in significance and have come to cover substantial amounts of money, whereas originally they did not take up such a prominent place. In fact, the value of the *dot* is relatively modest (Diop 1985: 113-115; cf. Jansen 1994).

### The Social Significance of Virginity

The wedding night has an important symbolic function in the unambiguous construction of the ‘female’ and ‘male’ identities of bride and groom:

> A bride’s defloration by penetrative sex is a ritual moment when, ideally, a ‘real’ man is potent and a ‘real’ woman is chaste, when gendered difference and hierarchy can be experienced as quintessentially real. 

> [In the wedding night defloration] an archetypal masculinity and femininity are created and revealed through interaction. Through the sex act, gendered identities and an act of domination are temporarily, but literally, embodied [...] In the return to everyday life, new, ambiguous identities emerge. (Lindisfarne, 1994: 95, 91)

The wedding night differentiates women from men, and also transforms both bride and groom into gendered adults. The proof that both the wife and the husband have to deliver in the performative enactment of idealized gendered sexual identities reinforces each other: “Virginity [...] is revealed by, and reveals, virility” (Lindisfarne, 1994: 93). The groom’s potency makes him a good partner for the wife and turns her into a successfully wedded woman (she has a husband who is *góor*, and earns respect for the quality of her husband and her marriage).

To start, virginity at marriage is a qualifier for the bride’s own identity and status.

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42 It is difficult to make the payment of the *alali farata*, or Islamic *sadâq*, fit into the common distinction in anthropological literature between bridewealth and dowry (Jansen 1994). Bridewealth is a transaction from the kin of the groom to the kin of the bride, whereas dowry is a transaction from the relatives of the bride to the bride (Goody 1973: 1-2). In the literature and by Senegalese people, the term *alali farata* is commonly translated with the French term *dot* (Diop 1985: 106). This French term *dot* - which literally means dowry - is, however, imprecise and can actually refer to different types of marriage payments (Jansen 1994: 138). Goody argues that payments from the groom and his relatives to the bride herself could be considered bridewealth, but prefers to define it as ‘indirect dowry’, because the bride, rather than her family is the ultimate recipient (Goody 1973: 1-2). Jansen agrees with Goody that the *sadâq* should be distinguished from both bridewealth and dowry, but argues that the label of ‘indirect dowry’ adds to the confusion, because it gives the impression that it is the transaction from the bride’s kin is given in an indirect manner, whereas it is the groom and his relatives who make the payment (1994: 112-116). She proposes to use the Islamic term *sadâq* or *mahr*. 
With her proper conduct, a virgin bride lives up to social expectations and idealized femininity, and this makes her a woman that earns respect. A girl who is not a virgin has a bad reputation. A second symbolic function of virginity is the way it marks her parents. A virgin bride is an indicator that she has been raised properly and has been well educated (see also Diop 1985: 122). A virgin bride makes her mother and aunts proud, whereas a unchaste girl is a deception to her parents, especially her mother. Girls in this study expressed that loosing one’s virginity is a “disappointment” and a lack of respect to one’s parents. Unchastity adversely affects the family’s respectability and can harm the reputation of the other girls in the family.

Thirdly, virginity marks the status of the husband. By marrying a respectable virgin bride, the groom earns respect for entering a good marriage and selecting a good wife. As Idrissa put it:

If we want to marry a virgin girl, it is a way of honouring yourself. People will say that you know how to choose. Your wife, all the children that she will have, will be good children. All right, the wedding night, well then you have to manage to have sex with her. And if she is a virgin, it is an honour to herself. And, it is an honour to you. The whole family will be happy, you know. We will give left and right, to her parents, to express that they have well educated their girl, they deserve this. You see, it is an honour to yourself, and to your family.

(boy, 22, in-school, FGD 6)

Marrying a virgin marks the status of the husband, because he has made a ‘good deal’ (see also Mernissi 2000). This is in turn affected by the way the wife’s behaviour and character impacts on her future children. This happens through her own status as a mother. Idrissa explains:

A virgin girl, if you manage to marry her, and you have sexual intercourse, you know that she is a virgin. And when she brings children into the world, what is absolutely sure is that these kids will be good children. Since she managed to preserve herself, in that case she can do the same thing for her children.

(boy, 22, in-school, FGD 6)

Because women are held responsible for the education of their children, they have to be an example of irreproachable and faultless conduct. It is generally assumed that children will be faced with the consequences of their mother’s misconduct. The work and the reputation of the mother set out the future for her children, as is expressed by the Wolof saying ‘the child will reap the fruits of his mother’s work’. If a mother misbehaves, her children are said to be already lost and to have little chances for succeeding in life. A mother’s proper conduct will ensure that her children are successful, rich and happy.

In this web of meanings, the bride’s virginity is also interpreted as a sign of the success of the marriage. Because her husband is the first one to penetrate her, she will respect him and be faithful. This has to do with the way the first sexual experience of women is interpreted as being something special and unique, something that makes an indelible impression on her. The first man to penetrate a woman, is the one who has made her enter the world of the sexual and has turned her into a woman. It is said that she will always

43 In French: «le travail de la mère, c’est l’enfant qui va récolter les fruits plus tard». In Wolof, «liggeee u ndeye, añou doom».
remember this experience and respect this man. So, it is important that this first man is her husband, because then she will respect him, and this is needed in a successful marriage. When her first sexual partner is not her husband, she will always remember this other man, and this is a threat to the husband’s position as well as the marriage. For men, by contrast, the first sexual experience is not considered to leave the same impression. It does not affect later sexual relations nor marriage in a similar way.

The bride’s virginity not only affects the position of the husband, but also contributes to the power position of the wife herself. Having a good reputation because of her pre-marital chastity makes her respectable. Not being a virgin can undermine a woman’s power position with respect to her husband. It is difficult for a woman to speak up when her husband can silence her by saying that ‘when he knew her, she was already like her mother’, which means that she was already old and no longer a virgin. By preserving their virginity, girls can protect their power position in marriage, but also in the family and the broader society.

All together, the jéballe and the bride’s virginity carry a load of social meanings and values, and affect the status and positions of a range of actors. However, not all blood on the sheet comes from the woman’s hymen. It can also be the result of the conditions under which intercourse takes place during the wedding night. Girls hear from married women how painful their wedding night was, and they see how newly wedded women are taken care of. During a group discussion, some girls expressed their fear of the wedding night:

Seynabou: This tradition, the wedding night, I don’t like it. I heard it hurts. [...]. The married girls, when they see those girls that are not married, they say that it hurts a lot.
Mame: It hurts, it hurts. [...] It is painful for the girl. [...] It is a duty for a girl. [...] We cannot escape it. [...] I am afraid of it, very afraid even.
(girls, 18, out-of-school, FGD 14)

Girls often tell stories about brides who were extremely nervous on the day of their marriage or who in the period before the marriage lost weight because of the stress (see also Diop 1985: 119-120). Against that background, it is not very likely that a bride is very relaxed and at ease during the wedding night. The husband, on the other hand, is also a bit tense with the pressure to consume the marriage. In the tenseness of the moment, the bride is probably not lubricated and the stress can make her vagina rather tight. When the man penetrates her without much consideration, there is a considerable chance that she will loose blood. This blood does not necessarily come from the hymen, but can also come from the injuries that are the result of the force employed in the penetration. Either way, proof is generated, the blood is interpreted as the result of the first penetration of the hymen, the woman is considered a virgin, the man has shown his potency, and the wedding night and marriage can be taken as a success.

Defloration is also stressful and painful because of the expected attitude of resistance by the bride. Although the bride is told to obey and consent,

In the face of the unknown, the pudeur, the fear to unveil publicly her misconduct if she is not a virgin, [the bride] can show herself reluctant and hesitant. Moreover, traditionally the bride had to safeguard her honour by resisting. (Diop 1985: 120; translation mine)

This attitude of resistance seems to be important. Ndèye, one of the girls, stated when talking about the pain in the wedding night, that she was going to refuse and do the maximum to prevent her husband from penetrating her (INT 9). The bride’s resistance
makes it more difficult for the groom to succeed in consuming the marriage and he has
to show more of his virility to conquer his bride, so to speak. It is said that the bride’s
resistance adds to the excitement of the husband. So, it is not the fact of the girl having her
first sexual experience that makes the wedding night so painful, but the manner in which
the groom has intercourse with his newly wedded wife. Sex takes place in a particular
way during the wedding night: it is a struggle in which the groom has to prove himself by
conquering his wife and penetrating her, and the bride has to make it difficult for him to
realize this goal. In that sense, the *jéballe* not only marks the sexual identities of wife and
husband, but also the gender inequality between them.

The blood stain is hence not watertight proof of the first penetration of a girl’s
hymen. Nor is the tightness of the vagina, or the bride’s tiredness the next morning.
People are aware of this. Moreover, some people are also aware that not all girls have a
hymen, as one father acknowledged. So, some girls who actually have sex for the first time,
do not loose blood because they do not have a hymen. Despite all this, people consider
virginity to be a biological fact. However, taking into account the social meanings vested in
it, virginity is much more a socially constructed ‘fact’, than a biological one.

‘The facts of life’ refer basically to the biological facts of sexuality and reproduction. [...] When it comes to an analysis of sexuality and reproduction as social facts, these concepts
are not, however, referring to biology, or nature, alone; they are loaded with a specific
meaning, which by no means is given by nature itself. (Hastrup 1978: 49)

This insight in virginity as a ‘social fact’ gains all the more relevance in a context where it
is highly questionable whether girls actually enter marriage as virgins. This situation is
central to the next sub-section.

**Changing realities**

Many people in contemporary Dakar doubt whether there are still girls who marry as virgins,
and some even state that you cannot find a single virgin girl in Dakar anymore. Nevertheless,
being a ‘social fact’,

virginity [...] may be ritually marked in circumstances which completely belie it or make
its proof impossible. (Lindisfarne, 1994: 93)

Virginity rituals are thus accommodated to changing sexual realities.

There are different options when the bride is no longer a virgin. For example, blood
of a chicken can be used to produce the blood stain (Diop 1985: 121). A similar result can be
realized by cutting the skin or sometimes private parts of the bride. Bride and groom can
do this ‘cheating’ together, but it is also possible that the woman does it on her own, with
the help of her *bàjjan*, or maybe with the support of a friend. Stories are told about aunts
and older women who can see the difference between ‘real’ virginity blood and blood from
a chicken. In response to that, complex strategies are designed where the chicken blood
cannot simply be spilled on the sheet, because then the aunts will see it is not ‘real’. During
the intercourse the man has to draw back, and the blood has to be inserted in the vagina,
after which the husband can penetrate the woman again and has to reach an orgasm, so
that his sperm and the blood mix and this produces the right type of colour of the stain.

In 1985, Diop already spoke of false proofs of virginity blood, and noted that the
wedding night is still widely practised, “even though we do not have high hopes of [the
virginity of the bride]” (p. 119, translation mine). He discusses how the role of the bàjjan has changed, in the sense that she more and more has to find a solution for the non-virgin status of the bride. He also indicates that “at present, we hardly go through the trouble of covering it up” (p. 121). The changing realities are also revealed by the changes in terminology. Originally, the money that the husband gives to the bride’s family when he has found her a virgin was called mbërënti in Wolof, which means ‘price of virginity’. Nowadays, the money is still given, even when the girl is not a virgin, and in most cases it is either called ndàmpaay, meaning ‘price of the massage’ (referring to the physical care that is given to the bride after the wedding night), or njaganal, which means ‘gift of head pillow’ (as the money is often left under the pillow) (Diop 1985: 121).

It seems that nowadays the ceremony of the jéballe has turned into a game of hide and seek. Even though nobody has many illusions about whether most brides really are virgins, virginity is always being claimed and nobody openly dissociates her/himself from its importance. The only exception to this are the weddings of teenage mothers. When girls have already given birth prior to marriage, it is obvious that the girl is no longer a virgin, and therefore the wedding night and defloration are not being practiced. In other cases, when the girl is not pregnant nor has a child, everybody plays along with the game. Both bride and groom have a vested interested in establishing the husband’s potency and the wife’s virginity, and covering up male impotence as well as the bride’s prior unchastity (Diop 1985: 119-123; see also Lindisfarne 1994: 93; Mernissi 2000). The family of the bride also plays the game in order to safeguard its public appearance. In fact, only very few people will actually know whether the girl is not a virgin, and those who know are not in a position to speak out, as they are also implicated in it. The boys or men who have slept with the girl keep quiet as they can be blamed for their acts, and the girlfriend of the bride who might know about her sexual experiences also keeps quiet because having a virgin bride as a friend positively affects her own status (irrespective of her own marital status). Nobody gains from dissolving the non-virgin status of the bride, so it is in everybody’s interest to play the game and claim virginity. Diop argues that:

There seems to be a discrepancy between the tradition – that attributes a high importance to virginity – which we wish to respect, and the freedom of the girls of today. We make reference to symbols that pretend to refer to the same meanings as before. But they are either tricked deceptions, like the nuptial sheet, or purely formal, like the prix de la virginité. They do not carry any real meaning anymore apart from expressing the effort to apparently respect a past that, in fact, in many ways substantially differs from the present. (Diop 1985: 123; translation mine)

Young people also reproduce the importance of virginity and underline its value and meaning of honour to the bride herself, the groom and both families. Girls themselves constantly reinforce the importance of virginity and of preserving themselves, as will become clear in Chapter 5. Virginity is hence an ideal that is upheld by members of different generations.

Even though almost nobody openly dissociates her/himself from the importance of virginity of women at marriage, changes in the practices of the wedding night can be noticed.

In the past, the sheet was displayed to everybody, shown to all the women in the village. Today [1985] only those who are close, like the immediate parents, can see it. It is brought to the groom’s family in a basket, by the bàjjan and her daughter, and shown to the
mother-in-law and the sisters-in-law. But, in fact, it is rarely shown. It suffices to announce the reason for the visit, and the family of the groom will have confidence. (Diop 1985: 120; translation mine)

Young people are often critical of the actual practice of the wedding night, and for instance resist the public display of the stained sheet. The wish for discretion with respect to the actual proof is partly the result of the influence of Islam as a religion, which according to opponents of the custom does not promote such an overt manifestation. It is also fuelled by "a sort of modern pudereur", which is connected to growing individualism and a desire for intimacy in the couple (Diop 1985: 122). It is also likely that the changing realities in which girls do engage in sex prior to marriage stimulate changes in the practice of the jéballe. It is in this light, that the 20 year-old Omar questions the practice of the jéballe:

If today, I was getting married, I would not do the wedding night, because I think it humiliates the woman. It discloses her secret. I don’t like having sex knowing that those women are there, behind the door, waiting to know if your wife is a virgin or not. And sometimes, some spread the legs of the woman so that you can better penetrate her. I think that this is not a good thing. I know my wife and I know whether she is a virgin or not. I will not disrespect her in case it happens that she is not a virgin, and vice versa. For me, those are things that have to take place in private, and whatever the result, the love that I had for her will always stay, does not change.

(boy, 20, out-of-school, FGD 20)

For this boy, and many other young people, the bride’s virginity is an affair of the couple, and not so much a concern of the broader family and the society as a whole. This shows how the emergence of adolescence, with the diminishing role assigned to the family, also starts to affect ideas about the wedding night and virginity. Omar’s words show how the importance and meaning of virginity is carefully being questioned and reconsidered, as something that is maybe less relevant.

Nevertheless, in contemporary Dakar, it is still doubtful whether a future husband or wife can openly dissociate themselves from the defloration practice and wedding night. A popular solution to this situation is nowadays being sought in spending the wedding night away from the gaze of the family and society: it has become popular, so to speak, to ‘steal’ the bride from the wedding reception and take her to a hotel (or the house of a friend of the groom), where the newly wedded couple spends a night, a few days or sometimes even two weeks. Except from the husband, the bride and the husband’s friends who have assisted in ‘stealing’ the bride, nobody might know where the couple is residing. On the couple’s return, the husband can inform the family that he is content with his wife, and can give the money to the bride’s relatives. But in fact, nobody knows what has actually happened, and whether or not the bride really was a virgin. The bàjjan and other relatives of the bride often allow for the ‘stealing’ to happen, as the bride’s disappearance liberates them from the responsibility to deal with a delicate situation.

4 Capturing the sexual activity of young, unmarried people in numbers

Having established that virginity is a social fact, instead of a biological one, the pressing question is whether unmarried young people practice premarital sex or not. This can be analysed by looking at data from surveys and statistics. This is however not a simple task, as regular surveys and statistical studies do not provide detailed information on
premarital sexuality as such (ECP 1997; Delaunay 1994). Demographic Health Surveys do touch on some aspects of sexuality, but from a reproductive angle: they present data on for example fertility, timing and spacing of pregnancies, desired number of children, and knowledge and use of contraceptives (e.g. EDS-III 1997, EDS-IV 2005). Unfortunately, demography and family planning are biased in their focus on married women, assuming that reproduction, and thus sexuality, are limited to marriage. Nevertheless, data on ages of first marriage and first sexual experience can shed some light on the occurrence of premarital sexuality. Specific information can be drawn from a special survey undertaken by the National AIDS Programme in Senegal: the *Enquête sur les Comportements de Prévention en matière de MST/SIDA dans la population générale à Dakar, ECP 1997* in short. The question of premarital sex can also be tackled by looking at the occurrence of pregnancies and STI infections among unmarried, young people.

**Age of sexual experience versus age of marriage**

I discussed earlier that the age of first marriage for women is rising. I noticed also that men marry at a later age than women. This means that the majority of boys in their late teens and early twenties is unmarried. Almost none of them is married before 25; in Dakar more than 99% of the 15-19 year old boys and over 94% of the 20-24 year old men is not married. These figures remain high for the age groups of 25-29 (over 82%) and start to go down for the men aged 30-34 (60%) (ECP 1997: 24). Women marry earlier than men, and despite the rising age of marriage, most marriages stay early in Dakar; 22% of the women who are in the ages of 20 to 24 years are married before the age of 18 (ECP 1997: 23). Nevertheless, a large part of the girls in their teens or twenties in Dakar has not entered into a union: almost 90% of the women aged 15-19, more than 60% of the women between 20 and 24 and over one third of the women aged 25-29 are unmarried (ECP 1997: 24). Are these unmarried boys and girls sexually active?

The ages of first sexual experience indicate that sexual intercourse starts early: 27% of women and 29% of men in Dakar have had sex before the age of 18 (ECP 1997: 25, 26). The median age of first sexual experiences is 18.0 for both women and men (ECP 1997: 26). For men, these sexual relations take place prior to marriage, since an almost ignorable percentage is married at the age of 20 (ECP 1997: 23). For women, on the other hand, it is more difficult to detect in these figures whether their sexual experiences start within or prior to marriage. However, there is an age gap of 1 year between the median age of first sexual experience for women (18 years) and their median age of first marriage (19 years) (ECP 1997: xi, 24, 26). Although both the age of first marriage and of first sexual experience have been rising for women, the gap between them is also becoming larger (EDS-III 1997; ECP 1997). This suggests that the first sexual experiences of women are more and more preceding their first marriages, and that female premarital sex cannot be neglected.

A comparison of the ages of first marriage and of first sexual experience makes it possible to see that sexually active women outnumber married women. In table 3.1, the

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44 The multi-stage and process-like character of the conclusion of marriage in many sub-Saharan African contexts makes it difficult to precisely and unambiguously define marriages and changes in nuptiality, as Van de Walle & Meekers point out (1994). They discuss how difficult it is to define a statistical indicator as for instance the age of first marriage: is it the moment of the religious marriage, of the consumption of the marriage, or as the moment when full cohabitation has started?

45 In accordance with its use in the quoted surveys, the term sexual experience is used here in the narrow sense of sexual intercourse: heterosexual penetrative sex.
difference in the percentages of women who had first sexual experience and who are married are presented for different ages and by age categories. At the age of 18-19 for instance, 14% of the women has had a first sexual experience, while only 9.8% is married (ECP 1997: 24, 26). The difference of 4.2% points to those unmarried women who are sexually active. Table 3.1 shows that there is a group of women who engage in sex prior to marriage. It seems that premarital sex occurs more among the younger female generations, but it can also be noted among the older women. The youngest generation of women in the ages 15-19 has, however, very little first sexual experiences before marriage. This can be understood when taking into account that the first sexual experiences of unmarried women seldom take place before the age of 16, but is more likely to happen at the ages 18-19 or 20-24 (ECP 1997: 24, 26).

Table 3.1: Sexual activity of unmarried women
Percentages of women (according to age) who have their first sexual experiences at a certain age minus percentages of the same groups of women who are married at that same age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Age of first marriage minus age of first sexual experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actual age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ages</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Composed of information in ECP 1997 (p. 24, 26)

46 Over the generations the age of first sexual experience for women has risen. This is for a large part related to the rising age of first marriage of women. With women marrying later, their first sexual experiences within marriage also occur at a later age. The gap between them also has become bigger, which suggests that first sexual experiences are preceding marriage more and more (EDS-III 1997: 61; ECP 1997)(see also Bongaarts & Cohen 1998 for similar developments in worldwide trends).

47 The figures presented in this table are the result of the following exercise: the percentages of women (by age category) who had their first marriage at a certain age deducted from the percentages of women (by same category) who have had their first sexual experience at a certain age. The assumption behind this exercise is that married women have sexual experiences. If this assumption is accepted, a higher percentage of women with sexual experience than women in their marriages indicates the women who are sexually active prior to marriage.

48 The negative figures for the 40-44 cohort indicate that the percentage of women that were married at the ages 20-24 or over 25 are higher than the percentage of women that had lost their virginity at those same ages. This thus means that there is a group of married women who are still virgins. This discrepancy between marriage and defloweration can be explained from the fact that the marriage process can cover several years. Another explanation could be found in the fact “the definition of marriage may change over time: older cohorts may emphasize socially defined unions, whereas younger ones emphasize legal codes or religious ceremonies as criteria of legitimacy” (Bledsoe & Cohen 1993: 47).
The occurrence of female premarital sex is confirmed by table 3.2 below, which presents the number of women and men who are not married, those who have not had their first sexual experience, and those who are sexually active but not married. According to this table, more than 60% of the women in the age category 20-24 in Dakar is not married and only 45% has never had sexual contacts (ECP 1997: 24, 26). This means that over 15% of these women has had sexual experience prior to marriage. Premarital sex turns out to occur in all age categories, but is more visible among the younger generations. It is also clear that a larger number of men is sexually active before marriage than women.

Table 3.2: Sexual activity before marriage

| Actual age | Women | | | | Men | | | |
|------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|            | Never married    | Never married and sexual experience | No sexual experience | Never married | Never married and sexual experience | No sexual experience |
| 15-19      | 89.3              | 3.7               | 85.6             | 99.5           | 19.2                      | 70.3                    |
| 20-24      | 61.4              | 15.7              | 45.7             | 94.3           | 69.3                      | 25.0                    |
| 25-29      | 37.8              | 21.1              | 16.7             | 82.7           | 72.4                      | 10.3                    |
| 30-34      | 19.4              | 11.6              | 7.8              | 60.4           | 52.3                      | 8.1                     |
| 35-39      | 10.0              | 6                 | 4.0              | 31.1           | 29.2                      | 1.9                     |
| 40-44      | 2.3               | 1.1               | 1.2              | 10.0           | 10.0                      | --                      |
| 45-49      | 1.8               | --                | --               | 6.7            | 6.7                      | --                      |
| All ages   | 44.9              | 9.9%              | 35.0             | 70.2           | 46%                       | 24.2                    |

* = Percentage of unmarried women/men (according to age groups) minus percentage of women/men who have never had a sexual experience
Source: Composed of information in ECP 1997 (p.24, 26)

These trends of premarital sex for different generations of women and men in Dakar are graphically represented in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below. What can again be noted here is that a group of women engages in premarital sex, but only in their late teens or early twenties. And as women marry relatively early (at least in comparison to men), there is little chance on premarital sex at later ages (as most women are married by then). Figure 3.1 shows that there is a substantial group of women that remains virgin till marriage. Considering men in figure 3.2, it is striking that a relatively large group remains unmarried, even at a later age. The majority of those unmarried men (in all generations) engages in sexual encounters, starting in their late teens, and especially in their twenties.

49 See also Blanc & Way (1998: 107-109) for Senegal as a whole, where similar trends are found. Blanc & Way discuss these as part of and in comparison to other countries in sub-Sahara Africa, Latin America, Asia and Northern Africa. With respect to female premarital sexual activity, Gage-Brandon & Meekers (1993) show that there is much variation between countries in the proportions of never married adolescent girls who have had sex.
These trends are in line with the reported number of premarital partners. Women have very few partners before marriage: more than three quarters of the married women claims to have had no sexual premarital partners. For women, the median number of sexual partners before marriage is 0.34 (ECP 1997: 28). Among married men, it is more common to have had sexual partners before marriage, as almost 80% had either one or more premarital sexual partners. The median of sexual partners of men before marriage is 3.68 (ECP 1997: 28). In addition, the existence of multiple sexual partners is more widespread among men than among women (ECP 1997: 27). In short, the majority of married men (79.3%) does not remain virgin till marriage, while most married women do (77.3%) (ECP 1997: 28). This means, nevertheless, that almost one in four married women starts her sexual life prior to marriage. But these figures are based on married women and men only. When considering not only married women and men, but also unmarried ones, these figures rise.

Table 3.3 shows data on both married and unmarried sexually active women and men in Dakar. It confirms that hardly any man enters marriage as a virgin. By contrast, two third of the women declares to be a virgin or have been one at marriage, which means that one third of the women looses her virginity before marriage. Premarital sexual activity occurs more often among educated women (either primary, secondary or higher). In addition,
premarital sexuality is more frequent among the women of the younger generations (ECP 1997: 32). But, as I noted earlier, women of older generations were also sexually active before marriage. Finally, the prevalence of premarital sex was higher in Dakar than in rural areas: 22% of the girls in Dakar indicated to have had sex before marriage before the age of 20, while in rural areas this was indicated by 16% of the girls (CERPOD 1997: 7-9).

In sum, the statistics discussed here reveal that most sexual relations take place within marriage, but also indicate that a majority of the boys and a substantial part of the girls has sex either before or outside marriage (ECP 1997). Such findings are also confirmed by other studies (Delaunay et al. 1999; Nanitelamio 1997; UNFPA 1996; Mbengue 1995).

A survey, undertaken in Dakar among 360 young people in the ages of 14-20 of whom the majority was unmarried, found that 26% had sexual experiences, among which boys acknowledge them easier than girls (53% and 13% respectively) (Camara, Nanitelamio & Niang 1994: 18). Another survey in Dakar pointed out that 5% of the women aged 15-19, and 15% of the women aged 20-24 reported premarital sex, and 43% of the men in the ages 15-19 (Naré, Katz, Tolley 1996: 49). A study in Senegal and four other West African countries found that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Effectif</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Effectif</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>202</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>273</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary and higher</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>257</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>663</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECP 1997 (p.32)

In sum, the statistics discussed here reveal that most sexual relations take place within marriage, but also indicate that a majority of the boys and a substantial part of the girls has sex either before or outside marriage (ECP 1997). Such findings are also confirmed by other studies (Delaunay et al. 1999; Nanitelamio 1997; UNFPA 1996; Mbengue 1995). A survey, undertaken in Dakar among 360 young people in the ages of 14-20 of whom the majority was unmarried, found that 26% had sexual experiences, among which boys acknowledge them easier than girls (53% and 13% respectively) (Camara, Nanitelamio & Niang 1994: 18). Another survey in Dakar pointed out that 5% of the women aged 15-19, and 15% of the women aged 20-24 reported premarital sex, and 43% of the men in the ages 15-19 (Naré, Katz, Tolley 1996: 49). A study in Senegal and four other West African countries found that

50 An interesting survey of Delaunay (1994) in a rural area in Senegal revealed that more than half of the unmarried women, 56% to be exact, had had sexual relations, which points to the premarital sexual activity of women (Delaunay 1994: 175-176). In addition, ‘only’ 46% of the female respondents indicates to have had their first sexual experience with their husbands. More than half of the first sexual experiences of women occurred with somebody else, and thus outside marriage (Ibid.: 176). Delaunay concludes that such female premarital sexuality is not exceptional: although women marry later, their first sexual experience occurs at the same age, which indicates that in time first sexual experiences are taking more and more place before marriage. Nor is it a recent phenomenon, as it can also be noted among the older generations of women (Ibid.: 177). Delaunay’s analysis of premarital sexuality is based on the data of the survey ‘Migration, sexual behaviour and nuptiality’, that were collected in 1989-1990 among the population of young adults in the ages of 15 to 39 years in the zone of Niakhar, a rural area with a mainly Serer population located north of the town Fatick. The figures of first sexual activities discussed here are collected among 1,136 women of different ages.
3% of the women declared to have had premarital sex at the age of 15, 13% at the age of 18 and 22% at the age of 20 (CERPOD 1997: 7). In addition, the prevalence of premarital sex of young women was found to be higher in Dakar than in rural areas, where the figures of premarital sex were 4%, 11% and 16% respectively (Ibid.: 7-8). These other findings confirm the above analysis.

I want to be careful in the conclusions that can be drawn from these statistical studies. It is not so much the quality of these studies that makes me cautious, but the reliability of reported sexual behaviours can be affected by the fact that the subject of premarital sexuality is very contentious in Senegalese society (Lagarde, Enel & Pison 1995; see also Blanc & Way 1998: 107; Gage-Brandon & Meekers 1993: 15). As a result of the strong condemnation of female premarital sexual activity, it is very well possible that both women and men answer in a socially acceptable manner. The low figures of female premarital sex can consequently be explained from both limited sexual activity as well as underreporting. By contrast, overreporting is a risk for the data on men, as they are exposed to pressures to be sexually active. Higher levels of male premarital sexuality can thus be the result of more actual sexual encounters, as well as of the fact that men declare more sex. Taking these considerations into account, I do not want to treat the figures discussed above in a too strict and narrow sense, as I doubt whether they are as factual as they give the impression to be. Yet, I think these studies are valuable in terms of highlighting general trends. They are indicators of a trend of premarital sex and I read them as an indication that the ideal of abstinence till marriage is not brought into practice by the majority of the boys and a substantial part of the girls. This trend is also confirmed by the data on pregnancies and STIs, which are presented in the next sub-paragraph.

Premarital pregnancies and STI infections in young people

Pregnancies and STI infections testify to young people’s sexual activities. I discuss them here to indicate premarital sexuality, but they are also important in highlighting the sexual and reproductive health risks that unmarried young people are faced with. Pregnancies are a clear indicator for women that they have had sexual intercourse. Unfortunately, most statistics do not distinguish between pregnancies within or outside marriage, but focus only on the age of the women at which the pregnancy occurred (in an attempt to call attention to early pregnancies). An exception to this is the study of Diop (1995a) on fertility and early pregnancies of female adolescents in Senegal. She distinguishes the following three categories in order to grasp the phenomenon of pregnancies prior to marriage: (1) conception and birth before marriage, (2) conception before marriage, but birth within marriage, and (3) both conception and birth within marriage. The assumption of limiting pregnancies to married couples, which is implicit in many surveys that do not provide insight into fertility before marriage, turns out to be incorrect. Diop found that 29.8% of all first births were conceived prior to marriage: 12.5% of the total births were conceived before marriage, but born within marriage; 14.1% were conceived and born prior to marriage; and 3.2% were to women who never got married after their pregnancy (1995a: 89-91, 97). This means that a considerable number of unmarried women gets pregnant. Almost half of them enters into marriage before giving birth, as such legalising the pregnancy and the child born out of it.

Diop concludes that there is no rise in the number of premarital pregnancies among the living generations of women (1995a: 90-92). This suggests that pregnancies before marriage also occurred in the past and are not a new phenomenon. In addition, premarital pregnancies are not an urban phenomenon: they occur as often in rural areas. It is only
among the younger generations that they are more manifest in urban areas. Moreover, for these same generations, a slow rise can be noted among those who have had primary education.\textsuperscript{51} It is interesting to note a rise of premaritally conceived pregnancies among girls that marry at a later age: 14\% of the women married before 15 had their first child in the 7 months that followed their marriage (indicating a conception prior to that marriage), in contrast to 32\% for the women married at 18 or 19 years old (Diop 1995a: 98-99). This might mean that the later women marry, the higher the chances that they get pregnant prior to marriage.

In a study on a rural area in Senegal, Delaunay (1994: 69) presents similar findings on premarital pregnancies. She concludes that “one out of six first births occurs to women who are still [unmarried]. In terms of conception, one out of four first births are conceived prior to first marriage” (Delaunay 1994: xxii, see also p. 235). According to this study, out-of-wedlock pregnancies are more frequent among girls that have received education (primary or secondary) than among girls who have never attended school: 35.4\% and 19.6\% respectively of all first births of these categories of girls are conceived before marriage (1994: 219-220). On the basis of a historical survey, Delaunay shows that premarital pregnancies and births rarely occurred in the beginning of the 20th century. The first declarations of the kind are made around the 1950s, when 1\% of all first births took place before marriage. This figure rose quickly to 18\% of all first pregnancies in 1970-74, among which 12\% were children born out-of-wedlock (Delaunay 1994: 215).\textsuperscript{52}

These two studies on pregnancies conceived before marriage underline the occurrence of premarital sex among girls. They are probably an underestimation of female sexual activity prior to marriage, as not all sexual encounters of girls result in a pregnancy and girls can be sexually active without falling pregnant (see e.g. Gage-Brandon & Meekers 1993: 15). This can be the case because of ‘good luck’, because of the use of contraceptives or because sex did not take place during the fertile period in the menstrual cycle, but also because of the lower fertility of girls in early adolescence.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, because the figures on pregnancies are based on living births, they underestimate the occurrence of premarital pregnancies in the sense that pregnancies that did not lead to a living birth but ended in abortion are not taken into account (Chapter 6 provides more information on the practice of abortion) (Diop 1995a: 58, 98). The occurrence of premarital pregnancies nevertheless points out that girls are sexually active before marriage. It also highlights (one of) the consequences of sex for girls. Unfortunately, little is known about men and boys who have children before marriage and the scope of unmarried fatherhood.

Another way to learn about young people’s sexual activity is by considering infections with STIs. Unfortunately, specific prevalence rates of STIs and HIV among young

\textsuperscript{51} Premarital pregnancies occur more often among women with primary education than among women who have never gone to school or among those who have secondary or higher education. Explanations for this could be that girls who get pregnant stop their studies and do not continue into secondary education. Another explanation could be that girls in secondary or higher education are just as sexually active as those with primary education, but that the first use contraception more often or are more likely to perform an abortion on an unwanted pregnancy (Diop 1995a: 93-97).

\textsuperscript{52} Delaunay raises the question about whether this lower rate of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and births in earlier days can be ascribed to underreporting. While she does not deny this possibility, she argues that the proportions of the reported rise can not be explained from earlier underreporting, which means that there has been an actual rise in pregnancies and birth before marriage (1994: 216).

\textsuperscript{53} Diop’s study suggests the existence of ‘a sterility’ at early adolescence: the lower chances of young girls to fall pregnant when having sex in comparison with women who are older. Girls are not necessarily fertile at the moment that their menstruation starts. Their fertility reaches normal levels only some years after the onset of their menstruation, normally before the age of 20 (Diop 1995a: 58, 98).
people are not easily obtained. Most rates discussed here consequently do not specifically address young, unmarried people. With respect to the prevalence of STIs, it is interesting to note that only 0.7% of the women and 1% of the men in the Demographic Health Survey declared to have had an STI (AIDS or other) in the last 12 months (EDS-III 1997: 132-134). These low figures have to be interpreted with caution and might be the result of under-reporting. Underreporting of STI prevalence is possible because of the stigma attached to STIs, because levels of knowledge of STIs are not that high that they are always properly recognised as such, because STIs might be asymptomatic in women, and because they are declared by people themselves and not necessarily medically screened. A clinical study in Dakar confirmed these low STI prevalence rates and indicated that the occurrence of STIs has declined sharply between 1991 and 1996 among women who work as prostitutes and among pregnant women (UNAIDS 1999b: 18-19).

Although there are hardly any exact figures on HIV prevalence among young people, UNAIDS mentions that “between 1989 and 1996, only one out of more than 400 pregnant teenagers screened for HIV was found to be infected with the virus” (UNAIDS 1999b: 20). There is also no evidence among pregnant women that the youngest age groups are more often infected with HIV. According to these statistics, infections of HIV and other STIs are not widespread among young people in Senegal, although one should not overlook those infections that do exist. Premarital sexual activity can not be read in the scope of STI infections, but earlier discussed data on pregnancies did underline that despite the strong norms against sex before marriage, young people do engage in it.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how being young means being in-between: a youth is not a dependent and irresponsible child anymore, but also not yet a fully independent and responsible adult. In the context of increasing urbanisation, increased access to education, and a rising age of marriage for girls, young people in contemporary Dakar experience a life stage of adolescence. A distinctive element in their position as youth is their non-marital status. The central role marriage plays in defining adolescence and adulthood impacts on the sexuality of young, unmarried people. Young people find themselves in a complex position when it comes to sexuality. They are not children who are sexually immature, but are not yet adults who are allowed to have sex either. This in-between status of adolescence makes young people’s sexuality a highly ambiguous matter. This chapter has considered marriage and the wedding night as important points of reference for premarital sexuality. The wedding night allows for the performative embodiment of idealized feminine and masculine sexual subjectivity: girls have to be virgins and sexually unexperienced, and boys have to be potent and sexually experienced.

Although most of the literature on adolescence does not underline its gender spe-
cific character, questions related to gender turn out to be relevant to the situation of girls and boys in Dakar. The rise in age of first marriage has for instance been more explicit for girls, as a result of which the adolescent life stage might be a bigger change in their life cycle than for boys. Moreover, the transition from unmarried girl to married and adult woman has always been more rapid than the transition from boy to adult man, which even in the past entailed a longer process of transformation and preparation. On the other hand, education, migration and urbanization might have affected the lives of boys to a bigger extent, given for instance the gender bias in school enrolment figures. Girls and boys in Dakar underline that their lives are different and that they have different roles in society and different expectations to live up to. This also means that the notion of independence is more important in constructing male than female adulthood. Gender also plays a profound role with respect to sexuality, where girls and boys are seemingly confronted with oppositional expectations. Hegemonic masculinity requires boys to become sexually active - although within limits -, whereas dominant femininity demands premarital abstinence from girls.

This chapter ended with a first attempt to investigate the reality behind the ideals of potent boys and virgin girls. It seems that in practice unmarried boys and girls are sexually active, although the extent of sexual activity of especially girls is difficult to capture in numbers. Moreover, the statistics do not provide much insight into how young people live their sexual lives, what relations and sex mean to them, and under what conditions and with whom they enter into sexual relations. These questions are central to the next two chapters, which focus on the reality of intimate relationships and sexual experiences of boys and girls respectively. Those chapters offer an in-depth analysis of the matters of virginity, abstinence, potency and sexuality in relation to femininity and masculinity.
The gender focus of reproductive and sexual health programs and AIDS prevention is most of the time directed towards women and girls. Men’s position and sexual behaviour is only rarely addressed as a gendered one in its own right (see also Van Eerdewijk 2005). One of the exceptions is the World AIDS Campaign of 2000 under the title 'Men make a difference' (UNAIDS 2000). WHO and UNAIDS have argued that:

an increased attention to adolescent males in needed [...] to reduce the high risk to their own health and development, [and] also in recognition of the direct impact they can have –both positive and negative– on the health and well-being of girls. (WHO/UNAIDS 2001: 3)

AIDS prevention as well as sexual and reproductive health campaigns, and more generally feminist thought have addressed masculinity in the extent to which it is problematic to women and allows men to exercise power over women. The concern is then with hegemonic masculinity, but not with men as subjects (Whitehead 2002). This makes that gender issues can be easily reduced to gender stereotypes, and stereotypes of both women and men have entered family planning and AIDS prevention. With respect to masculinity, this has meant that “heterosexual men [are presented] as always being ‘absent’ or hopelessly irresponsible” (Spencer 2000: 128; translation mine). In seeking to understand boys’ lives and sexuality, analysis has to go beyond stereotypes and has to explore how hegemonic masculinity is problematic to (men and) boys themselves (Horrocks 1997). Some of the work in the field of masculinity studies has critically reflected on hegemonic masculinity by investigating non-conformative men, such as gay, queer or black men (e.g. Forrest 1994, Cornwall 1994, Kimmel 2004). This thesis however fits into the studies that have questioned masculinity by looking at men who might be considered to be part of the ‘norm’. Little research has however been done on men and masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa, and this study adds to those few publications that have drawn attention to the struggles of men in that vast region (Silberschmidt 1992, 2001a; Hunter 2005; Brown, Sorrell & Raffaelli 2005). In this chapter the sexual lives and intimate relationships of Dakarois boys move central stage. The aim is to come to a multidimensional understanding of how unmarried boys construct their premarital sexuality. What kind of relationships do they have with girls? When do they have sex, with whom and with what motives in mind?

In order to get a first impression of what the relationships of boys with girls look like, this chapter starts with the case of the 21 year-old Moussa. This case shows how boys identify different types of girls, and this typology of girls into ‘real’ girlfriends and ‘easy’ girls is further explored in section 2. Section 3 presents a number of sex accounts, in which
boys speak about their sexual experiences with girls. These sex accounts show how sexuality is closely linked to masculinity and manhood. This is further explored in section 4, where I discuss in detail how the notions of sexual needs, sexual pleasure and ‘seizing the occasion’ are central to a hegemonically constructed male sexual self in which boys are active sexual actors seeking satisfaction of their needs. But there is more to boys’ sexuality than this hegemonic masculinity, and section 5 explores how the notions of ‘surprise’ and ‘provocation’ give insight into the experience of boys where they lack agency with respect to sex and relationships with girls. This also brings me to a discussion of boys’ insecurities and feelings of shame and embarrassment. It becomes clear that boys have to relate to two contradicting norms of male sexuality, and that abstinence remains important for them in a specific way. The chapter ends with the conclusion that boys struggle with bringing together these two conflicting demands regarding male sexuality.

1 Moussa and his girlfriends

Moussa is 21 years old. He has left school at the age of 14 and has been working in a carpentry atelier as an apprentice for the past six years. Recently, he quit his job because he considers his apprenticeship a form of exploitation. His boss is supposed to teach him the skills of a carpenter, but does not seem to take this responsibility very highly. In fact, he takes advantage from apprentices like Moussa, and Moussa complains that his boss lets him work without paying a salary and without teaching him anything substantial. Moussa would enjoy to continue his work in carpentry, but only on the condition that he gets paid at the end of the month. Since he left, he has done some work whenever he runs into something, but a large part of the time he does not have a job, nor an income.

He has a girlfriend, Faye, whom he has been dating for seven years now. Faye is 19 years of age, and Moussa really loves her: “I know for sure that I will never love another girl the way I love her”. He thinks she is special: “I have found qualities in her that I have not found in other girls”. Not surprisingly he states: “If I had the money, it is this girl that I would marry” (INT 25). In the seven years that they are together, they have been separated three times. They broke up every time when Faye had discovered that Moussa was seeing another girl. Each time she confronted him with her suspicions or accusations of infidelity, they broke up. The first two times he managed to get her back and they started dating again. At the moment they are still in the middle of their third crisis, and Moussa is doing what he can to resolve it and win her back.

Why does he have these ‘other’ girlfriends?

I am not the type of boy that can limit himself to one girl, but Faye is the one that I really love. With the others it is not sincere. Sometimes I have to go somewhere, but she, she cannot accompany me. Then I have no choice but to have another girl accompany me in order to avoid having to go by myself. That is what pushes me to have another girlfriend. [...] What I do, I don’t do it out of love, but more for fun. [...] I often court another girl just for fun. Besides, I visit different neighbourhoods. Sometimes I meet a beautiful girl down there and then it is my friends who put me under pressure to court her. But one thing is clear, whatever the milieu where I find myself, when my girlfriend arrives, I drop the girl with whom I was, because my girlfriend is the one I love.

(boy, 21, out-of-school, INT 25)

Moussa says that he has never had sex with Faye, his ‘real’ girlfriend. “It would be a shame for me to do those sort of things with her.” By contrast, he does have sex with the other
girls: “That is what they are there for” (FGD 18). Sometimes he dates these girls that he has sex with, but that is not necessary. He can also court a girl at a party or at the beach, and never see her again. Usually he first buys such a girl a sandwich and a drink, and then later sleeps with her.

The relationship between Moussa and Faye is illustrative in the sense that he is older than she is. In fact, in most intimate relationships of Dakarois young people, girls are younger than their partners. Boys prefer to be older than their girlfriends, and argue for such an age difference because the man is supposed to take the dominant position in the relationship. Interestingly, most girls subscribe to this male dominance and rarely seek to overtly confront it. A second characteristic of premarital relationships between girls and boys is that the latter are preferably higher educated than the former. It is explained that a boy who is educated can guide his girlfriend, whereas a higher educated girlfriend can be “difficult to convince”. Again girls often share this ideal of boys in a dominant position and are reluctant to date a boyfriend who is less educationally trained. Another characteristic is that intimate relationships of Dakarois young people are most of the time between partners of the same religion. For most young people, both boys and girls, the relevance of religion lies in its role in marriage in the sense that a marriage between two religions is often seen as difficult and problematic, because it requires one of the partners to convert to another religion. In premarital relationships, sharing the same religion can be important because it allows for sharing ideas and beliefs. But of course exceptions exist and not everybody thinks that religion is important for a successful relationship. Those who disagree, argue that love is the only thing that really matters: when you love someone, it is not relevant whether (s)he has the same religion or not. References to love are also used to override the importance of ethnicity and caste in partner choice for premarital intimate relationships. In many of such relationships, partners do not have the same ethnic background or come from the same caste. Younger generations increasingly question their relevance.

Moussa’s experiences are also illustrative for the relationships that boys have with girls in the sense that Moussa has relationships with different girls at the same time. In his relationship with Faye, love is the central element, but in his relationships with other girls, sex is more prominent. When talking about sex, Moussa points to a process of exchange in which he gives something in exchange for having sex with the girl. All these themes will be explored in relation to the construction of male premarital sexuality in this chapter.

2 Identifying types of girls

With respect to love and sexuality, it is paramount to boys that not all girls are the same. The following discussion shows that in the eyes of boys there are different types of girls:

Sadio: A man has to choose his girlfriend carefully. In general, the girl that we love is the one that has pudeur (modesty), the one who dresses decently. The girls with whom we amuse ourselves are in general the girls that we do not love. If you love a girl, you have to think that she is the future mother of your children, so, you only want the best for her. But if you don’t love her, the idea of having fun comes to your mind.

Moussa: What Sadio says is true. If you really love a girl, you never propose her to do certain things. But if you realize that she keeps bad company (avoir des mauvaises fréquentations) or that she hangs out with other boys, that will hurt you in such a way that you say to yourself that if you won’t have sex with her, another guy will. It can happen that
if during that period you don’t sleep with her, she will call you impotent and dump you.

Mamadou: As my friends have said, the girl that you really love, you never think of doing certain things with her. But if it is an ‘easy’ girl, every time that you have the opportunity to have sex with her, you don’t hesitate.

(boys, 19 to 21, out-of-school, FGD 19)

Boys distinguish two types of girls: their ‘real’ girlfriends and the ‘easy’ girls. The relationships boys develop with these girls differ in terms of the role that love and/or sex play in it.

The ‘real’ girlfriend: love without sex

The ‘real’ girlfriend is the girl that the boy claims to really love and care about. As the discussion in the quote above shows, boys claim that they do not have sex with their ‘real’ girlfriends. It is a common attitude among boys not to touch the one they love. But, what do boys mean when they talk about love? Love has to do with feelings and attraction. It is both the inside and the outside that can make a boy love a girl: he can be attracted to both her beauty and her ‘good heart’. Love also has to do with having confidence in each other, and being able to share everything together: happiness but also problems and worries. When you love someone, you also give counsel to her on how to best live her life. When talking about love, exclusivity turns out to be very important for boys. Love has to be between two people, and boys do not want their girlfriend to hang out with other boys, as Moussa puts it above. Infidelity of the girl is interpreted as a sign that she does not really love him. As love is about feelings, other interests should not play a role in the relationship. Both partners have to be serious, and this means that girls should not be interested in money and that boys should not be looking for sex. Being serious is also related to the fact that love often implies that the couple has “a project together”. This refers to having a future, in the sense of wanting to get married and building a life and a family together. It is clear that expectations and ideas about love are rather idealized. They often do not correspond with reality, but are a reflection of what boys are ideally looking for.

When talking about the kind of girls they love, boys sketch a picture of what the ideal girlfriend looks like. The expectations boys have of an ideal girlfriend are closely intertwined with their ideas about the ideal wife. Character is the core element in these ideas. The ideal wife, and thus the ideal girlfriend, has to have pudeur (modesty), and has to behave in a decent and respectable way. That is why boys develop feelings of love for a girl who is friendly and open, has a ‘good heart’, invests in maintaining good relations with his parents and friends, and who does not keep bad company (avoir des mauvaises fréquentations). An ideal girlfriend is well educated, which amongst others implies that she treats her future husband well and shows respect for him, and that she knows how to educate possible future children. With respect to the latter, I showed in Chapter 3 that the mother’s conduct has to be exemplary. An ideal girlfriend is faithful to her husband or boyfriend. She should not be interested in money or material gains. Very importantly, a girl with character is a girl who remains a virgin till marriage. By wanting their ‘real’ girlfriend to be a virgin, boys reinforce the dominant virginity norm.

It is against the background of idealized love and of ideals about marriage and virginity that boys claim that they do not have sex with their ‘real’ girlfriend. Consider how Omar explains that the love for his girlfriend Awa was incompatible with sexual desires for her:
I loved Awa so much that I was ready to do anything for her. [...] It was not a small love. [...] I could not hurt her (faire du mal) in any way, even if my friends called me impotent, homosexual. [...] I loved her too much to hurt her this way. [...] I loved her so much that I did not think of having sex with her.

One day, however, Omar did ask Awa to sleep with him, but he is ashamed about this:

You know, with the influence of my friends, one day Awa came to visit me and there was nobody at home. I said to myself that this was an occasion. So, I proposed her to make love with me. She immediately started to cry because she had not expected me to ask her something like that. [...] I had always told her to be careful with boys, because I was a boy like them and I knew what they do to deceive (tromper) a girl. [...] I loved Awa so much that I did not think of having sex with her. Every boy can distinguish between the girl that he loves and the girl he does not love. He can as a result talk smoothly to a girl to deceive her in order to have sex with her. When I proposed Awa to make love with me, she cried all the time holding me tight. [...] I would have been a traitor if I had slept with her. So, I asked her to put on her clothes again. I was ashamed of what I had just done.

In the end Omar never had sex with Awa, and he is proud of that:

[She told her mother] that during the five years that we were together I had never wanted to hurt her. Her mother could not believe that during five years I have never wanted to have sex with her. Her classmates, after a long discussion came to see me because they could not believe that after five years I had not slept with her. And when I confirmed that it was true, her friends admired me and I was proud of myself. I have had several occasions to have sex with her, but I have never done it because I loved her too much.

(boy, 20, out-of-school, FGD 18)

Omar clearly views his proposal to Awa to have sex with him as a mistake. He is ashamed of even having asked this to her, the girl that he really loves and that he would never want to hurt. He is proud that he eventually never slept with Awa. Like many other boys, Omar argues that having sex with this girl, that he loves so much, means faire du mal to her. Sadio, Moussa and Mamadou in the discussion quoted earlier also expressed this view, when they stated that "you only want the best for the girl you love". Asking her to engage in sex would mean that you are asking here to misbehave and that seems to be incompatible with wanting the best for her. Consequently, "if you really love a girl, you never propose to do certain things to her". That means that kissing, hugging and caressing is possible, but sexual intercourse is off limits. It is interesting to note the euphemism and vague expressions like 'hurting her' and 'doing things like that' that boys use when talking about sex and the ‘real’ girlfriend, rather than more explicit terminology as ‘having sex’ or ‘sleeping together’.

Another explanation for not having sex with the ‘real’ girlfriend is that boys do not want to ‘spoil the taste’. Omar explains:

If you want to buy something and you taste it on beforehand to the point that you have had enough of it, will you still buy it? You will hesitate to buy it, because you have tasted it, you already have eaten from it. There are a lot of couples who face problems because of that. [...] I know myself, and I know that whatever the love I have for a girl, if ever I come to have sex with her, I won’t feel anything for her anymore.

(boy, 20, out-of-school, INT 26)
‘Buying’ here refers to marrying a girl. If you have already tasted a girl before you buy, meaning if you have already slept with a girl prior to marriage, you lose your interest in her. Boys often claim that as soon as a girl accepts to sleep with them, they are no longer seriously interested in her. In order to protect their love, boys should therefore not sleep with their ‘real’ girlfriend.

The girl’s character plays a central role in why boys do not sleep with their ‘real’ girlfriend, again in Omar’s words:

But it is not just because you love this girl that you do not do it. Some things all depend of her. If the girl refuses that you do some things to her, you will not do it. Everything depends on her character. With some girls, you don’t even dare to think of sleeping with them, or even worse ask them. Some girls accept that you touch them in certain areas, and other girls refuse.

(boy, 20, out-of-school, FGD 19)

The girl’s character is the determining factor in the way boys treat her. If she respects herself, they will also respect her. This explains why boys categorize their relationships with what they consider to be ‘easy’ girls in a completely different way.

**‘Easy’ girls: sex for exchange**

As the opposite of respectable girls, boys identify the so-called *filles faciles*, or ‘easy’ girls. Boys claim that it is with those girls that they have sexual relations. In Wolof, these girls are often called *rey*. This word originates from its use in the clause *rey jeggi*, which refers to the act of killing a sheep. On several feasts and special occasions, such as at a baptism or with the Muslim feast of Tabaski, it is a custom to kill a sheep. This is in most cases done by a man who goes from door to door to perform the actual killing: slicing the sheep’s throat. *Rey jeggi* refers to this act of cutting the throat of the sheep, after which the man is said to step over the dead sheep and go on his way without looking back over his shoulder. With respect to ‘easy’ girls, the reference to *rey jeggi* expresses the idea that the man has sex with the girl, after which he moves on and continues wherever he was going without looking back. It is a way of saying that the only thing that matters is the sexual act, and the man does not have other concerns for the girl in question. He is a passer-by, who moves on after having done what he came for. It is common in the Dakar context for boys to say that they have ‘killed a *rey*’, when they have had sex with an ‘easy’ girl.

As respectable girls are respectable because of their conduct, it is the perceived lack of character that makes other girls in the eyes of boys fall into the category of *rey*. Girls who dress in sexy clothes, or who do not behave decently, girls that keep bad company and hang out with the wrong people, or with different boys, or girls that spend a lot of time out on the streets are all susceptible to being labelled an ‘easy girl’. They are called ‘easy’ because it is assumed that they are without *pudeur* and therefore sexually active, and the implication is that they are ‘easily’ convinced to engage in sex. ‘Easy’ girls can be recognized, according to boys, by the interest they display in the boy’s money and status. Material interests are seen as incompatible with ‘real’ love and are therefore taken as a sign that a girl

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56 Depending on the group, other words, which are difficult to translate into French and English (for example woccat), are employed to refer to this category of easy girls.
is not serious. As she is playing around, boys will treat her accordingly: they have fun and ‘amuse’ themselves with these girls. When a girl does not respect herself, the boy does not have to respect her virginity and can have sex with her. Boys then simply say that this is what these girls are for: playing around and having sex. The relationships with ‘easy’ girls can be both incidental as well as more long term, but as they are ‘not really serious’, one cannot speak of a long term commitment. Boys might meet these girls at the beach, at a party, or in a club, but also in the neighbourhood or at school. They might never see such a girl again afterwards, but it is also possible that they see the same girl several times during a certain period.

It is far from uncommon that boys have relationships with different girls at the same time. Besides their ‘real’ girlfriend they also date other girls, but these latter relationships are not as serious (see also Tadele 2001). Moussa for instance indicated that he “is not the type of boy that can limit himself to one girl” and he “has a girl in every neighbourhood that he frequently visits”. He says:

For me, there is one girl that I really love, but there are others that I collect. Sometimes on an evening out or a dance I say to my friends that I count to court a girl before the end of the happening. [T]here is one girl that I really love. […] The other girls are just pastime (passe temps) for me.
(boy, 21, out-of-school, FGD 19)

With respect to ‘easy’ girls, there is no reference to exclusivity. In fact, boys can have multiple partnerships that are not conceivable for other girls that they are dating.

Boys characterise the relationships they have with ‘easy’ girls as exchange relations. Babacar explains:

It is very simple: you give them the money and in exchange you ask to have sex with them. They never refuse because they say to themselves that you have been good for them. When you benefit of the money of certain men, you have to pay a compensation (contrepartie). Men do not give something for free, they always ask something in return.
(boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)

Both boys and girls often say that when a boy gives something to a girl - a drink, a present or money -, she has to pay him back: lui rendre sa monnaie. He does not give something for nothing, but gives money or presents in exchange for sex. Moussa explains:

If you should happen to buy a sandwich and a drink for this type of girl with an ulterior motive, and once, twice, three times nothing happens, this girl will start thinking that every time she is hungry, she can come to see you, because she finds an interest in you. And it is this that will push you to pursue a certain interest towards her. You will not accept to feed her for free. Those girls know us, they know that when we buy them a drink or a sandwich, we do that because we want something. Your friends will call you goorjjoen (homosexual) when you pay a sandwich and a drink for a girl without having sex with her.
(boy, 20, out-of-school, FGD 19)

Note how it is the girl’s conduct that makes Moussa develop a specific interest in her: her interest in ‘satisfying her hunger’ pushes him to pursue a certain interest towards her. In exchange relationships boys negotiate sex with the girl by suggesting that she has to give something back for what she has received.

The degree to which the money-sex exchange is made explicit varies from relation to
relation, but it is never a straightforward commercial act or commodity exchange. As Omar explains, with compliments and flattering words boys try to ‘fool’ a girl:

I know how to convince [girls]. [...] It is in the little details. You know, everything starts with one and then can go just up till ten or even more. I try to be friendly with them, to talk with them. I pretend not to be interested in them, while actually they interest me a lot. Most of the time they come to see me and when the occasion is there, I do not hesitate to sleep with them. [...] I can say that [...] I take advantage of the feelings they have for me.

(boy, 20, out-of-school, INT 26)

Boys have to court a girl and please her by treating her well and being nice to her. It is only in this context that they can convince the girl to have sex. Boys talk ‘sweet language’ to girls in order to convince them of their serious intentions and to get the girl in the mood. They say that they really love her, find her beautiful and special, and are intending to marry her. As this is not always true, especially not when boys see this girl as an ‘easy’ girl, this sweet language can also be considered a ‘discourse of deceit’ (cf. Dilger (2003: 37–39) for courting strategies and ‘sweet language’ of Luo boys in Tanzania). In this context of courting, the exchange element remains implicit. It is in the broader context of treating the girl well and of which the gifts of the boy are just one element-, that the girl can be asked to please the boy. Even though the element of exchange is used to convince the girl to accept sex, this cannot be done too overtly and directly, as it is an insult for a girl to be approached as an ‘easy’ girl. Making the exchange too explicit will not be helpful in persuading the girl to have sex. Moreover, the exchange is not that black-and-white that the boy can demand sex by giving a certain amount of money or a certain present. In most cases, boys give something (either incidentally or on a more regular basis), and on a later moment refer to this when they are negotiating sex.

Western discourse on the meaning of money makes it difficult to see the embeddedness of money transactions in personal relationships. It is “a peculiarity of [western] culture” to distinguish gift exchange – as an exchange between interdependent transactors – from commodity exchange – as an exchange between independent transactors (Bloch & Parry 1989: 8). In such a discourse the problem seems to be that [...] money signifies a sphere of ‘economic’ relationships which are inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating. There is therefore something profoundly awkward about offering it as a gift expressive of relationships which are supposed to be personal, enduring, moral and altruistic. (Bloch & Parry 1989: 9)

But it is widely accepted and even expected of boys and men in Dakar to give money and presents in intimate relationships, including marriage (see previous chapter). The money and presents given by boys are a way of “being good to [girls]”, as Babacar phrased it above, and express their care and affection for the girl (Teunis 2001: 177-178; see also Standing 1992: 447; Seidel 1993: 180-181; Gysels, Pool & Nnalisuba 2002). This means that in those intimate relationships, money is not necessarily antithetical to personal, emotional and intimate bonds, but can in fact be the cement through which such bonds are created and maintained.

Boys complain when the exchange element is pulled out of context. Dakarois boys often complain that girls are too materialistic and only interested in one thing: money, too much money (see also Nyamnjoh 2005: 303). Boys feel that materialistic girls do not care
about them as a person, but only as a provider of money and goods (see also Tadele 2004). In a context where unemployment and poverty make it difficult for them to find and accumulate money, boys feel uncomfortable and threatened by the alleged focus on material gains. This complaint has also been voiced by Biaya in his analysis of how “an atmosphere of cultural and social decadence” has come into existence in Dakar over the 1990s (2001: 74-77). Young girls and men from the rich elite are the new players in this decadent culture of “urban pleasures” (p. 79). Young men and boys with only limited access to financial and material resources are excluded from these urban pleasures in which masculinity comes to be connected to “l’avoir et le pouvoir de dépenser”, the power to spend (p. 81). And because money and gifts are the cement for building intimate relationships with girls, the poverty many young men and boys face not only excludes them socially and economically, but also sexually.57 The relevance of the complaints of boys about the material interests of girls is that they highlight that exchange relationships also for boys involve more than a mere exchange of money for sex.

It is interesting to note that boys (and girls, see Chapter 5), circulate both discourses on the meaning of exchange relationships: sometimes narratives represent them as plain transactions, while at other instances such interpretations are resisted and the embeddedness of the exchange in the construction of an intimate and/or sexual relationship is pointed out. It is against this background, that the clear differentiation between ‘easy’ girls and prostitutes should be understood. When boys talk about prostitutes, they refer to women who engage in sex on a commercial and more or less professional basis. These women work with clients, and operate in certain streets or specific places (like the beach or a car cemetery). Some boys indicated to have visited prostitutes in order to ‘satisfy their needs’ when they did not have a girlfriend or partner. Prostitutes might be either official prostitutes (who are registered, have a health card and undergo regular medical check-ups) or illegal ones (who are less controlled, but also less protected). In contrast to the implicit link between sex and money with ‘easy’ girls, the commercial element is very explicit with prostitutes: these women engage in sex acts with clients who have paid them a certain amount of money. The distinction between ‘easy’ girls and prostitutes underlines once more that the presents or money given by the male partner cannot in themselves be interpreted as a sign of prostitution or commodity exchange. In some ways, ‘easy’ girls are judgementally named ‘informal prostitutes’, and I address this as well as the phenomenon of sex for exchange from the girls’ perspective in more detail in the next chapter. There I will also address the power inequalities in and the effects of such relationships.

From typologies to reality
It is tempting to consider the way boys speak about their relations with different types of girls as descriptions of what their sexual lives look like. Their sexual partners are then not their ‘real’ girlfriends, but other girls, that they call ‘easy’. Reality differs however from the typology in three ways. First of all, there is sexual intercourse between boys and their ‘real’ girlfriends, as several boys have indicated to have had sex with their girlfriend. The few

57 The socio-economic as well as sexual exclusion of young men and boys makes Biaya (2001) speak of a crisis of masculinity, which manifests itself in a sexual inertia of young Dakarois boys and men. I would not go as far and conclude that Dakarois men are “castrated” to use Biaya’s terminology (p.78), because in practice young men and boys do have intimate and sexual relationships with girls and women, despite the competition from elite men. Notwithstanding, I recognize the vulnerability of boys and men in terms of being able to create and maintain such relationships.
girls in the next chapter that talk about their sexual experiences, are also referring to sex with their boyfriends. Secondly, the exchange relationships of boys with 'easy' girls are not as straightforward and uncomplicated as they suggest. It is often not that evident for boys to be able to negotiate sex with 'easy' girls. The 20 year-old Mamadou for instance acknowledges that "you know, sometimes it works, sometimes it does not work" (INT 27). Thirdly, it is not that easy to distinguish between girls and to put them in either one of the categories. For these three reasons, the typology of girls says more about the construction of the male sexual self than about real sexual experiences, or actual girls. This means that the typology in terms of 'real' girlfriend and 'easy' girl should not be understood as descriptions of actual sexual relations, but as a projection of male sexuality.

A comparable process of labelling different types of women by men has been noted by Nencel in the context of Lima, Peru, where men talk about three types of women: "the potential partner or spouse; the one who provides sexual pleasure and is excluded de facto as a potential candidate for a relationship; and lastly, the prostitute" (1996: 67; see also Nencel 2001: 50-69).58 In her analysis of this labelling, Nencel shows how men's experience of their sexuality differs with the different types of women. In this respect, she points to the "fragmentation of sexual desire" (1996: 61):

[Men] sought to quench their sexual thirst with women whom they considered to be sexual outlets. In these encounters sexual desire embodied a virtually instinctual quality. In their relationships with their girlfriends, sexual desire lost this quality. Their accounts did not emphasize their need to obtain sexual satisfaction; rather, sexual desire was experienced as one of the many emotions felt in their relationship. [...] Certain feelings, sensations and emotions are reserved for [the group of women that were considered their (potential) partners]. Sexual desire and satisfaction are enmeshed in a conglomeration of emotions. With the other group of women, [the sexual outlets], sexual desire and satisfaction are fragmented from the range of emotions they feel with their partner and perceived as virtually instinctual. [...] The man is quick to make sexual advances - an unlikely occurrence if he considers the woman a [potential partner]. (Nencel 1996: 61, 68)

In Lima then the identities and behaviour of women are categorized and constructed around the sexual intentions of men.

This understanding of the construction of male sexuality through the creation of a typology of girls and women can also be fruitfully applied to the way Dakarois boys talk about their sexual lives and partners. Their narratives on not having sex with their 'real' girlfriend and about their exchange relationships with 'easy' girls are then not actual facts, but have to be read as discursive practices. In that respect it is important to understand that the typology is not just something made by boys, but rather produced by society at large. The distinction between respectable and 'easy' girls does not originate from unmarried boys either as individuals or as a group, but is commonly found throughout the wider society. Interestingly, girls also make the distinction between types of girls, and I will show in the next chapter how they anxiously do all they can to keep themselves in the category

58 In Dakar, prostitutes could be identified as a third category of women in men's sexual language. I have chosen to focus on the two categories of 'real' girlfriend and 'easy' girl for two reasons. Firstly, the two types seem to be the most important reference points in the construction of the boys' sexuality. It makes sense for Nencel to explicitly highlight prostitutes as the third category as her study focuses on 'women who prostitute'. Secondly, the tensions between the male sexualities imagined and enacted with these two types captures the struggle that boys face in shaping their masculinity and sexuality.
of respectable girls. By referring to the types of female partners, boys thus internalise a societal discourse that labels women and girls. Read as discursive practices, the two types of girls that they identify provide insight into the different sexualities boys are expected to enact: a controlled and restrained sexuality with their ‘real’ girlfriends, and an active and instinctual sexual desire that needs to be satisfied frequently. Obviously, these two contradict each other, and boys struggle in bringing these two together when shaping their sexuality. The different sexualities boys are expected to enact, as well as the tensions they experience in living up to them, are explored in more detail below. The analysis of the sex accounts in the next section highlights the active and instinctual desire which seems to be central to the construction of hegemonic masculinity. The controlled and restrained elements in male premarital sexuality, that is the more sub-dominant forms, will be considered later in this chapter.

3 Sexual experiences of boys

In both the group discussions and the individual interviews, boys spoke relatively easily about the times they had had sex with girls. Some boys where a bit uncomfortable in the beginning when they were trying to figure out what the conversation was exactly about, but most of them quickly felt at ease to share their sexual experiences. I will present some of these sex accounts and use them to analyse how they construct boys’ sexuality.

The first sex account is from Babacar, a 19 year-old boy who left school five years ago because he wanted to earn money in fishing. He speaks of his first sexual experience:

I was still very young. I don’t remember my age exactly, but I was still a kid. We used to play theatre with girls. One girl would then play the role of mother of the family, and one boy would be father, and the rest would take the role of children. […] In the building where I lived, there was a big chicken coop and we had put a mattress there to play on. Nobody stopped us from that. Each boy would say that this girl was his wife and it is like that we entered into the coop with the girls. We pretended to sleep and sometimes things happened. It is like that that I had sex for the first time. But I cannot really call this sex, because I did not really feel any pleasure. Maybe I was still too young.

(boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)

His friend Omar, who is 20 years old and who went to school until last year, but dropped-out and hopes to go abroad to try his chances, tells the following about his first sexual experience:

I was probably thirteen or fourteen when it happened. […] I lived […] with my older brothers, and every now and then I saw that they were having sexual relations and I wanted to discover what that was. One day I convinced a girl, who lived in the same street as I did, to follow me. I took her to the terrace and it is there that I had my first sexual experience. But I have to admit that that day I did not feel any pleasure compared to the other times I have had sex. It was only by curiosity that I did it. […] Afterwards I was ashamed, especially ashamed of her. When we would cross each other on the stairs, I did not dare to look and neither did she. We both hurried to pass each other. […] I was embarrassed. I could not look at her knowing that I had had sex with her.

(boy, 20, out-of-school, INT 26)

Omar’s last sexual experience took place in a different setting, when he was still in school:
At my school there was a guy who dated a girl in 5th grade. The guy did not love this girl and said that she was a rey and that if he ever had the occasion to sleep with her, he would not hesitate. I did not know this girl in the beginning, but I noticed that she was interested in me, because every time I met her, she would take my hand and call me by my name while I did not know her. During a matinée dansante organised at school, we met each other and she did not leave me alone for the whole morning. You know, girls, when they see you wearing nice shoes and cool trousers, they immediately fall in love with you without wondering where you got these clothes. One day, after classes, when I was leaving, I ran into her and her friends. She put her arm around my shoulder and introduced me to her friends as her ‘husband’. In the beginning I thought it was a joke, but later I understood that she was serious, because she repeated it several times. Seizing the occasion I asked her to pick a day that I would show her my place. She suggested Wednesday or Thursday [...] That Thursday there would be a meeting of parents and teachers, which meant that classes would finish earlier than normal. When I came out of class, she was already waiting for me. But in order to avoid attracting attention, we had to wait a little, the time that the other youth needed to go home or go to the beach. Then I took her to a friend [...], because my place is not ideal, and I slept with her [in my friend’s room]. [...] I had explained him that there was a girl at school who was in love with me and that I wanted to take her to the room that Thursday. [...] When I arrived that Thursday, he was there, [...] but he left to leave me alone with her. We talked a little. Then I started flirting with her. I had to stop to close the door, and then ...

(boy, 20, out-of-school, INT 26)

Sadio is another boy of the same group. He is 21 years of age and is an enthusiastic soccer player who hopes to be discovered by a big soccer club one day. He was a little older the first time he had sex:

[I was 17 years old at the time.] I was hanging out with some people, when a friend arrived. He wanted me to accompany him to the VDN. At that time I was having problems. I was tired, because I was often excited and I did not have a girlfriend to satisfy my needs. So, we went to the VDN and found ourselves some prostitutes. [...] At the VDN you can find several prostitutes, just as you can run into people having sex in some corner. At first we walked by without stopping, all the time checking whether there wasn’t anybody who knew us around there. After being sure that nobody in the vicinity knew us, we turned around. When we got to the area where the prostitutes were, my friend who was used to visiting them, approached them and talked with them. Several minutes later he came back with two prostitutes. Then we went to the beach to have sex. [...] I was curious to find out what it was exactly, [sexual intercourse]. At that time I often happened to think of girls and I wanted to discover. But I can say, that first time, I did not like it. [...] At the beach, the prostitute took off her clothes and gave me a condom. I had sex with her, and when I came, I was tired and afterwards I felt embarrassed. [...] Of course I was happy to have the experience and even before we went to find the prostitutes, I was already happy because I was really excited. But after having had sex with the prostitute, I felt embarrassed and I was not pleased with myself, because I had had sex with somebody else’s girl. [...] After this experience with the prostitute, I often thought of going back there. But I fought against that, I went to sleep early, 8 o’clock in the evening. My friend even came one day to go back there together, but I refused to put my feet there.

59 Fifth grade here is classe cinquième of secondary school, which runs from 6th grade up to 1st grade and classe terminal.

60 The VDN is la Voie de Dégagement Nord, the large road that connects Dakar with Parcelles Assainies and other suburbs (see Introduction, map 1.2). Houses are built at some distance from the actual road itself, as a consequence of which there are some deserted areas. According to Sadio’s story, this is an area where prostitutes work. It is at walking distance from the beaches bordering the ocean.
once again, because when you start having the habit to see prostitutes, you cannot stop.
(boy, 21, out-of-school, INT 28)

Sadio’s second sexual experience was quite different:

It was at a ball organised by my friends in Medina. After the party a friend had negotiated
a reg for me and another one for himself. We took them to a room to ‘kill’ them. At that
time I often went to Medina. [...] We were in the same room. [...] There was not really a
difference between the first and second time (that I had sex). Only the second time, we
were in a room and it was more comfortable and more discrete. Each one was in a corner
of the room with his girl and talked with her. I even seduced the girl myself that day, but
seduced by interest.
(boy, 21, out-of-school, INT 28)

A fourth friend in the same group, Mamadou, tells how he had sex with a girl he met in a
dancing:

I was in a dancing and it is there that I met a girl. I approached her and we have talked for
a long time before going out for a walk. We went to the sea and I gave her a drink that I had
hidden in my pocket. We continued to talk. When we were talking I started to caress her,
and then I kissed her. It is like this that we made love.
(boy, 20, out-of-school, INT 27)

Pape is a 20 year-old boy from one of the school-going groups. One day, when we were
supposed to meet for a focus group discussion, he approached me and asked for my help.
He was afraid his girlfriend had gotten pregnant and did not know what to do, so I tried to
see what I could do for him. A couple of weeks later I met him for an interview, and I asked
him about this time that he had slept with his girlfriend:

A: You have been with her for two years. And this was the first time that you made love to her,
right?
Pape: Yes, with her, it was the first time. [...] No, it was a surprise to us. No, I had never
talked about sex with her. [...] We did not want to do it.
A: So, how did it happen, that day?
Pape: It was the morning after Saint Valentine’s Day. Her visit was a surprise to me. When
she came to see me, she, how can I put it. She had not told me that she would be coming
that morning. I was even supposed to meet you that day, but as you know, I was late. She
was with me, you know.
A: So, what happened? You had been with her for two years, and had never slept with her. What
was special about that day that that could come about?
Pape: [...] It was morning. That day, she had come along, she had come only to see me
only to please me because it was Valentine’s Day. But we did not want to, even me, I did
dnot want to have sex with her. But I do not know what, what has pushed us to do that sort
of things. But, even now, even now, I do not know what has pushed us.
(boy, 20, in-school, INT 13)

The final sex account that I present here is from 20 year-old Malick, and his sex account
dates from a couple of years back, when he was about 14 or 15. He had met a girl, Khady
(17 years of age) when he had been out dancing at a soirée. Malick continues the evening
hanging out with two friends and Khady in one of their homes. The two friends leave
Malick and Khady alone. After having chatted for a while, Malick asks her to sleep with
him. She refuses. They continue talking, and when he asks her again, she hesitates. But
Malick thinks: “This girl, she is going to accept soon”. When he asks her again a little later, she accepts. Not only Malick, but also his two friends have sex with Khady that evening. Later, Malick hears that Khady is pregnant, and he is worried that he may be the father. He discusses the situation with the two other boys. Although one of them might very well be the father, they decide that all three of them will deny responsibility for the pregnancy. When they all deny their involvement, Khady cannot make a convincing accusation against one of them and they are all cleared from the responsibility for the pregnancy. So, when Khady’s older brother comes to discuss the pregnancy, Malick denies he has anything to do with it, and so do his friends. In the end, Khady has the baby, and takes care of it, without support from Malick or his friends (boy, 20, in-school, INT 7).

The sex accounts are a rich source of information on the way boys live their sexuality. The accounts clearly show how being sexually active is a central element in boys’ sexuality. A first insight they give is that boys have sex with different partners: some boys have had sexual experiences with prostitutes, but this is less common than having sex with an ‘easy’ girl or with the ‘real’ girlfriend. Contrary to the claim ‘not to touch the one they love’, some boys do have sex with their ‘real’ girlfriend. Also in having sex with ‘easy’ girls, the boys’ actual behaviour differs from the ideal representations of exchange relationships as straightforward and direct. Mamadou for instance cannot just offer a drink and ask for sex, but has to please and seduce the girl before she might be ready to engage in sex: he has to talk with her, go for a walk, give her a drink, start with caressing and kissing. In the next section I start unravelling what these accounts tell about the construction of male premarital sexuality.

4 Needs, pleasure and ‘seizing the occasion’

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the boys’ experiences of ‘being a man’ are connected to sexual activity and experience. Boys and men have to show their potency and virility by engaging in and talking about sexual intercourse with women. In this section, I further explore this dominant construction of male sexuality by analysing the sex accounts. This will be done by looking at the meanings and significations of the following elements in the boys’ sex accounts: the wish to discover sex, reference to having sexual needs, conceiving sex and sexual needs as something natural, talk about sexual pleasure and satisfaction, and the notion of ‘seizing the occasion’.

The social construction of boys’ sexual desire

The sex accounts show that most boys are still young the first time they have sexual intercourse. The first sexual experience of boys can take place at ages as early as nine or ten years. Most boys have sex for the first time in their early or mid teens, but some are a little older, like Sadio who was 17. All boys in this study claimed to have had sex. Other sources also indicate that boys start their sexual activity in their teens, although their findings are more conservative. According to the ECP survey, 15 % of the boys in Dakar has had sex before the age of 16, and almost 6 out 10 are sexually active before the age of 20 (ECP 1997: 24–25).61

Besides child play, the first sexual experiences of boys are usually the result of the wish to discover what sex is. This curiosity is the reason that Omar convinced a girl to follow him to the terrace, and that Sadio went to visit a prostitute with a friend. Although
numerous boys say that they did not really find sexual pleasure in these first encounters, they often do say that they feel good about themselves afterwards, because they have come to know what sex is like and because they have acquired the experience. As being a virgin is not desirable for boys, their first sexual experience is an important moment, because it makes them feel ‘like a man’ (gōor). The 20-year old Malick for instance says that he felt strong after the first time: “I am a man now, you know. I can start courting girls, because now I am experienced” (INT 7). Most boys indicate that they tell their friends about their first sexual encounter. Some boys say that they feel proud and manly the first time they have slept with a girl, although some boys seem to have a more matter-of-fact attitude about it. Moussa for instance says: “I did it and I cannot say whether it was good or bad, but you had to do it and I talked about it” (INT 25).

A second point that stands out in the sex accounts is the explicit reference to sexual needs and desires. Boys have sex because they are physically aroused and sexually excited. Baba explains:

> [At the age of puberty], you know when we reach that age, well, we easily feel sexual sensations that, that always make you want certain things. Because, we talked about wet dreams. […] There are things that, that are pleasures you know when we do them when we are with a girl. And when you do it and you like it, it is a pleasure, and that pleasure can push you to say that you want to discover with that girl.
> (boy, 19, in-school, in FGD 12)

Boys feel things that make them want to have sex: pleasurable sensations. By having sex, they seek to satisfy their sexual desires. For boys, sex thus implies pleasure: they have sex because they enjoy it and find pleasure and satisfaction in it. The physical experience of sexual pleasure and of sexual needs and desire are considered to be something normal for boys: all boys have it. Not having sexual needs, or not finding pleasure in sex is considered abnormal, and can lead to suspicions about homosexuality or impotency. I will show in the next chapter that the notions of pleasure and of needs and satisfaction are silenced in girls’ sexuality. This implies that ideas about the naturalness of boys’ sexual needs and pleasure are particular to the way masculinity and male sexuality are constructed.

The pleasure found in sexual encounters however differs with the type of partner. Mamadou for instance argues:

> You know, if it is with your girlfriend, you can start with caressing her, kissing her before passing to the action. But with a prostitute you pass directly to the act itself, you ejaculate and you move on (tu t’en vas).
> (boy, 20, out-of-school, INT 27)

Those (few) boys who have had experiences with prostitutes indicate that the lack of intimacy and the plain focus on the sexual act reduces the pleasure they find in these encounters. Babacar indicates that there is a difference between ‘sharing a rey’ and being alone with a girl:

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61 These are the figures of sexual activity of the boys who were 20-24 at the time they were interviewed (ECP 1997: 26). The findings of this survey suggest that boys of the younger generations are sexual active at slightly earlier ages than men from older generations.
I often say that making love (faire l'amour) and pleasure are not the same thing. As Moussa has said, if it is the case of a reg that we share with four people, in that case, we cannot really speak of pleasure. But when it is just the girl and me on our own, that is when I really experience pleasure, because in that case, I give her pleasure and vice-versa.

(boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)

The differences in pleasure depending on the partner and circumstances of the sexual encounter suggest that, for boys, the pleasure of sex not only comes from the physical satisfaction of their needs – that is reaching an orgasm through penetration –, but is to a certain extent also related to the intimacy with the girl they are making love to.

With the experience of sexual desires as 'natural', sexuality and sexual desire become something that is beyond the boys’ control. My male research assistant once explained to me that “a boy, having reached a certain stage, is no longer himself; he becomes an animal, he can no longer control himself”. Boys explained to me that they can be en rage, that they can get so physically excited that they become uncontrollable ‘animals’ that cannot resist.

“At a certain moment, you do not react to your thoughts but you react according to your desire, your pleasures” (boy, 19, in-school, FGD 13). Boys consider their sexual desires as a strong, natural force that is difficult to control. Both the sexual desires and the impossibility to control or resist them are considered to be biological facts of life for boys.

In the context of the ‘natural’ and uncontrollable urge of male sexual desire, boys often come to speak of sex and girls in terms of ‘seizing the occasion’. Omar uses this term when he explains how he came to have sex with an ‘easy’ girl he knew from school: when she puts her arm around him and calls him ‘husband’ in front of her friends, he “seizes the occasion” and invites her, with the intention to have sex with her. Boys often use this expression to indicate that they will not think twice when they have the chance to have sex. When they have the opportunity of sex, they will not hesitate but act. Omar for instance says: “every time I get the chance to have a reg, I go for it” (INT 26). The suggestion is made that a boy will not say ‘no’ to sex, nor postpone it to a later moment.

In such a framing of male premarital sexuality boys are, firstly, always in need of sex and, secondly, always ready to have sex. It seems that they never have moments when they do not feel like having sex, and they never turn down an opportunity to have sex. This ‘ever ready’ and ‘always in need’ quality of male sexuality is well compatible with the multiple partnerships that boys often engage in. Whereas the next chapter will address how multiple partnerships are highly problematic for girls, they are much less a problem for boys, because they are an expression of boys’ uncontrollable sexual desire that seeks satisfaction when the occasion presents itself (cf. Mernissi 2000: 209).

Hearing boys talk about ‘seizing the occasion’ can make one think that they are actually almost always having sex. This is however not the case. When I asked boys to tell me about their last sexual experience, these encounters often dated from a couple of months or sometimes a year or more back. Most boys in this study had sex on a very irregular and infrequent basis. To give an idea of the frequency of sexual contacts: Malick seems to be one of the more sexually active boys, and is engaged in casual sexual relations with different girls. He indicates that during some periods he can have sex 3 or 4 times a month, whereas in other periods he can stay without sex for weeks or months (INT 7, FGD 5 and 6). Most boys have less sexual encounters than Malick. Babacar explains that it is difficult to say exactly how often he has sex:

“It is difficult to say exactly. It is only on an occasional basis. It is not something that you can plan with a calendar on beforehand. We have all for sure had sexual relations, but it is not something that we do every day.” (boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)
Sexual contacts often take place at special days or holidays: New Year’s Eve, Korité, school dances, marriages, balls or on a night out in a dancing or club. Reliable figures on sexual contacts of the participants are scarce, but it seems that boys do not have ‘the occasion’ of sex very often. This puts the expression ‘seizing the occasion’ in a different light: it depicts boys as sexual beings in the sense that they are ‘ever ready’ for sex, even though in fact they might not have sex very frequently. Without actually having sex very often, boys can still portray themselves as sexually active, and thus as potent and virile men.

This brings me to another point. Despite the common understanding of male sexuality as something natural and instinctive, the way boys talk about sex suggests that there is a substantial social element in it. This already came forward in the sense that the first sexual experience makes boys feel like goor. It can also be seen in the following discussion of a group of in-school boys who are talking about why they cannot resist girls and sex:

- [We have to] send these girls away, make them aware of their responsibilities [and encourage them to abstain and remain virgins]. [...] But I want to say in response to that [...] we cannot send away all the girls who come for these things [: sex]. Yes. Because we are men, we have to accept.

[...]
- [...] There is also an instinct in men, because, what, one has to be objective right, what do you think about these wet dreams [that we talked about earlier]. But that, what makes that happen to a man? It is the same instinct that causes this with men. It pushes you at maybe not sending away. If we can send away four or five girls, but we cannot send away everybody, right. [...]
- There are these girls, [...] they say that there is nothing you can do against them. And you, as a man, you react, right. She starts to charm you, and as a man, you cannot not react. [...]
- Or even, she starts to charm you, making certain gestures, in order to make you. She provokes you, you know, that is it. If it is only words, you can, well, leave it, right. But she stays there, she charms you, she starts to do things to you. Well, as a man, well, a man is just a man, right. Well, that is it.
- We are human beings.
(boys, 18 to 20, in-school, FGD 13)

The boys talk about instinct: “we are human beings” and “a man is just a man”. But their expressions of “because we are men, we have to accept” and “as a man, you cannot not react” also point out that they are expected to show that they are ‘a man’ in social terms. They do this by ‘reacting’: having sex. The same group of boys explains how they feel pressure from girls to prove something:

- There are these girls, when they come to visit you, they provoke you, they provoke you. They come, they say to their girlfriend, ‘this one, he is not like that, you know, he only talks’.
  A: *He is not like what?*
  - He is shy.
  - He is not capable of-
  A: *He is not like what?*
  - He is not capable, you know.
  - He is shy.
  - When he is in front of me, he is like someone who-
  - is asleep.
  - He takes himself as-
  - someone incapable.
Not reacting makes boys vulnerable to doubts (from girls as well as their peers) about their manhood and accusations of being impotent, incapable or homosexual. Expressing the need for satisfaction of sexual desires as well as the inability to control one’s sexuality can in this light be understood as elements of ‘being a real man’, being gôôr. This means that the naturalness of male sexuality is in itself socially constructed.

Sex is then not just about bodily pleasure and the satisfaction of biological needs, but centres on creating and proving masculinity. Although few boys would explicitly argue that this is the case, Babacar steps away from dominant discourse when he explains why he finds more pleasure when being alone with a girl, compared to ‘sharing the girl’ with a group of boys:

A: So, if it is not, is not for pleasure with these reys, so, what is it then? Is it something natural, it is for you, just to satisfy your needs [...]?

Babacar: It is not every time that one is excited that one has to find a rey. But as Moussa has said, if we are among friends and we have a rey and you do not want to participate, they will call you all kinds of names, you are impotent or you are a homosexual. Sometimes to avoid taking part in those sort of things, I make sure that I am absent, not around. [...] We do not always enjoy pleasure with these reys. It is to avoid that we are not being respected and to show at the girl that we are respectable, that is why we engage in it. (boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)

Sex is thus about showing your friends or the girl(s) that you are gôôr. The way Babacar speaks about it makes clear that sex is not just a natural act in response to physical needs, but that it is of social relevance for the construction of a male identity. Having sex can thus be a potentially positive experience for boys in two ways: on the one hand, because it gives sexual pleasure and satisfaction, and on the other hand, because it gives boys the opportunity to establish a male identity that conforms to the dominant norm of male sexuality.

With respect to the latter, the fact that masculinity has to be proven to peers makes it common and important for boys to talk amongst each other about their sexual experiences (cf. Gage 1998: 159). In contrast to the difficulties that I encountered during fieldwork in talking about sex with girls, it was most of the time no problem to have boys talk about their sexual experiences. In fact, they often seemed rather eager to share their stories. This talking about sexual experiences and girls has to be understood as part of the performative process in which boys construct their masculinity. Boys not only establish themselves as gôôr by courting and having sex with girls, but also by talking about this with their peers. In that respect it has to be noted that there were also silences in the boys’ narratives, especially on matters such as limited sexual experience, insecurities in how to relate to girls or how to go about sex, and unsuccessful dates or sexual encounters.

In relation to the sharing of sexual experiences amongst boys, I want to briefly mention pornographic materials here. Boys, as well as girls, use pornographic materials such as movies, booklets, magazines or websites. I was sometimes confused what participants meant when they spoke of pornographic movies, as it was not clear whether they referred to kissing and sex in romantic movies that are displayed on television, or more explicit
pornographic material. It turned out to be the latter. As far as my limited knowledge goes, most of the pornographic movies that circulate have been produced in the west. Boys can watch these movies together, but can also watch them with their girlfriend. The widespread use of pornographic materials in either videos, books or websites has also been noted in Ethiopia (Tadele 2001) and Nairobi (Spronk, personal conversation). Despite the fact that they are condemned for creating promiscuity among the youth, the popularity of pornographic materials might be understood against the background that they are one of the very few explicit sources of information on sex: boys can actually see how to do sex.

**Boys in a dominant position**

The elements of sexual needs and desire, of uncontrollable urges, of satisfaction and pleasure, of ‘seizing the occasion’ and proving potency and virility through sex are part of hegemonic male sexuality. In this hegemonic masculinity that boys performatively embody, they are positioned in a dominant position vis-à-vis girls when it comes to sexuality. In this constitution, sex originates from male desires and needs, and is directed towards male satisfaction and pleasure. In Chapter 3, I already noted the general patterns of gender inequality, including, amongst others, the position of men as household heads combined with the desired submissiveness of the wife, the higher school enrolment rates of boys at all educational levels, the higher degree of freedom that boys are allowed with respect to their where-abouts and behaviour. The wedding night also symbolizes male domination. In the context of these unequal gender relations, the hegemonic male sexuality makes that boys are enabled to shape their sexual relations and encounters primarily towards their own desires. Boys thus come to be positioned as sexual actors, who have agency to respond to their sexual needs. This gender inequality in sexual matters is reinforced by the fact that both girls and boys prefer relations in which the boy is older and higher educated than the girl, as a result of which the boy is always ‘ahead’ of the girl.

The male gaze in sexuality and the dominant position ascribed to boys gives rise to a specific dynamic in young people’s intimate relationships, in which it is generally taken for granted that boys take the initiative for dates, relations and sex. Girls only have limited possibilities to take initiative. Yet, in indirect ways - such as clothing, behaviour, gestures and movements, as well as speech, that is les petites manières - girls can show that they are interested in having sex. In the way she dresses, by paying a visit to her boyfriend or by asking to be invited to a certain event or to go somewhere, a girl can try to attract the attention of the boy. Girls can only in subtle ways attract the attention of boys, because they have to keep up their image as respectable, and thus asexual, girls, and avoid being labelled an ‘easy’ girl. I will come back to the controversies surrounding girls taking initiative below, when discussing provocation. Here it is relevant to note that the indirect petites manières of girls create a situation in which boys can take the initiative in a more overt and direct manner. So, boys are sexual actors who approach attractive girls, ask them on a date, propose a relationship, and/or take the initiative for intimacy and sex. The latter can entail the creation of a situation in which one thing leads to another, but can also be an explicit request or proposal of the boy to engage in sex.

In this respect, it is also interesting to note that sex never occurs at the girl’s place. Usually, it is up to the boy to arrange for a place for sexual encounters. Given the restrictions on female premarital sex, parents and relatives are critical of their daughters bringing home boyfriends. In most cases when a girl takes a boyfriend to her home, she can receive him in the living room where the parents can join in the conversation and watch over them, but the couple is not awarded privacy in a separate room. This makes it
extremely unlikely that sex occurs at the girl’s place. The only exception to this is when the
parents and other relatives are not at home, but this is rare. So, it is up to the boys to make
arrangements for a place to have sex. This can be at their homes, for instance when they
have a room of their own, or when they share a room with brothers who are willing to
accommodate when they bring home a girl. But few boys have a room of their own, and
parents often do not want to be openly confronted with their son’s sexual life and boys feel
that they cannot bring a girl home in front of their parents. A common solution is that
boys take the girl to a friend’s place, who can be either a friend living with his parents, but
having his own room and enough privacy, or a friend who lives on his own. The friend
‘lends’ his room to the couple. Sometimes the friend leaves when the couple arrives, after
having chatted for a while, and sometimes he stays in front of the door to take guard that
no one disturbs the privacy. Another solution that boys sometimes come up with is to rent
a small room together. All the boys who participate in paying the rent can use the room,
where they put a mattress on the floor, to spend private time with a girl and to have sex.
When neither of these options are available to a boy, he can try to find a place outdoors:
they can for instance have sex in a car or at the beach.

The male dominant position in combination with male sexual initiative puts forward
the question to what extent boys actually dominate sexual and intimate relationships with
girls. This requires a look at the negotiation of sexual proposals. I already mentioned that
boys employ ‘sweet language’ to talk girls into accepting sex. As I will discuss elaborately
in the next chapter, girls can experience quite some pressure from boys to say ‘yes’ to sex.
The effort that boys have to put in ‘sweet language’ or a ‘discourse of deceit’ in order to
convince girls suggests that girls are not that easily persuaded, and that boys are thus not in
such a position that they can command sex. Notwithstanding, Chapter 5 will make clear
that girls are being put to the test.

There is a phenomenon of sexual activities of boys that needs some special conside-
ration in this respect: the fact that groups of boys are ‘sharing a girl’. This came forward in
the sex account of Malick, who is not the only one to have sex with Khady, but his two
friends also take part. In most cases where a number of boys has sex with the same girl, it
is usually one of the boys who finds a girl and negotiates sex with her. In some cases, he
negotiates that his friends can also sleep with her. In other cases, the friends enter the
scene when the first one is already having sex with her and indicate that they also want to
sleep with this girl. Babacar describes it as follows:

It depends on the place. It can take place in a room, at the beach or in a car. In general, it is
a complot. The others wait aside and when the first one is coming, a second one comes
forward. But it is not as with the prostitutes where everybody waits in a line-up for his
turn. When you are just two, the first one comes into action while the second one keeps
watch.
(boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)

It is always two or more boys who are taking turns in having sex with a single girl. It is never
two or more girls and only one boy. This phenomenon of ‘sharing girls for sex’ has also
been noted in Ethiopia, where boys suggest that it is a form of solidarity to share girls and
possibilities to have sex in a context of “scarcity of love, sex, and money” (Tadele 2004: 8).
The question of course is whether boys in these circumstances actually negotiate
with the girl, or force them to have sex with multiple boys. At a first instance, Malick
speaks of ‘negotiating’ with Khady. But when I discuss this incident once more with
him after he has indicated that he feels bad about the fact that he might be the one who
impregnated Khady, he says that he actually talked her into it. In fact, he says, “maybe I threatened her a little, I have insulted her” (informal conversation, april 6th 2001). Although straightforward evidence of the use of force and violence is hard to obtain, the bits and pieces that boys do express suggest that on some occasions a degree of pressure or force is exercised on girls to accept sex. The mere fact that the other boys arrive when the first one is already having sex puts the girl in a compromised and vulnerable position from where it is far from easy to refuse the others. But sometimes girls manage to refuse, as is explained by Babacar:

Sometimes it happens that the rey accepts to sleep with a boy, and when the others arrive out of the blue and without warning, she refuses that they also take part, because she had agreed to sleep with one boy, not with three or four.

(boy, 19, out-of-school, INT 24)

With respect to the situation in Ethiopia, Tadele shows how in some cases boys can employ a level of “diplomacy” in negotiating with the girl, while in other instances he speaks of gang rape when boys take a girl to an isolated place where she cannot cry out for help, and use violence to prevent the girl from refusing sex or escaping (Tadele 2006). I have not come across such accounts of outright violence and rape, but the phenomenon of a group of boys engaging in sex with a single girl certainly gives rise to such possibilities.

5 Beyond hegemonic masculinity: ambiguity about control

Experiencing sex and desire as ‘natural’ and uncontrollable urges that need to be satisfied whenever the ‘occasion’ presents itself is central to the hegemonic construction of male premarital sexuality in which unmarried Dakarois boys come to be positioned as dominant and in control vis-à-vis girls. The sex accounts show that boys performatively enact and embody this male norm of active sexuality. Hegemonic masculinity is important for understanding the way boys experience and live their sexuality, but at the same time does not capture the whole complexity of their sexual lives. In fact, there are also cracks in the hegemonic male sexuality that boys are expected to live up to. Babacar indicated that sometimes he does not ‘seize the occasion’ when an ‘easy’ girl is available. His words suggest that sexual needs do not always require satisfaction, and that a boy is not always ready to have sex, but in fact can actively avoid an ‘occasion’. This brings me to the second norm in male sexuality: the controlled and restrained sexuality that boys claim to enact with their ‘real’ girlfriends. This section starts from the sex accounts again, but now with the aim of seeing alternative masculinities. Attention will be paid to the idea of sex as a surprise and the issue of provocation. Moreover, the doubts and feelings of shame and embarrassment that boys voice will be considered. What does the second norm in male sexuality look like, and how do boys negotiate the tensions between the two different norms?

Surprise and provocation

I will start with the notion of sex as a surprise. Pape, the 20 year-old boy who worried about a possible pregnancy of his girlfriend, uses this expression when he talks about how he came to have sex with her on Valentine’s Day. He says that he did not intend to have sex and that her visit as well as the fact that he ended up having sex with her came to him as ‘a
surprise’. Neither he, nor the girl intended this to happen: it was something that came about in the heat of the moment. Boys commonly frame sex as a surprise when they are accounting for two types of situations: sex with their ‘real’ girlfriend and unprotected sex. Both situations refer to undesirable behaviour. By labelling such socially undesirable events as ‘a surprise’, boys take away their own agency for what happened. This strategy is also highlighted by Rhodes & Cusick (2002) who analyse how people account for unprotected sex. They show how people deny their own agency, and thus responsibility, when asked to explain undesirable and morally charged behaviour. That is exactly what Dakarois boys do: in framing of sex as a surprise, they play down their responsibility. They did not want to have sex with their ‘real’ girlfriend, nor intended to have sex without protection, but it just happened by surprise. It is interesting to note that in this conceptualisation of ‘surprise’, deviance from a norm is being explained, while the norm itself is not being brought into questioning. It was the irrationality in the heat of the moment that explained why a condom has not been used, or why a boy slept with his ‘real’ girlfriend, but no claims are being made about the acceptability of unprotected sex or of sex with your ‘real’ girlfriend.

Another explanation boys give to account for undesirable sexual events is the provocative behaviour of girls. This phenomenon of provocation as well as its effect on boys merits to be considered in more detail. Provocation is a term that both boys and girls – and adults for that matter - in Dakar use to describe a certain behaviour of girls. It is most of the time used in a specific way: to explain why boys cannot abstain from sex. The argument is that boys ‘indulge’ in sex because girls are constantly ‘provoking’ them (provoquer). What is provocative behaviour of girls? Omar gives an example of an overt provocation:

One day a girl arrived at my place just at the moment when I came out of the bathroom, with a towel around my hips. You could see my sex [penis] under the towel. When her eyes turned towards my penis, she told me that I did not have it, that I was incapable. I asked her what made her say that, but she answered me that she just noticed that I did not have it. So, I said to her that it was because I had not yet shown her ‘the weight of my hand’ (la lourdeur de ma main) [meaning: my virility] that she would think such a thing. And you know, there were more girls like her who thought the same thing and after having had sex with me, they have changed their mind. She however persisted in telling me that I did not have it and that she had known this the moment she saw me. So, I proposed her to get into action right away, but she refused. I swore to her that sooner or later I would show her ‘of what character I was made’ (de quel bois je me chauffe).

(boy, 20, out-of-school, FGD 19)

The provocative element is that the girl implies Omar is impotent when she says that “he does not have it”. In this example, the provocation is openly focused on the boy’s sexual capacities, but more indirect and/or less sexually explicit behaviour can also be considered provocative. My male research assistant gave me some examples. For instance, a boy is sitting outside in front of his home in the shade. A girl passes by, she comes along again and she passes by a third time. The provocative element is that the girl is said to be drawing the

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62 The study of Rhodes & Cusick (2002) is based on the possibly morally charged accounts of “unprotected sex by HIV positive people who have the potential to transmit HIV to their sexual partners” (p. 211). Their analysis focuses on how the self, as a moral enterprise, is represented in a context of situated norms of risk acceptability and moral responsibility.
boys attention by passing by three times in a row. Another example, a boy is having a cold soda, sitting in front of a small shop. A girl enters into the store and says: “Oh, what a heat today, a soda to cool down would be nice”. Here the girl is said to provoke the boy because she offers him an opportunity to court her by offering her a drink. A final example: two young men are waiting with their car in front of a garage for the mechanic to finish his business with another customer. There is a lot of dust on the car and one of the young men is wiping off the dust. Two girls passing by complain that the dust is making their clothes dirty. The girls’ remarks are considered provocative because their complaints about the dust create a situation in which the man can apologise and propose to make it up to them. What these examples have in common, is that the girls do not avoid contact with the boy/man, but that they actually offer a situation in which the boy can start a conversation and make a proposition. The word provocation is also used in references to girls who dress in a way that is considered (too) sexy, or to girls who make certain gestures or movements that are considered to be sexy and seductive, as becomes clear from the following discussion of Malick and Idrissa:

Malick: These days there is a lot of temptation. Because the girls do not know how to dress themselves properly. It is provoking. And their way to talk also, to be close to you, with their manners-.
(The whole group starts to laugh)
Idrissa: Right, there are these girls, at school, […] they come to school in indecent clothes, so that we can not-. […] We are boys, you know, […], we feel things. But there are limits. But if you come wearing something that, that provokes, we cannot resist.
(boys, 20 and 22, in-school, FGD6)

In all these different situations the girls are said to create a situation in which the boy can attempt to court her. In that sense, almost any behaviour of girls that allows boys to contact them can be labelled provocative.

The term provocation has a negative connotation, in the sense that a decent girl does not display provocative behaviour (see also van Eerdewijk 2001b). The problematic aspect is that the girl in a way takes the initiative to contact or court or a boy. This is problematic in a context where it is generally taken for granted that boys and men are the ones who take the initiative when it comes to courting and sex. As I will discuss in great detail in the next chapter, girls are not supposed to express their sexuality and certainly should not take the initiative in these matters. Obviously, provocative behaviour is a reason to be categorized as an ‘easy’ girl. For now it is important to understand that when girls do display initiative, it is problematized and interpreted as a provocation towards boys. Even behaviour that does not carry any sexual intentions or that is nor even directed at the boy can be labelled provocative and, thus, problematic. In terms of gender, it is important to note that initiative and courting are provocative and thus problematic when done by girls, whereas similar behaviour from boys is never labelled provocative nor rendered problematic. In fact, boys are expected to act in such a way.

It is important to understand the effect this behaviour of girls that is labelled provocative has on boys. Omar, after having been provoked while coming out of the shower in his towel, indicates that he wanted to prove the girl wrong. He said that he “wait[s] for the occasion to present itself to remind her of what she said” and show her that he is a virile man. The effect of so-called provocative behaviour of girls is that boys feel challenged to show their manhood and virility. When provoked, boys and men feel that they have to react and show that they are capable. Boys experience provocation as pressure from girls to show their manhood by engaging in sex. They are afraid that if they do not react to the
girl’s remarks, to her sexy clothing, her seductive manners, that she will think that he is not ‘a real man’. Malick, the boy who possibly impregnated Khady, also experiences this pressure to have sex with girls that provoke him. When talking about his insecurities with respect to girls, he says that he is afraid that if he does not react, a girl might think that he failed, “that I am afraid, that I hesitate, things like that, you know” (INT 7). As such, she implies that he does not know how to do ‘it’, and raises doubts about whether he is goōr enough.

Boys speak about provocation in specific contexts, namely when explaining why they cannot resist to sex and cannot control themselves. The point they make is that the girls’ behaviour is the reason why they cannot resist. What is interesting in the way provocation is used when boys speak about their sexuality, is that the initiative and agency is put in the hands of the girls, instead of in the hands of the boys themselves. They use the notion of provocation to indicate that they are not in control of the situation, but that their sexual behaviour is the result of “the power [of girls] to seduce men” (Biaya 2001: 78). On the one hand, the framings of male sexuality in terms of girls’ provocation and sex as a ‘surprise’ lines up with the hegemonic masculinity in which boys’ sexuality is a natural and uncontrollable urge. On the other hand, however, these notions throw a different light on male sexuality, in which the boy is not the initiating actor who is in control of the sexual encounter, but subject to outside influences that make him do certain things. It is the girls’ behaviour that pushes him to act sexually. (Pornographic movies and materials are also mentioned as factors that make that boys cannot resist and abstain from sex.) These two framings where boys are both in control and not in control of sexuality create an ambiguous picture of male sexuality. An interesting question is why boys would want to excuse themselves from conforming to hegemonic masculinity: why do they need to account for situations where they cannot control themselves, as this experience of uncontrollable sexual urges is exactly what they are expected to have. The avoidance of responsibility and denial of male agency in the notions of sex as a ‘surprise’ and of girls’ provocative behaviour reveal that sex is not only positive or pleasurable for boys. This is further underlined by the feelings of embarrassment that boys have with respect to their sexual experiences, as well as the insecurities they face with respect to sex and girls. In the next sub-section, I analyse such feelings of shame and insecurity as entry points to the second norm in male sexuality.

Embarrassment and insecurities: reconsidering abstinence

Feelings of shame and embarrassment as well as insecurities can be clearly noted in the case of Malick, whom we have already seen several times in this chapter. He is the boy who slept with Khady, and also arranged for his two friends to have sex with her that same evening. They all denied their responsibility when she turned out to be pregnant later. Malick is also the boy who expressed that he felt that he was ‘a man’ after his first sexual experience. He is also the boy who seems to be one of the more sexually active boys in the research group. Malick has had numerous girlfriends, and has regular occasional sexual contacts as well. Recently he has slept with three different girls: one is a girl he met at a club, another is a girl that he has been seeing on a more regular basis lately, and the third one is Astou, a girl that he also has been dating.

Malick’s case fascinated me. The first time he joined in a focus group discussion, he had been brought along by one of the other participants. Malick did not say a word during the discussion, and actually left early. When he comes back a week later, I make a joke and ask him whether he will say something this time. In that group discussion, we come to talk
about premarital pregnancies, and after a while I ask Malick what he thinks about the issue. He responds by saying that he has already made two girls pregnant. During that group discussion, but especially during the individual interviews and informal conversations that I have with him, he talks about his girlfriends, about how Khady fell pregnant, and about the second girl that fell pregnant: Astou. Malick had been dating Astou for an approximate-ly three months, even though he says that he was never really in love with her. When he is making up his mind to break up with her, he “ends up” having sex with her one day. Malick claims that Astou provoked and seduced him, and that because it was a surprise for him, he did not have a condom, so they had unprotected sex. When Astou tells him about her pregnancy, Malick does not believe her at first, but later he understands that she is serious when her aunt comes to discuss the situation. A friend of Malick and Astou’s aunt look for a solution and decide to end the pregnancy with an abortion. Both Malick and Astou agree with this, and Malick accompanies Astou to the clinic to have the abortion done. In fact, it turns out that this was the reason why he had to leave early at the first focus group discussion.

Malick’s sexual history matches the hegemonic image of gôor: he had his first sexual experience at an early age, he knows how to seduce girls, feels good about being sexually experienced and has sex with different partners on a more or less regular basis. But the more I talk with him, the more it becomes clear to me that he is also insecure about sex and girls, and feels uncomfortable and ashamed about how things have evolved in his life. Our conversations are an opportunity for him to reflect on his life and he says:

> Look at me, I am 20 years old, and I have already impregnated two girls. [...] Every day I get worse. [...] Sometimes I think that I am sick or something like that. The fact to chase after girls like that, I tell myself that I am not normal, you know.

(boy, 20, in-school, INT 7)

Malick feels ashamed about possibly having impregnated two girls, and he feels ashamed about not having taken precautions. He also feels bad about having insulted Khady in order to make her agree to have sex with him and his two friends. He feels bad about the fact that he may be having a child and that he does not take care of it. When reflecting on his experiences, he is confused and does not know what to think about it or how to change his life in the future. He says that he does not know anymore how to relate to girls, and says:

> I do not have my head clear with respect to girls. It is complicated. [...] They do things to you that you do not want, right. [...] When we are with them, it is very complicated, we do not know what to do.

(boy, 20, in-school, INT 7)

In the end, he suggests that maybe he should try to avoid girls as much as possible.

What is interesting in Malick’s reflections about his sexual history is that although in many ways he conforms to hegemonic masculinity, he is uncomfortable and insecure about his sexuality and about his relations with girls. He also has doubts about his behaviour and its consequences. Similar feelings of regret and shame are also present in
some of the sex accounts presented earlier. Omar, for instance, says that he did not dare to look the girl of his first sexual experience in the eye when he met her afterwards. Sadio, who visited a prostitute with a friend, says that although he was happy to have had his first sexual experience, he felt embarrassed and “not pleased with himself”.

The doubts, embarrassments and insecurities of Malick and boys like him take two forms. To start with, boys are insecure about whether they can live up to the ideal of active sexuality of hegemonic masculinity. Malick, who has slept with numerous girls so far and who does not seem to be shy in courting girls, for instance wonders: “Sometimes I doubt if I really am someone who knows how to do it” (boy, 20, in-school, INT 7). Despite his sexual history and experiences, Malick is insecure about his ability to seduce a girl and have sex with her. Establishing himself as man through sex with girls is thus an ongoing process for boys like Malick, and this can make them question more or less frequently whether they can live up to the expectations set on men: whether they are (still) good enough.

In the second shape, the doubts of boys come to touch the desirability of behaviour that conforms to hegemonic masculinity. This undesirability of sex lies in the negative consequences it can have. Boys for instance regret having sex because of its possible unfortunate health consequences: risks of unwanted pregnancies, and of STI or HIV infections. Although sex can be physically enjoyable for boys at the moment, the risks might make them reluctant to engage in sex or regret their sexual activities afterwards. Another way in which sex is negative is in the sense of faire du mal (to harm or do wrong) to a girl, that I discussed in the beginning of this chapter in relation to why boys claim not to have sex with their ‘real’ girlfriends. In this sense of faire du mal, boys feel ashamed about sex when they consider what they have done to the girl: they have asked her to give away what is supposed to be most precious to her. Sleeping with a girl harms her status and reputation, and as such is something ‘bad’ to do to her (cf. Mernissi 2000: 205 - 207). These negative effects of boys’ sexual contacts on the status and reputation of an unmarried girl can make that boys feel ashamed about sleeping with their ‘real’ girlfriend. In some cases, it also makes them feel embarrassed to have slept with a girl at all, because even though that might not be the boy’s ‘real’ girlfriend, she is “someone else’s girl” as Sadio puts it. A third way in which sex can become something negative for boys, is when they have sex too often and when they are too preoccupied with it. In short, when sex becomes too much. It is this idea that makes Malick wonder whether he is sick or abnormal when he is chasing after girls like that.

These doubts and insecurities give insight into a second norm in male sexuality that boys have to relate to. Apart from being sexually active and knowledgeable, men also have to be ‘serious’ and not too focused on sex, girls and women. When discussing the meaning of adolescence as an in-between phase in Chapter 3, I already highlighted that the transition to adulthood involves the taking up of more and more responsibilities, in particular for boys. By going to school, earning money and contributing to household expenses, they prepare for their future independent lives. It is this expectation of responsibility and being serious that puts boundaries on the extent to which boys can indulge in sex and girls. Failing at school, being unemployed, not earning money, and remaining financially dependent on your parents or friends are often seen as irresponsible behaviour from boys. Moreover, boys are often criticized when they spend the little money they have on girls or going out dancing. Although being sexually active and knowledgeable are important in constructing manhood, boys should not loose themselves in this, and certainly not at the expense of their educational, financial and familial responsibilities. This means that boys have to put limits on their sexuality, and in this sense virginity and abstinence remain important reference points for the sexuality of boys. Although they are
not required to remain virgins until marriage nor completely refrain from premarital sex, boys show that they are ‘serious’ through practicing abstinence in the sense of not losing themselves in sex. Malick for instance worried about the jokes that were made about the fact that he does not work extremely hard at school nor has a job during the three months of summer holidays. Friends tease him by saying that he is lazy and does nothing useful. Malick feels the necessity to improve his life and his image. Boys embody seriousness when their sexuality is balanced with their other responsibilities.

All this implies that there are two norms of male sexuality that boys have to relate to. On the one hand, they have to display their manhood by being sexually active, experienced and knowledgeable: always in need of and ready to have sex. On the other hand, they have to live up to an idea of abstinence and should not spend all their time and energy on sex and girls. What remains largely silent in these two masculinities is boys’ desire for intimacy. The disappointments that boys voice over sexual encounters with prostitutes and occasions where boys ‘share a rey’ (see Mamadou and Babacar in section 4) in fact concern the lack of intimacy. Sexual satisfaction through penetration and ejaculation is not the only thing that boys seek or find in their relationships with girls, despite the fact that hegemonic masculinity suggests so. It is the “fragmentation of sexual desire”, to use Nencel’s term (1996; see section 2 above), from other emotions and feelings that creates this silence on the need for intimacy. Boys do speak of love and of sharing, confidence and ‘only wanting the best for each other’ when they talk about the ‘real’ girlfriend. With respect to the category of the ‘easy’ girl in which they place their active sexuality, there seems to be a silence on intimacy at first sight, but I also discussed that for boys (as well as girls) the so-called exchange relationships involve more than a mere exchange of money and sex.

The acknowledgement of the existence of a hegemonic and subdominant norm for masculinity is useful to understanding why the lives and experiences of boys cannot be fully understood by only taking hegemonic notions of male sexuality into account. This acknowledgement allows for seeing that boys can embody and enact multiple masculinities, and thus generates insight into the heterogeneity among boys’ lives. Every single boy has to find a balance between a ‘natural’ and uncontrollable sexuality on the one hand and a restrained and ‘serious’ sexuality on the other. Some boys will be more ‘serious’, whereas others will be more occupied with sexual matters and girls. This balancing of two normative masculinities does however not come about without a blow, so to speak, but actually involves a struggle for boys. Whatever they do, they always fail to live up to one expectation: when they are having sex, they might be considered irresponsible and not serious, but when they focus on their future, work and education, and do not spend energy and time on girls and sex, they might be susceptible to accusations of impotency and homosexuality.

The creation of a typology of different kinds of girls is an important way through which boys can reconcile these two conflicting and contradictory demands on their sexuality. With their ‘real’ girlfriends, boys can enact the ‘serious’ part of their male sexuality by embodying a sense of responsibility for the future and a capacity to abstain to a certain extent. With the ‘easy’ girls, boys have the space to enact their active and potent sexuality: they can satisfy their needs and prove their virility and potency whenever they get the occasion. By differentiating between types of girls, boys (and men) can live up to conflicting norms of male sexuality. In that sense, the contradictory norms of male sexuality make that boys and men have to fragment their sexual desire. Male sexual desire is given two shapes, and as such is fragmented into two types of sexual desire: the ‘natural’, uncontrollable and animal-like urge on the one hand and the controlled and restrained sexuality on the other.
What is interesting when one considers how the typology of girls helps boys to deal with contradictory demands on their masculinity and sexuality, is that this typology makes that boys (and men) can redirect the tensions surrounding their gender and sexual identity - and thus their status as a person - to another group: girls and women. More bluntly, it allows them to work off their difficulties to negotiate two contradictory masculinities onto girls and women, whose female identities and sexuality are as a consequence subject to fierce societal surveillance and correction. Boys (and men) themselves thus do not take the heat, but in many ways remain outside the eye of the storm. This in itself is another manifestation of gender inequality, and more particularly, the dominance of men in sexual matters. That is precisely the reason why it is important to acknowledge that the typology of ‘real’ girlfriends and ‘easy’ girls has more impact on girls than a differentiation by girls between ideal boyfriends and undesirable, not-serious partners has on boys. In fact, the former has a stronger base in society, which adds to its circulation.

Because reality is harsh and complex, and because girls do not fit neatly in the boys’ typology, the tension between the two norms of masculinity is not that easily resolved. In fact, the insecurities, doubts and feelings of embarrassment of boys have to be understood as signs of their struggle to balance contradicting demands in their real life relations with girls. The feelings of shame as well as the feelings of insecurity and discomfort of boys with respect to their sexuality and sexual lives are the result of having to live up to and negotiate a contradiction. In real life where girls and women cannot be that easily categorized as ‘real’ girlfriends or ‘easy’ girls, the conduct of boys is always subject to criticism and correction of the norm that they fail to enact. That is probably also the reason why Malick does not “have his head clear” with respect to girls. The behaviour of boys like Malick towards girls and sex takes shape in the context of a struggle they have to fight to balance conflicting norms in a complex reality. The boys’ conduct is hence not necessarily a consequence of a determined and conscious strategy or choice. In the end, that means that even though boys might be behaving in a hegemonically masculine manner in their sexual lives, they are not necessarily in control of their sexuality, sexual contacts and relationships with girls.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on the sexual lives of boys in Dakar by listening to how they speak about sex, intimate relationships and girls. Male premarital sexuality has been analysed in its multidimensional manifestations. Boys come forward as active actors in sexuality. Their sexual contacts usually start in their early or mid teens. In the course of their teenage years, they develop a curiosity for sex and a wish to discover and experience it. Boys refer to bodily sensations of sexual needs that make them want to have sex. In that sense, sex brings them pleasure and satisfaction. Boys experience their sexual desire as something ‘natural’ which is beyond their control and which, they say, they always seek to satisfy. In that respect they use the notion of ‘seizing the occasion’. Most boys have sex on a very irregular and infrequent basis. However, they talk a lot about it, and it is important for boys to share their sexual experiences with their friends in order to show that they are gôor. In this hegemonic construction of male premarital sexuality boys have agency: they seek to satisfy their needs and take the initiative vis-à-vis girls when it comes to sexuality. Taking into account that boys are often older and higher educated than the girls they date, and that unequal gender relations in society as a whole provide men with a dominant position in relation to women, it can be argued that boys are in control of their sexuality.
and of the sexual relations they have with girls.

However, this is not the whole story. Boys also speak about sexuality in terms of sex as a ‘surprise’ and refer to the provocative behaviour of girls. In these narratives, boys lack agency in their sexuality and contacts with girls, and are not in control of what happens. Male premarital sexuality in that way becomes ambiguous. Boys also experience feelings of shame, embarrassment and insecurity with respect to sex and girls, even when they behave according to the norm of hegemonic masculinity. In fact, the sexuality of boys cannot be understood without relating it to the norm of abstinence. Although boys are not expected to refrain from sex, they should in a way abstain: they should not be too occupied with girls and sex, but have to balance their sexuality with other responsibilities such as school, work and family obligations. In order to understand the sexual lives of boys in a meaningful way, the different dimensions of their sexuality and the conflicts between different expectations need to be taken into account. This multidimensional perspective shows how boys take up a dominant position vis-à-vis girls with respect to sexuality, but that at the same time, they have to negotiate different norms regarding their sexuality and masculinity. It provided insight into the various ways in boys relate themselves to hegemonic masculinity: they reproduce and reinforce it and simultaneously question and rework it.

I argued that the typology of girls into ‘real’ girlfriends and ‘easy’ girls says more about the construction of male sexuality than about the actual identities and behaviours of girls. In fact, the typology helps boys to negotiate the tension between the need to be sexually active and experienced and the need to be serious and responsible than about. But because in real life girls cannot be that easily put into boxes, boys continue to be faced with doubts and insecurities about their sexuality and intimate relationships with girls. As such, boys are not fully and by definition in control of sex and these relationships, despite the male centred construction of sexuality and the dominant position of boys vis-à-vis girls. The lives of girls as well as their perspective on and experiences in intimate and sexual relationships with boys are the focus of the next chapter.
What kind of intimate and sexual relationships do girls have with boys? What role do love, money and sex play in these relationships? Do girls have sex, and if so, with whom and for what reasons? Now that the previous chapter has shed light on the experiences of boys in their relationships with girls, it is time to turn the spotlight on girls. This chapter will generate an understanding of the way girls construct their sexuality. It contributes to the central question on the embeddedness of young people’s safe sex practices, by providing insights into female premarital sexuality. The story of Dakarois boys has to be complemented, and in some ways nuanced and corrected, by the story of Dakarois girls. Important issues that this chapter will therefore take up relate to the agency of girls in sexual matters and whether girls can counteract the typology boys have of different types of girls.

The chapter starts with Aida, a 19 year-old girl, and the boyfriends that she is dating. On the basis of her case, the phenomenon of multiple partnerships will be discussed. Aida’s case brings out three themes that will be central to the remainder of the chapter: love, money, and sex. Love is the subject of section 2, which considers what love means for Dakarois girls, and what their ideal boyfriend looks like. This is followed by a reflection on why love is so important for girls. Section 3 turns the spotlight on the ways in which money and presents are part of the girls’ relationships, and also considers the negative judgements about girls’ alleged material interests. The precarious status of money in relationships is related to its assumed connection with sex. This subject of sex is central to section 4. As girls did not easily speak of their sexual experiences, this section starts with showing these difficulties of talking about sex. It continues with analysing the reasons girls brought forward to explain the sexual activities of a ‘girl-like-them’ in a hypothetical story. The issues of love and money, in combination with other subjects such as male initiative and ‘sweet language’, come forward as reasons to engage in sex. I will also explore how girls step outside dominant discourse that silences their sexuality, by tracing glimpses of pleasure in section 5. In section 6, the narratives of three girls that did have sex are presented and these allow for an analysis of female sexual desire. Section 7 seeks to tie together the themes of love, money and sex by reflecting on the shortcomings of scientific literature on ‘prostitution’ and transactional relationships in African contexts. This section also comes back to the boys’ typology of different types of girls, and addresses questions on the agency of girls with respect to sex and sexuality. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.
Aida and her boyfriends

The case of Aida and her different boyfriends provides a first insight into the world of relationships from the point of view of girls. Aida is 19 years old, and in the pre-final year of secondary school (classe première). She has six sisters, and two older and two younger brothers. Her father is married to two wives, and they all live in the same home. Since all her sisters have dropped out of school, Aida is the only girl in her family who has reached this far in education. This does not mean that this has gone without a struggle, since she had to repeat a class twice. At the second occasion, her father questioned whether she worked hard enough at school and refused to continue paying her school fees. Luckily, Aida’s older brother decided to pay for her schooling. She seems to be making quite good progress now in school, and hopes to pass to the final class next year.

Aida has a boyfriend: Youssouf. He is 30 years old, and lives in a town at a four to five hour drive from Dakar, where he has a job in a factory. Youssouf is a cousin of Aida. She has been with him for five years. She already knew him for some time before they started dating, but she had “not really noticed him”. He, by contrast, had fallen in love with her the first time he saw her, and had tried to contact her several times ever since. The first time that he asked her to date him, she refused. He did however not give up and courted her for a long time, and finally she accepted to date him. Aida says that she did not really have feelings for him at that time. It was her sister, with whom she talked about it, who encouraged her to go along with it: “That is part of life, you have to try to have a boyfriend”. So, she tried.

Because they live so far apart, they see each other only three or four times a year during holidays. They speak each other a couple of times a month by phone. The distance is not really a problem, because, as Aida put it, they “love each other very much”. On those occasions that they see each other, he always gives her money and presents. In the beginning she felt very uncomfortable about that and did not know what to do with the money, but then her sister told her to keep it and buy whatever she needed from it, like a pair of shoes.

Youssouf has expressed his interest in marrying her. Aida, however, is trying to delay such a marriage. Even though she argues that marriage does not have an age and that she is ready for marriage, she wants to finish her education before getting married. Aida and Youssouf have a lot of discussions about this. When she says that she wants to finish school first, he replies that she will want to continue her studies after her exams. And he does not want to wait forever. Aida’s father leaves her some room to decide whether she is ready for marriage or not. Some time ago for example, another man had asked her father for her hand. When asked about her opinion on this, Aida told her father that she did not want this marriage, because she was not interested and she “did not even know this person”. The case of a marriage with Youssouf is however far more complicated. In principle, she does not oppose marrying him. On the contrary, she believes that he would be a good husband to her. It is however the timing that is bothering her. Youssouf seems to be getting impatient. Last summer he had wanted to marry her, but she said ‘no’ and did not spend the summer holidays with him in order to avoid a wedding. She will try to delay the marriage again this summer, but is not sure whether she will succeed. Will Youssouf accept to wait another year? And will her family allow her to stretch the timing of this marriage once again? And should she take the risk of loosing him and wait for another potential husband? “There are a lot of men, but will I find one that I love like this one? That will be difficult.”

I asked Aida whether other boys have shown an interest in her, since she started
dating Youssouf. “Of course”, she said, “lots of them”. At the moment she is seeing at least two ‘other boyfriends’. One is a university student of 26, that she often sees during the weekend. The other one is 20 years-old and goes to the same school as Aida does, so they have the chance to see each other on almost a daily basis. These are however not ‘real’ boyfriends: “I do not think that they are boyfriends, because I do not really love them.” If, in the end, the marriage with Youssouf will not work out, she is not counting on marrying one of these two other boyfriends. Why does she date them then? It is the boys who talked her into this, she explained, because when you refuse to date them by saying that you already have a boyfriend, they say that they can do a love triangle, and that you can date both of them. In addition, Aida explained, she dates them to have a good time and to enjoy herself. Do these ‘boyfriends’ give her money or something like that? “Oh yes, of course.” But, so she claims, “they give her something for nothing”, meaning that she does not sleep with them in exchange for that money.

Aida claimed that she does not have sex with Youssouf, nor with the other two boyfriends. When I asked her what she thinks a girl and boy can do when they like each other, she does not want to talk about it at first. Later she says that kissing is “acceptable, because she knows that boys like doing that”. But she does not like to do it herself and often tries to avoid it, although sometimes she does kiss them. Aida said that she kisses to please them, and because they tell her that “whatever they ask her, she refuses to do”. Whereas kissing can be acceptable, sex is not. Aida actually claimed that none of her boyfriends have ever asked her to sleep with them. I asked her what she would answer if they would ask her in the future, and she replies:

Even if they try to convince me, I will refuse. Because, me, I think that, you know, according to the religion there are certain things that a girl does not do, that a Muslim should not do. And, I am satisfied with that. Every time, when I speak, I say, “Oh, God does not like that”. And he tells me, they tell me, “you think that you, you are more Muslim than the others”. I tell them, “that is not it, it is, the Holy Coran, it is simply that I do what God has said, what he wants and what he does not want. That is why I do not want to try to do it. […] In my family, all the girls already have a husband, and all of them were virgins. That is why I do not want to do it.

(girl, 19, in school, INT 10)

It seems as if the boyfriends sometimes did ask her to sleep with them, as her response starts hypothetically, but then slides into real discussions she has about not wanting to engage in sex. Later Aida said that the two boyfriends that she does not really love are difficult to convince of not having sex, and that she often quarrels and fights about this with them. With Youssouf on the other hand, Aida claimed that she never, never, never talks about these sort of things, because “he is not like that”. He has studied Arabic and the Coran, and therefore he himself does not want to do certain things. Accordingly, most of the time Aida and Youssouf talk about religion.

Boyfriends are part of the lives of the vast majority of girls in this study. Only one girl claimed not to have a boyfriend, nor to want one. This girl is an exception, as she is very religious, and strictly limits her contacts with boys and men. All the other girls are either having a boyfriend, are interested in a boy and hope to start seeing him, or have just broken up with a boyfriend. Having a boyfriend, or more than one seems to be common for girls in Dakar. As Aida’s sister said: it is part of life, you have to try it.

The socio-economic characteristics of Aida’s relationship with Youssouf correspond with those that I discussed in the previous chapter. Youssouf is older and higher educated than Aida. Aida explains to me that she thinks it is better when the boyfriend is older than
the girl: if a girl and a boy are of the same age, and the girl grows up more quickly, she can come out ahead of him (dépasser), and that is not desirable. It is better when the girl is younger, because than she will not overtake him. This male dominance is reinforced by the second characteristic of education. Aida’s relationship with Youssouf is also illustrative because they are both Muslim. For most girls, it is important that their boyfriend has the same religion. Aida, like many other girls, explains that she enjoys discussing religious matters and the Coran with her boyfriend, and that this is why it is important that he is Muslim like her. Moreover, Aida argues that she does not want to marry a Christian, because she does not want to convert to Christianity. Like with the boys, few girls let ethnicity or caste influence their choice of a boyfriend.

Aida’s case is illustrative in the sense that she is involved with multiple boyfriends. Like Aida, many girls do not exclusively date one boyfriend, but have multiple relationships with different boys at the same time. This phenomenon is called mbaxal in Wolof. The girl who engages in mbaxal is designated with the term mbaran. Most of the time, one of these boys is the ‘real’ boyfriend, and the other ones are not. In Aida’s case, she decisively indicated that she is not interested in marrying one of the Dakarois boyfriends whom she does not really love. She does not have a chance to see Youssouf regularly, so she dates these other boyfriends in order “not to be bored”.

This practice of mbaxal, that many girls in Dakar engage in, is often criticized and found unacceptable. Multiple partnerships are looked down upon, because they are taken as an expression of infidelity. It is the assumed lack of love on the part of the girl that is considered problematic. Moreover, when she does not love these boyfriends, she has to have other motives for engaging in these relations. The 23 year-old Koumba explains why she does the mbaxal:

You know why, there are these boys, when they see you passing by, they start charming you. You tell that you have a boyfriend, but they close their eyes for that and do whatever they can to date you. They do not let go of you until you accept. You have seen me leave, you have asked me, I told you I have a boyfriend, if you do not believe me, I will let you date me to make you see with your own eyes. You know that like this, I do not love you, otherwise I would not have mistreated you like I do. That is to say, I ignore you, I do not take care of you, when you call me by phone, I hang up, when you talk to me, I hardly answer. Even so, when you give me money, I take it. With it, I buy body lotion, or perfume, things like that.

(girl, 23, out-of-school, FGD 16)

Girls are said to do the mbaxal for money. And, the argument goes, this makes girls materialistic and greedy. Even worse, the fact that a girl gets money is also taken as a sign that she must be having sex with this boyfriend, which is of course unacceptable. Mbaxal, sex and exchange are easily lumped together into one corner of misconduct and unacceptable behaviour. An example of this is the article ‘Multiparténariat des jeunes: un comportement à risques assumés’ in the magazine Univers Jeunes, that is designed to inform adolescents (October 1998). The article labels mbaxal as ‘a vicious circle’. It warns young people about entering into the mbaxal, which is said to be a fashionable and popular, but nevertheless dangerous practice. The danger, it is argued, lies in the pregnancies, STIs and HIV/AIDS that might be the result of it. Having multiple partners is equated with sex for exchange, and is implicitly considered to lead to pregnancies and STI/HIV infections. In the context of Dakar, multiple partnerships, exchange, sex and out-of-wedlock pregnancies are all condemned and problematized. Because they are easily tied together into one untangible
knot, quick conclusions can be drawn: when there are multiple boyfriends, then there can
be no love, so there must be money, which means that there is sex. In this judgemental
string of associations, it becomes very important for girls to avoid the impression of either
one of these elements, as it triggers other kinds of accusations. Most girls therefore do
not ‘admit’ as openly as Aida that they are seeing multiple boyfriends, who did not make
any effort to hide for her other boyfriends for me. At the same time, however, girls also
make jokes about their ‘collection’ of boyfriends. Girls can push each other to have
more boyfriends, by suggesting that it is all right because everybody does it, so why deny
yourself this pleasure and opportunity. Girls also put each other under pressure to have
multiple boyfriends by saying things like “the number of boyfriends shows what you are
worth”.

The issue of multiple partnerships, as well as Aida’s case, highlights three themes that
are central to the experiences of girls with boys: love, money and sex. Aida speaks of love
when referring to her relationship with Youssouf, but she does not claim to love the other
two boyfriends. With respect to money then, she receives presents and money from all
three boyfriends. Youssouf gives her whatever he thinks she might need, but Aida insists
that she never asked for it. The other two also give money: “of course”, as Aida has put it.
Does Aida have sex with any of her boyfriends? She said she does not, but it is difficult to
assess whether this is the whole truth. Like most girls, she does not want to talk about it in
detail. The three themes of love, money and sex all merit more elaborate consideration and
reflection.

2 Love and the ideal boyfriend

When Aida talked about Youssouf, she spoke in terms of love. What is love according to
Dakarois girls? How do they see the ideal boyfriend? And why is love that important for
girls in contemporary Dakar?

The ideal of love

Maty, a 21 year-old girl at an informal educational centre, explained:

Love, it is this person whom you have the intention to give your heart to, to whom you
give your heart and with whom you have a project, with whom, if God wants it, you would
like to marry. That is your love, because you entrust your heart to him, and he gives his to
you. You have entrusted your hearts to each other. [...] Love is that person with whom you
share good and bad, you share everything, you share materially, you discuss, etcetera. Love
is the person to whom you give your heart and with whom you have the intention to get
married.
(girl, 21, out-of-school, FGD 14)

Three elements come forward in what this girl is saying about love: it is about feelings and
sharing everything, it carries an idea of reciprocity, and it is related to marriage. To start
with the first, love has to do with giving your heart to somebody. It carries the quality of
sharing good and bad and helping each other in whatever way you can. Whereas friend-
ship is mainly between two people of the same sex, young people stress that love and sex
relations are between two persons of the opposite sex. In a study among girls in the
Casamance (South Senegal) this idea of sharing everything together seemed to be absent
in intimate relationships and it was noted that “it is remarkable that love is not defined in
terms of being together, becoming one, or sharing good and bad times. Boys and girls measure the love of the partner from the extent to which it serves the interest of the other, and those interests are largely incompatible” (Van der Laar 1995: 164). For Dakarois girls – and boys for that matter –, love is understood in terms of sharing and being together, and has to do with feelings of being in love: “that are feelings that one has for somebody”, as the 18 year-old Mariem put it (girl, 18, in-school, FGD 1). In trying to capture what these feelings are, girls indicate that it is difficult to describe these feelings.

It is easier to say what love is not. According to the girls concerned, there is a contradiction between economic or other interests in a relationship and feelings of love. In that sense, aimer par interêt, or loving out of interest, is incompatible with so-called ‘real’ love:

Mary: There are girls who do not love, who love only money. They date someone only for the money.
Seynabou: They do not love the person, but they love his money.
A: And when you really love him, can you ask him for money also?
Seynabou: No, that is not good.
(girls, 21 and 18, out-of-school, FGD 14)

According to these girls, real love and economic interests are mutually exclusive. As such, girls reproduce the materialistic discourse in which boys complain about girls and their lack of seriousness in love relationships. The sincerity of love feelings is judged by the absence of any other interests. That is why girls often talk about boys who engage in a relationship just to sleep with that girl. Economic or material interests, just as well as sex, function as disqualifiers for love and are disapproved of, because they are ‘not serious’.

This brings me to the notion of reciprocity, the second point. The 18 year-old Kiné in the same discussion explains that love has to come from two sides:

Kiné: [Some say] that you should give your heart to the one you love. But if you give him your heart, and he, he does not give his heart to you, that is not good.
K: So, he, he has to give his heart too?
Kiné: Yes.
(girl, 18, out-of-school, FGD 14)

Love has to be reciprocal and both partners have to give their heart. Love is also connected to the notion of exclusivity, as becomes clear from Seynabou in the same discussion:

Seynabou: For me, when somebody loves you and when he expresses it to you and you date each other during a long time, and then later he has another girlfriend. When you think about when he begged you to date with him, you ask yourself how he could have done that. If a boy does that to you, that means he does not love you.
(girl, 18, out-of-school, FGD 14)

According to Seynabou, infidelity is a sign of not loving someone. Being faithful is hence a

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64 The difference in understandings of love in my study and the one in the Casamance might be explained from the research location. It is also possible that these attitudes among the young have changed in time since Van der Laar conducted her fieldwork. Whatever the explanation, it is important to note that the idea of being together and sharing good and bad is part of the ideas young people in Dakar have about love.
central element in the way love is understood by these girls.

Thirdly then, love has to do with marriage. As Maty indicated above, the intention is to get married. Aida also links her feelings of love to getting married, to ‘having a project together’: a future, which ideally consists of marriage, children and a family. Although most young people indicate that it is important to have ‘a project’ together, most couples are actually not preparing a marriage at this age. Some girls are negotiating a marriage proposal with their parents, but as in Aida’s case the suitor, whose marriage proposal she is asked to consider, is not necessarily their boyfriend. In some cases, where the ‘real’ boyfriend is older than the girl, there might be actual talk of and preparations for a marriage. With respect to the meaning of love, however, it is more the general intention of having a project together that is important than the actual enactment of it.

In connection to this idealized perspective on love, girls have clear ideas about the ‘ideal boyfriend’. He should not only love and understand you, but also has to help you to solve your problems. Moreover, girls want their boyfriend to have character: he has to be well educated, of proper conduct, well dressed. The ideal boyfriend has to be ‘presentable’. A boy with personality earns respect, and it is important for girls that their boyfriend is respected. Moreover, he himself has to show respect to the girl and her family and maintain good relations with them. Girls therefore do not like their boyfriend to insult or hit people, or to be impolite. They also disapprove of boys who are running after all the girls, who go out all the time, who smoke and drink, and hang out with the wrong people. Girls especially have a poor opinion of boys who hang around in the street without work or income and who have no serious plans to reach something in the future: boys that, as is commonly said, “only sleep, wake up and drink their tea”. Girls like to see the ideal boyfriend as someone who works hard because he wants to reach something.

Moreover, an ideal boyfriend has to be caring and attentive. He has to spend time with his girlfriend, and should preferably always be available to her. He has to know how to express his love to her. Some girls say that when he loves you, he should do whatever it takes to please you, and has to agree with everything you do. Very important is that he has to be sincere and honest. Here the notion of exclusivity comes back. When another girl makes a move on him, he has to say ‘no’ to her and make clear that he already has a girlfriend. The ideal boyfriend therefore also has to be trustworthy and keep his promises. Girls complain that boys often make promises (like loving her only), which they do not respect later (when they start seeing other girls as well).

Another way to express his love is by literally taking care of her: by giving presents and gifts, and by giving money. The ideal is that he loves her so much, that the boyfriend wants to give everything he has to her. Also, he has to give her everything to please her and make her love him. In contrast to the incompatibility of love and material interests in the ideal notion of love, a boyfriend who gives presents and money is conceived by girls as desirable. It is important here that the girl does not want to ask for gifts, but that the boyfriend gives it of his own accord. Aida for instance makes clear that she does not ask Youssouf anything, but that he gives it to her on his own initiative. The boyfriend has to be one step ahead of her in this sense, and see what she needs and then offer her that as a gift.

Finally, the ideal boyfriend has to love her without asking something in return: he should not want to have sex with his girlfriend. If a boyfriend really loves his girl, than he should not desire to make love to her. This is related to another aspect of the ideal boyfriend. Girls want him to be supportive in the sense that he can give them conseil. Being respectable and of proper conduct himself, the boy also should encourage and help the girl to behave properly. As such, he can help her with her problems. In this line of thinking, he should not make her do ‘bad things’. The girl and boy have to encourage each other to live
their lives in a respectable manner, and having sex before marriage does not fit into that picture. If a boy really loves a girl, then he should respect her and her virginity. Girls often say that he has to love you like his sister. He has to love his girlfriend with all his heart, and he should not do her any harm and damage her reputation by having sex with her. Like with the boys who speak of the 'real' girlfriend, love and sex are also by girls seen as being incompatible.

Why talk about love?
Of course, the way girls define love in terms of love, fidelity, exclusivity and abstinence is an ideal. Reality, however, is harsh and shows a different face and girls’ actual intimate relationships contrast with this idealized love. For example, girls do not always intend to marry their current boyfriend. Money and material gains play a substantial role in the relationships, whether the girl asks for it herself or whether they are given on the initiative of the boyfriend. The definition of the ideal boyfriend who gives money and presents already deviates from the ideal of love which disconnects ‘real’ love from material interests. Another contrast between reality and the ideal of love is that relationships are not always, or often not, exclusive: both boys and girls have multiple partners and in that sense are not faithful. Finally, the discrepancy manifests itself in the ambiguous link between sex and love in practice. Although girls make an effort to deny sexual activities, they might in some cases have sex with boys, as I will explore in more detail later in this chapter.

The discrepancies between ideal love and daily life reality also comes forward in the complaints girls voice about boys and love. Just like boys complain about the lack of seriousness of girls, girls complain that boys (and other girls) often only enter into relations ‘for fun’. For example, after having discussed what love means, Mame says:

Some [boys] show their love. Those who are really sincere and who tell the truth and who prefer the truth, they show their love. But the majority, however, only wants to have fun (s’amuser).
(girl, 18, out-of-school, FGD 14)

Girls complain that boys are only interested in one thing – sex - and that they do not treat girls seriously and with respect. They also complain that boys are often having different girlfriends at the same time, or are not giving them enough attention. Generally speaking, there is a lot of deception and disappointment among girls about the way boys approach and treat them in relations. A specific and often heard complaint is that boys talk about their sexual experiences with a particular girl. Whereas girls have an interest in keeping their sexual affairs quiet, boys often talk with their friends about their sexual experiences in order to show their masculinity. This makes girls dependent on the discretion of boys for safeguarding their sexual secrets, and protecting their reputation. Apart from revealing sexual activity of girls, boys can also claim to have had sex with a girl, when actually this is not the case.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how boys complain about the materialism of girls. This means that both girls and boys are disappointed and not satisfied with the reality of their relationships. The climate between girls and boys in the field of relationships is characterised by a lot of mistrust and manque de confiance between the sexes. This has also been noted by Van der Laar (1995) in reference to youth in the Casamance, South Senegal. She explains this from the way marriages and relations between women and men were
structured in the past, in which parents, in the broadest sense, arranged marriages. With marriage representing a tie between families, rather than between individuals, and with marriage having economic functions (see also Chapter 3), an emotional bond between spouses was not necessary nor important. In fact, “the limited verbal communication within the couple is a way to preserve the unity and interest of the social group” (M’Baye 1988: 142). Affective ties between individuals could be a threat to the marriage system (Ibid.). The consequent orientation of both the husband and the wife towards their own families implied that “distrust of the spouse was the predominant rule” (Van der Laar 1995: 164). Even though changes in marriage and relationships place more value on the emotional connection between partners (to which I will pay more attention below), the ambiguities that arise out of such processes of change create insecurities for both girls and boys. These feed into already existing distrust between the sexes and can lead to the complaints about the lack of seriousness and sincerity that both girls and boys voice.

Looking at the disappointing reality of girls’ intimate relationships with boys, the question is why girls have such high expectations of love and boyfriends. This can be understood by looking at the differential importance of friendships and marriage for girls and boys. Chapter 3 showed how friendship seems to be more reliable for boys than for girls. Boys often have long term friendships dating from their childhood, where they find assistance to sort out problems and realize their goals. By contrast, girls complain about female friends not keeping secrets, which may harm their reputation. These gendered differences regarding the importance and role of friendship make that relationships with boys can be important for girls in terms of the help that boyfriends can provide in case the girl has a problem. Since her female friends have less options to help her out (because they have less access to money, and because they have less room to manoeuvre in public space), the girl expects more from her boyfriend. By contrast, boys do not turn to their girlfriends when they are facing problems, but ask their male friends for help. Relationships are also valuable for girls because they are a step in the direction of getting married. This carries substantial weight considering that, for girls, marriage is the main route to becoming adult and being taken serious (see also Chapter 3). This is not the case for boys, as they can be taken serious as a man without being married, and have multiple pathways to becoming a man. Given the gendered importance of both friendship and marriage, girls invest a lot of energy in finding the right partner (see also Van der Laar 1995). That explains why love is so important for girls, and why they have such high expectations, that are not easily realized in their daily lives.

Talking about love also has to be understood in the sense that the love discourse gives voice to some specific preoccupations of girls (and boys) in contemporary Dakar. A similar point has been made by Larkin (1997) who discusses how young people in Nigeria negotiate frictions with their parents about marriage, love and partners.65 “The real social tensions over love and responsibility, over individual desire and social control” are central to these frictions (p. 418). Similar shifts in marriage relations - and the consequent ambiguities for young people and their parents - are also prominent in Senegal and Dakar, as I discussed in Chapter 3. Right now I want to draw attention to the point that the notion of love is an important way through which younger generations can express their view

65 Larkin analyses the popularity of Indian films in Hausa popular culture of Nigerian youth, and highlights how “characters in Indian films have to negotiate the tension between traditional life and modernity in ways that Hausa, in a similar postcolonial situation, can sympathize with” (1997: 413). The tensions between individual desire and familial obligation are a central concern of both Indian films and their Nigerian audiences, and this explains the popularity of Hindi films in the Hausa context.
on relationships and marriage, and as such differentiate themselves from their parents’ generation and from how things went in the early days.

When parents nowadays receive a marriage proposal for one of their daughters, the girl in question is often asked for her opinion. In contrast to the early days, when statements like “I do not love him” were said not to exist, girls can now decline a proposal by saying that they do not love the suitor. The meaning of the term ‘love’ in this context is ambiguous, but the fact that it is being used already indicates a change with respect to the past. Talking of love becomes a way of expressing that the girl does see a future in the marriage and that the suitor is a partner she can imagine as her husband. In order to make an assessment whether a marriage will work out, or put differently, whether they love each other, girls nowadays prefer to know their future husband prior to the marriage. What do responses in terms of “I love him” or “I do not love him” signify? Consider what Aminata says about how she got married:

Aminata: I had a cousin from my mother’s side who wanted to marry me. My mother did not want this marriage, because she did not relate very well to his mother. Consequently, my father preferred to have me marry another cousin, before the first one would come and ask for my hand, because they could not really refuse such a proposal. [...] But I was not OK with this, because I loved this first one. [...] So, in the beginning I did not want it, but my mother and my girlfriends told me that I had to choose the boy that loved me, instead of the boy that I loved myself.

A: Why did you prefer the other?
Aminata: We never dated each other, but I just loved him more than the other one. He is more presentable (présentable). [...] He is more handsome. Anyway, I preferred him.

A: How do you feel about being married to the man that you did not love that much?
Aminata: I said to myself that it is destiny, the will of God.

A: How did your father discuss it with you, and how did you react?
Aminata: When he came to talk to me about it, I made him understand that I did not love him. He told me that I played l’enfant gâtée (the spoiled child). After that I did not talk about it anymore. My mother agreed with my father, and she said to me that the family of the other cousin was too complicated and that I would run risks with them. I thought it over and over again, and later I came to agree with the situation. Now I love my husband.

(young woman in marriage process, 17, out-of-school, INT 20)

On the one hand, girls speak in terms of love to refer to an emotional bond. But it is obvious that feelings of love are not the only base on which girls take decisions about marriage. In fact, it is not uncommon for girls to decide to marry somebody else than the boyfriend that they are very much in love with. “I do not love him” or “I do love him” are therefore not only expressions of desire and love, but can also be express concerns about for instance status, money, age, and family relations that impact on the proposed marriage. Even though these factors do not concern feelings of love, whether or not the marriage is accepted is phrased in terms of love. That also suggests that love is the result of marriage, rather than its cause.

The term love has increasingly become an expression of individuality and individual choice and desire, notwithstanding the actual influence of the parents. Other instances at which this becomes clear is when young people dismiss the importance of ethnicity or

66 Aminata was part of the research group, but it was only during the focus group discussions that I realized that she was already married (see chapter 2; section ‘Young people participating in this study’).
caste in partner choice for both marital and premarital relationships: by referring to love. Moreover, young people indicate that love is one of the reasons why they want to get involved in intimate relationships prior to marriage. In short, the love discourse signifies the views of younger generations on matters of premarital relationships and sexuality as well as marriage; views that differ from and conflict with older generations. The tensions between different generations are often framed in terms of tensions between tradition and modernity, in which love and individuality have become associated with being modern, and social responsibility, family obligation and control are considered as signs of tradition (cf. Larkin 1997). This would suggest that love did not exist in the past, which is not the case. It has been pointed out with respect to for instance Senegal that the earlier mentioned limited communication in the couple – in comparison to the richer communication within the lineage – did not mean that "affection and esteem (l'estime) did not exist within the couple" (M'Baye 1988: 142). In fact, "the attachment between marriage partners [was] desirable, although not as an essential value" (Ibid.: 142). This shows that "[love] is interpreted differently in every time and culture, and by various groups" (Van der Laar 1995: 159) and there are no definitions of love that suit all ages or cultures (Beall & Sternberg 1995). The specific meaning of the love discourse as it is voiced by young people in contemporary Dakar point to the generation conflict over marriage and premarital relationships. In combination with an association of love in popular thinking to western ideas about (pre)marital relationships, the individuality expressed in references to love gives it a 'modern' ring (see also Van Eerdewijk 2006 for a reflection on the role of love). In sum, there are several reasons that explain why the love discourse is so strongly represented in the girls’ narratives on their intimate relationships with boys. On the one hand, it points to the value that such premarital relationships have for girls given the limitations of female friendships and the central role marriage plays in being considered a woman. On the other hand, the love discourse expresses a sense of individuality and carries a connotation of modernity in relation to older generations and the past.

3 Money, presents and negative judgements

The second central element in the relationships of girls is money. Aida indicated that all three boyfriends give her money and presents. This seems to be in contrast with the view that love did not exist in African (or other non-Western) cultures in the past has been persistent in scientific literature as well. But despite the conventional thought that “romantic love is unique to Euro-American culture” (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 149), it has been documented that “romantic love occurs in greater or lesser amounts throughout the world” (Rosenblatt 1967: 479). Jankowiak & Fischer (1992) also come to the conclusion that love is a “near-universal” (1992: 154). They analysed a sample of 166 cultures, derived from the Standard Cross Cultural Sample (SCCS) of P.G. Murdock & D. White. These 166 societies were coded on the following five indicators (p. 152): (1) accounts depicting personal anguish and longing, (2) use of love songs or folklore that highlight the motivations behind romantic involvement, (3) elopement due to mutual affection, (4) native accounts affirming the existence of passionate love, and (5) the ethnographer’s affirmation that romantic love is present. In 88.5 % of the studied cultures, at least one of these indicators was coded, and these cultures were labelled as ‘love present’. Although I am critical about these quantitative studies on the SCCS, and about the definition of the indicators and of what was labelled as ‘love present’, and thus careful with respect to the conclusions Jankowiak & Fischer draw, I think this study is valuable in showing that expressions of romantic love are not restricted to western societies, but occur in other parts of the world as well.

In scientific literature, romantic love is also connected to modernity and capitalism. Love is strongly linked to moral individualism which is paramount to industrial capitalism, because it puts the individual above and against the claims of the group (Giddens 1992, Illouz 1997; Evans 2003; Spronk 2006).
incompatibility of material interests and ‘real’ love. But I will show in this section that the issue of love and money is rather ambiguous. Even though ideally material interests are considered a sign that the relation is not based on ‘real’ love, it turned out that giving money and presents are an important characteristic of the ideal boyfriend. In the context of their daily lives, girls expect their boyfriend to express his sincere love by financially and materially meeting the needs of his girlfriend. In this sense, Aida’s serious partner Youssouf fits the expectations of the ideal boyfriend. According to the idealized notion of love, the fact that Aida accepts Youssouf’s gifts, would make it questionable whether she really loves him. It would be a point for other girls to question Aida’s love. But Aida makes clear that there is ‘real’ love between Youssouf and her, by stressing that she never asked him for anything, but that he gives her whatever he thinks she needs on his own initiative. In other words, she is not in this relationship for money, but because of her ‘real’ love for Youssouf. His money and presents are an expression of his care and attention to her rather than a sign of her materialistic interests. Because love is not Aida’s principal motivation in her relationships with the other two boyfriends, she makes less effort to deny the exchange element of them. Her short answer to my question whether they give her money underlines this: “of course” they do.

The vast majority of the girls in this study receive money and presents from their boyfriend(s). Girls value the presents and money highly, as is expressed by Sophia, who is seeing two boyfriends:

Sophia: My boyfriends do a lot of things for me, they give me money, they offer me presents.
A: This is maybe a bit an indiscrete question, but how much do they give you every month? Or do they give on an irregular basis?
Sophia: One gives me every month 5 to 10,000 CFA (7.5 to 15 euro). Sometimes, on special occasions like festivities such as Tabaski or Korité he can give me 30,000 (45 euro). And he also just gives me money from time to time.
A: Do you think that the money and the presents are important?
Sophia: Yes. I think that a boyfriend should take good care of his girlfriend, because when he becomes her husband, he will continue this habit.
A: Is it more difficult for you to refuse to sleep with a boyfriend when he has given you money?
Sophia: No, not at all. Because the money and the gifts, that is normal.
(girl, 20, out-of-school, INT 18)

Even though Sophia had indicated earlier in the interview that she does not have the intention to marry any one of her boyfriends, she explained the importance of the generosity of a boyfriend in relation to his possible future behaviour as a husband. But in fact, all boyfriends are expected be generous and to take good care of their girlfriends.

How much money does ‘taking good care’ imply? The amounts given can vary considerably. Some girls receive small gifts on an occasional basis, such as a drink or a pair of earrings. Other popular gifts are perfume, or money for the hairdresser, which is not cheap. Some girls enjoy being taken out by their boyfriends to eat a hamburger or pizza, so called ‘modern’ food in a take-away restaurant where a couple can have some snacks and drinks for about 5,000 francs CFA (7.50 euro). Poorer boyfriends have less to offer, but some girls are dating boyfriends with regular jobs and salaries and in such cases the amounts given are considerable. With a regular salary the boyfriend can give the girl money on a regular basis. One girl who was going to marry her fiancé who lived in Europe received 30,000 francs CFA (45 euro) every month, but this was not an amount that most girls could count on. Van der Laar (1995: 156-157) argues that for the girls that she worked with in the...
Casamance region, the money and presents from boyfriends form the main source of income. She noticed that girls in their teens and early twenties spend a lot of time and energy on their appearances: clothing, jewellery, make-up, hair styling. I also found that girls in Dakar attach great importance to their looks, which signify their status as well as their attractiveness to men. This is confirmed by Nyamnjoh who notes that Dakarois girls “invest remarkably in making themselves beautiful and desirable” (2005: 310). There is a lot of competition among girls in this respect. Van der Laar calculated that some girls spend 25 hours a week on their looks and personal care, and that they need an estimated 15 to 20,000 francs CFA (22 to 30 euro) a month to pay for this (p. 156).

In order to be able to make these expenses, boyfriends and relationships form an important source of income for girls. Generally speaking, girls have limited access to money and income and they depend on their parents for housing, food and basic clothing, and school fees in case the girl attends school. Some girls have their school fees paid for by older brothers or sisters or other relatives with a job, or who live abroad. Such relatives sometimes also give them money for personal expenses. Generally speaking it is not easy for girls in this age group to get a job and earn a stable and substantial income. The most obvious occupation for young girls is being a domestic servant (bonne): employment that often entails long and hard working hours for a (very) low salary and little job security. It is mainly the poorer girls, or girls from the rural areas, who are employed as such. And even though earning their own money can provide them with some independence and mobility, the salary is often insufficient to meet their basic needs. The gifts and money generated from boyfriends and relationships therefore form an important source of revenue for girls in a context where they have little access to money.69 Boyfriends and relationships enable girls not only to take care of their personal needs, but also to contribute occasionally to family expenses. Their position in the family will improve if they, whenever they have the means to do so, take their responsibility to pay certain expenses instead of spending all their money on themselves and their looks.

The material aspects of the girls’ relations are judged very negatively in Dakar. By referring to the ideal of ‘real’ love and its assumed incompatibility with money and financial gains, the girls’ material interests are found to be highly disturbing and problematic. The previous chapter showed that boys complain about girls’ materialist behaviour. But parents, teachers, and many others in Dakar also complain about the girls’ materialism. The negative judgements are often linked to the existence of multiple partnerships (mbaxal) and the occurrence of premarital sex: the money is said to draw girls into premarital relationships, which are said to bring with them the risks of improper behaviour, promiscuous sex (which is considered to be all sex outside marriage), loss of virginity prior to marriage, unwanted and often unrecognized pregnancies, single mothers, lost marriage perspectives, and damaged family reputations. The assumed materialism of girls has as such become a contested subject.

Interestingly, girls themselves also circulate the materialistic discourse and accuse other girls of having a boyfriend just for his money, especially when they see that girl wearing new clothes or having the latest fashionable hairdress. The critique on other girls is voiced with the complaint that true love does not exist. As such, girls also connect the

69 It is interesting in this respect to consider that Van der Laar originally intended to carry out a study on “the economic activities of young unmarried women in the south-Senegalese city of Ziguinchor”, but that her “interest in the economic position of young urban women led [her] as a matter of course to lovers relations, broken promises of marriage and unmarried motherhood”, as the young women she encountered “were far more interested in [these] kinds of topics” (1995: 1).
alleged material and financial interest of other girls to having multiple boyfriends and not abstaining until marriage. With their complaints about other girls, girls themselves reproduce important elements of the dominant - male centred - discourse on female premarital sexuality. They do so in an attempt to construct their own identity and establish themselves as a girl with 'character'; in being critical of others, they can display that they understand what a good girl is supposed to be like. The effect of the critical attitudes girls have towards each other is a strong normalisation of behaviour amongst girls. This makes that, even amongst themselves, girls do not often display what kind of relationships they are actually involved in, how much money goes around in it, and to what extent they are engaging in sexual activities.

But girls obviously also have to defend themselves against accusations of materialism. I already mentioned several strategies for this. One way is to argue, as Sophia does, that "it is normal" that boyfriends give you presents when they care about you. Another way is Aida's point that she does not ask for gifts, but that Youssouf takes the initiative himself to provide them. Criticising and accusing other girls is another strategy to redirect attention from the girl herself to others. Keeping details of relationships to themselves and showing good character is another defense against accusations. Moreover, girls explicitly deny a connection between money, presents and sex, such as Aida does when she said that the two boyfriends give her money "for nothing", she means that she does not have sex with them in return. Finally, in relation to boys, girls can return his gifts by giving him special attention, for instance buy a present, or prepare food or drinks. As such, the girl is already paying back some of his gifts, and this makes it more difficult to claim other returns such as sex.

It is clear that the precarious status of money in relationships is largely based on its assumed relation to sex, which is the final point of Aida's experiences that requires detailed consideration. Ideally, for girls love does not go with sex. And ideally, girls remain virgins until marriage. Aida says that she does not have sex with Youssouf. And what about the other two? She says she does not sleep with them, but I am not sure whether this is completely true. One reason for my doubts is that boys can be very persuasive in their requests for sex, especially when they have been giving presents and money to a girl. In that respect it is also interesting to note that Aida says that negotiating sex is much harder with the two boyfriends in Dakar, than with Youssouf. Secondly, the fact that Aida indicates that she does not want to talk about it makes me suspicious, as if there is something that she wants to hide. Aida did not bother about hiding the fact that she has multiple boyfriends, nor that she gets money and presents from them, yet she explicitly avoids the topic of sex. Finally, when I ask how she would react if asked to have sex, she ends up talking about the fights and arguments she has with these boyfriends about sex. Of course, these are my doubts and speculations and it might well be the case that Aida is not sexually active with any of her boyfriends. Her refusal to talk about it reveals the impact of the virginity norm and points to the stigmatizing effects of the labelling by boys of 'real' girlfriends and 'easy' girls. Most girls, like Aida, avoid to talk about their sexual activities and it is difficult to discuss the matter of sex with them. These difficulties as well as the question whether and when girls have sex are taken up in the following sections.

4 What girls do not talk about: sex

In contrast to the boys, who were rather eager to speak of their sexual experiences, it was difficult to have girls talk about sex, especially when it came to their own experiences. The
vast majority of the girls in this study denied to be sexually active, and either claimed to be a virgin or indicated that they did not want to talk about sexual experiences. In first instance, this seems to constitute a problem for my inquiries, as I have only very limited information that directly deals with the sexual activities of girls, and cannot analyse the sex accounts from girls as I did for boys. At a second instance, however, this is already a finding in itself, and seen like this, the ways in which girls speak, or maybe more correctly, avoid to speak about sex, is a rich source of information on their sexuality. By listening carefully to what they are saying, by reading between the lines, and by being sensitive to small clues, an understanding of when, why and how girls engage in sex did grow. Here I attempt to provide the reader insights into this process of teasing out information. I start with showing how difficult it is for girls to talk about sex, and how discussions on such issues are being cut off. This will be followed by the responses of the girls to a hypothetical story in which a girl does have sex. In section 5, I explore the first cracks in the dominant discourse that silences female premarital sexuality by considering some glimpses of pleasure. The issues of female sexual desire and pleasure are further explored in section 6 by taking a closer look at the narratives of girls that did have sex. Section 7 discusses in what ways pleasure and desire point to sexual agency of girls. In taking these different steps, I hope to generate insights into the sexual experiences of girls. When do they have sex, and with whom? For what reasons? And what do they think of it?

“You should not even think about it”

In the first group of school attending girls that I worked with in Dakar, I immediately experienced how unacceptable it was for them to talk or even think about sex. Consider the following discussion that unfolded in reaction to our question whether love can be a reason to sleep with a boyfriend:

Mariem: That can not be an excuse! If you really, if you believe in God, and if you read the Coran, there are certain things that every time, you should not do. You should not even try to imagine this or think about it. You think of your parents.

Aissatou: But me, if a boy asks me to have sex with him, I tell him ‘no’. And when he comes back again

Mariem: It is the last time. (She finishes the sentence for Aissatou)

Ramata: If I really love him-

Mariem: If I really love him, I will fight against that love.

K: And when you do not succeed in fighting it, in winning?

Mariem: I disappear.

Aissatou: I say to myself, if someone really loves you, he will not ask to sleep with you.

Mariem: Exactly!

Ramata: But sometimes, but sometimes-

Mariem: Sometimes what? (She cuts Ramata off)

Ramata: But sometimes he loves you, but he asks to make love to him-

Mariem: So, he does not love you. (She cuts her off again)

Ramata: Oh yes.

Mariem: No, no, no, it is very rare.

Ramata: It is rare, but-

Mariem: I, I say to myself, what do you do? (She cuts Ramata off again) Normally he shouldn’t even say certain things. Normally, if he really loves you, he should not even ask you to sleep with him. Outside marriage, it is not normal. I say he does not love you. If he really loves you, he would have thought of your parents, or of the problems you will have with them afterwards.

(girls, 17 to 19, in-school, FGD2)
Aissatou and Mariem dominate this discussion, as they have dominated most of the conversations in this group of five girls. Aissatou is one of those girls that always wear a veil, and this shows that she is an *Ibadou* - that is that she belongs to the relatively small, yet visible group of Muslims who believe that they practice the real Islam. Mariem also attaches a lot of importance to religion, but like the majority of Muslim girls in Senegal is not veiled. The third girl, Ramata, is Muslim as well, but she is much less focused on and interested in religious matters than the other two. Together, Mariem and Aissatou give voice to the dominant view that girls should remain virgins till marriage, and that they should not even think about sexual matters. It is very difficult for the other three girls in the group to stand up against them and voice a different point of view. In fact, Ramata is the only one who speaks up, but it is clear that she does not get much space to say what is on her mind. She tries to say that “if you really love him”, you might have sex with him. But Aissatou and Mariem argue against her that especially when he loves you, he should not even think about sex. In line with the earlier discussed character of the ideal boyfriend, they make the case that when he asks you to sleep with him, that definitely means that he does not really love you. Ramata in a way understands what they are trying to say, but she is looking for an opening, some space to see things differently: “but sometimes, he loves you, but he asks you to make love to him”. Her attempt to open up the norm does however not stand a chance against Mariem and Aissatou.

This discussion clearly demonstrates the normalization with respect to female premarital sexuality: prior to marriage it is “not normal” and should on no account take place. The quoted discussion not only highlights the overt process of normalization, but also the far stretching impact of the dominant virginity norm. Ramata is the only one of the three girls besides Aissatou and Mariem who dares to speak up, but she cannot break through. Moreover, after having been punished severely by Aissatou and Mariem, she keeps quiet and leaves it at that for the moment. The discussion is illustrative of almost all conversations I had with girls about sex and sexual experiences. None of the 25 girls that participated in the in total 12 focus group discussions (with girls) admitted that they were sexually active, or even could be sexually active prior to marriage. In the individual interviews, only one girl acknowledged to have slept with her boyfriend. Apart from her, the only two other girls who talked about their premarital sexual experiences were teenage mothers, who because of their pregnancies could not deny having had sexual intercourse.

Somehow I felt that there had to be more to girls’ intimate lives than this silence and denial of their sexual experiences. For one thing, the narratives of girls like Aida about their boyfriends were not really prudish and I felt it was unlikely that they had never actually had sex, or at least had been at in situations where they had almost engaged in sex. Moreover, the silence and denial did not correspond with the statistical surveys that did indicate a level of sexual activity of unmarried girls (see Chapter 3). Moreover, that premarital pregnancies are not an uncommon phenomenon also suggested that girls are sexually active. The sex accounts of the boys, although they have to be treated with caution, also point to girls engaging in sex. In addition to this, I was puzzled by the silence and denial of girls because their non-verbal expressions did seem to carry a sexual connotation. Many girls for instance spend a lot of time on their looks to make sure that they make a good impression on men and wear clothes (both Senegalese and western style) that are

70 Whereas veiling as it is commonly seen in Arabic contexts is only practiced by the *Ibadous* in Senegal, and not by the majority of Muslims, it is common for women to cover their head with a *sjawl* or a piece of cloth that matches their dress and is folded according to the latest fashion.
at least quite feminine. Moreover, girls sometimes also visibly wear sexy details such as a bin-bin, which is a chain worn around the hips and belly which is said to incite men because of the sounds it makes when having sex. At the beaches, which surely are spaces where more explicit bodily expression of sexuality occurs, it is intriguing to note how girls and women are continuously putting on and rearranging their pagnes (wrap-around skirts), which are considered sexy because they cover the women’s thighs but simultaneously allow for their uncovering.

The most explicit example are the events at which women and girls dance. These can be baptism or marriage ceremonies, or afternoon dance events organized by women themselves (known as sabaar), a night out in a nightclub or dancing, as well as dancing competitions at schools or political campaigns (Heath 1994; see also Nyamnjoh 2005: 312). One evening such a dance event took place in the neighbourhood where I lived and I was impressed by the crowd that had gathered and the performances and interactions I came to observe. The crowd mainly consisted of women and girls who had formed a circle. At one end the drummers, who were all men, were seated, and behind them some men had gathered to watch the women dancing. The musicians would play their drums, and the women and girls would one by one jump into the middle of the circle to dance. Besides the competition between girls and women on who was the best dancer, there was a clear interaction between the male drummers and female dancers. The drummers incite women to dance in specific ways and see how far they will go, whereas the dancers also push the men to play certain rhythms and music. Such dance events are a play of “advances and retreats”, and “the focus of both condemnation and enthusiastic performance” (Heath 1994: 94). The interaction and especially the movements of the women, which are often sexually suggestive, invoke hilarious reactions and screams and laughter from the audience. Interestingly, even girls wearing trousers would wrap a pagne over their trousers, because the movements of the legs opens up the pagne that covers and uncovers the thighs. The dance events can be understood as an expression of female autonomy from male authority in the sense that women’s suggestive motions take place “outside the direct control of husbands or other male household heads” (Ibid: 96). As one of my neighbours explained, such dance events are an opportunity for girls to show their sexual worth. This also makes participation in those events contested, as the girls’ bodily expression of sexuality conflicts with the general sexual restraint that is expected from women and girls. Mariem for instance clearly pointed out to me that it was not appropriate to dance on such an event that was organized at her school. Views like hers make that women dance with varying degrees of restraint, depending on the specific context in which the dance event takes place, that is whether it is organized by and for women, whether it is part of a political campaign, or for instance takes place in a nightclub (Heath 1994). These variations notwithstanding, the dance events and the way I saw girls and women in Dakar dance at various occasions obviously were an expression of their otherwise silenced sexuality. The fun that girls and women had in dancing and the encouragement to try out suggestive movements also pointed to the pleasurable side of female sexuality.

This fun in relation to female sexuality also clearly comes forward in the sharing of seductive techniques among girls and women. Dakar, or Senegal for that matter, knows a market for seductive techniques and items including special incenses, bin-bins and different styles of sexy clothing and underwear (such as sexy lingerie, or crocheted pagnes worn under traditional dress). A study noted how “these products are said ‘to bewitch and turn men’s heads’, making them lose reason” so that men “vibrate with pleasure” (Nyamnjoh 2005: 308, 300). Women have fun sharing their experiences with these techniques amongst each other. One evening when I came home in the dark my female
neighbours called me in. They were in a hilarious mood, and did not want my husband to
join in because they wanted to show me two items: a negligee decorated with beads and a
pair of panties made of beads only. In particular the beaded panties were a specialty and
my neighbours tried to convince me to buy and wear them for my husband. They said that
these would make him give me anything in the world, and even beyond. When I sugges-
ted that the beaded panties were maybe not too comfortable to wear, they laughed and
made clear that I had to do something special to please my husband. I never bought the
panties nor the negligee, but I heard later that a recently married woman had in order to
ensure a good start of her marriage. The explicit discussions of the necessity to please your
partner as well as the laughter and jokes that accompanied the advice suggested to me that
sex is something pleasurable for women. Moreover, it also showed that women exercise a
considerable amount of agency when it comes to sex. I will come back to this matter of
agency later. For now, the point is that the dancing, the seductive techniques and hilarious
discussions about men and sex revealed another story than the silence and denial that
I generally encountered in discussions. This convinced me to further explore the sexual
experiences of unmarried Dakarois girls. Because it was so difficult for girls to explicitly
talk about their own sexual experiences, my assistant and I came up with the ‘hypothe-
tical case’ as a strategy to let girls talk about sex.

A hypothetical case

During the focus group discussions with girls, we introduced a hypothetical story of a girl
who lived a life like the girls we were talking to, and then we asked them to explain her
behaviour. The girl in the story eventually accepts to sleep with her boyfriend. By using
this hypothetical case, we hoped to create some room where the girls could talk about why
‘girls like them’ would engage in sex without having to reveal their personal experiences.
With the hypothetical story, that gave us the opportunity to direct the discussion towards
the concrete situation of a sexually active girl, we hoped to learn more about such non-
normative realities. In the next quote we are still talking with the same group of girls
as above.

A: So, we have a story for you.
K: Right, there is this couple that has been together, that has been dating each other since a long
time. It is really the ideal boyfriend whom everybody would want to have. A boyfriend who is
nice, good, polite. OK, he works, or something like that. Anyway, he does everything for the girl.
When there is a party, he buys her clothes, when they go somewhere, he pays for her, etcetera,
etcetera. In short, they are supergood together, but not yet married. So, one day the boy asks the
girl to sleep with him. But the girl says ‘no’. For a long time, a period of time, he asks her the
same thing, but the girl refuses. They however stay together. Then one day, the girl accepts to
sleep with him. The boyfriend, however, has not taken precautions: he does not use a condom, so
they have sex without protection. So, they make love without a contraceptive, without protec-
tion, anything. OK. So, what we want to know, after hearing this story, how do you see the
change of behaviour of the girl. According to you, why, after having refused for a long time, she
accepts one day? Why does she accept? Will she make love to the boyfriend again? Will she ask
for a condom the next time? What will their relationship look like under these new conditions?
A: So, we start at the beginning.
K: Yes, we start at the beginning. According to you, why, after having refused for a long time, the
girl changes her position one day and agrees to sleep with him?
Fatou: Maybe she is afraid to loose him.
Mariem: Or maybe because she is asking questions to herself. She says to herself, every
time I ask him, he gives me, so I should not refuse this. There is even a proverb in Wolof
In the hypothetical story it was the boy who asked his girlfriend to sleep with him and the girl who initially refused. We designed the story in this way, because generally speaking, boys take the initiative, at least in a direct and overt sense. As I discussed in Chapter 4, boys court a girl, ask her out, ask the girl to sleep with them, and/or create a situation in which one thing leads to another. Girls are supposed to be sexually innocent, and therefore cannot overtly express their interest in boys and/or sex, although they surely have their indirect ways (les petites manières). When they do take the initiative, their behaviour is easily labelled as ‘provocative’. Like the girl in the story who initially says ‘no’, girls will always start with refusing sex, because they have to show their character by controlling and preserving themselves. By denying their sexuality, girls become respectable girls that have a place in society. In the negotiations over sex, the gender identities of both the potent boy and the virgin girl are, and have to be, established.

After her initial refusal, the girl in the story accepts to have sex. The girls in the different groups suggested a range of explanations for why she might do so. A first reason mentioned is that the girl is afraid to loose him. Refusing to sleep with the boyfriend might make him break up the relationship and find another girlfriend. By accepting sex, a girl can safeguard her relation. Safeguarding the relation can be important in terms of, on the one hand, the girl’s feelings of love for him, and on the other hand, the money and presents he gives her. Sometimes boys play with this fear and ask girls to prove that they really love them by sleeping with them.

Money and gifts play a role as well, as Mariem tries to point out with the proverb that says that you have to be in the shade for someone who is in the sun for you.\(^{71}\) Mariem tries to say that you have to do something in return for someone who does a lot for you, i.e. the one in the sun who is making an effort for you. It means that if a boyfriend gives you money, presents, or takes you out, you have to give him something in return: sex. Exchange can hence be a reason to have sex. The way Mariem speaks of this proverb makes clear that

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\(^{71}\) In Wolof: kule nekkal ci naaj bi, ge nekkal ko ci ker gi, and translated into French: celui qui est au soleil pour toi, tu dois être à l’ombre pour lui.
it is not unusual or exceptional to reason in this way. On the contrary, she makes it sound very straightforward that a girl sleeps with a boyfriend in return for what he has given her. This also resonates with the ways boys talk about sex and exchange, as I showed in the previous chapter. But the connection between money and sex is not always that straightforward, as I will address later.

Another reason for having sex is found in the complex of trust and love, but how these two elements relate to sex is a rather complicated matter. As I showed earlier, with the dominant view of premarital abstinence, the argument is that when a boyfriend really loves a girl, he should not even think about having sex with her out of respect for the girl and her parents. In daily life, the contradiction between love and sex often gets blurred and the link becomes rather ambiguous. It is important here to distinguish his love from her love. Let me start with his love. Two girls explain that confidence in this context refers to believing that the boy speaks the truth, that he is sincere and does not fool around with you. He is to be trusted, in the sense that he loves you and there is the expectation that he will marry you one day. I showed earlier how Ramata breaks away from the dominant view that love and sex cannot go together, by saying that “sometimes he loves you, but asks to sleep with you”. Ramata is suggesting that if he loves you, he can enjoy flirting and kissing with you, and he can ‘even’ want to have sex with you, to make love with you. Ramata cannot say this literally and explicitly in the group, but her remarks provide an opening for seeing the link between (his) love and sex not merely in a negative and constraining way. In this alternative view, love and sex coalesce and fuse. They are not in contrast to, but in tune with each other.

However, the sincerity of his love needs to be tested first, and that is one of the reason why girls refuse sex, at least initially. As girls see it, the boy’s wish for sex is not necessarily an expression of his love, and he might also just be interested in sleeping with you, without really loving you. The following excerpt from another group of girls discussing the same hypothetical case shows how testing his love is linked to proving her love:

- [The girl] realizes that this guy really loves her, spending enormous, is making enormous expenses for her, she realizes that he really loves her. She can start now making love to him.
  
  [...]

- [She accepts] because, I think, the boy has really proven to her that he loves her. [...] He really loves her, right. And now it is the girl’s turn to prove this boy that she really loves him. It is because of this that when the boy asked the girl to sleep with him, that she refused. And now the girl can say that the boy has proven that he really loves me, and now I am going to do the same thing to him in order to show him that I love him.
  
  [...]

- I think she accepts to make love with him in order to please him (lui faire plaisir) and not to loose him, in order to take her turn and ‘give him his change’ (rendre la monnaie de sa pièce), to prove him that she really loves him.
  
  [...]

- But the girl can say that the man is kind to her, I am not always going to let him be nice to me, but I also, I am going to try to do, to be nice to him. Since he spends always without growing tired, without stopping, everything I ask from him, he gives it to me, and even when I do not ask him and he knows that it is good for me, he will provide it. So, I am also going to provide something.
  
  [...]

- She has thought about it, and maybe she has confidence in him and she knows now that the boy really loves her, because if he would have been another type of boy he would have left her, he would have abandoned her.
  
  [...]

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- [But sometimes] it is not only love that interests him.
- I know, but he, if his intention is only to sleep with me-
- and to then to dump you-
- right, if he does not have sex with me and he dumps me, well, then he did not really love me.

(girls, 18 to 20, in-school, FGD 9)

A boy’s love is tested positively if the does not end the relationship when the girl refuses sex, but continues to see her. Having tested his love, it is now the girl’s turn to show the boyfriend her love, and one of the ways to do that is by sleeping with him. Her love then also becomes a reason to have sex, and again the two are not in conflict, but in tune.

The last discussion powerfully shows the interconnectedness of the different reasons for accepting sex: it is not either his love, or money, or her proof that explains why a girl accepts to sleep with her boyfriend. No, these factors are elements of an interconnected whole through which meaning is given to the relationship, or put differently, through which the meaningfulness of the relationship is constructed. It is important to establish the relationship as serious rather than ‘for fun’ or to ‘play around’ in. Boys prove their love by taking good care of the girl (amongst others, by giving money and presents to her) and by not leaving her when she is testing him by refusing sex. Girls prove their love by accepting sex. In the interconnectedness of money, sex and love, it is important to note that money or presents are not straightforwardly exchanged for sex, but are symbolic for the boyfriend’s care and attentiveness, in short, for his love (see also Dilger 2003: 83).

In investigating the reasons why girls have sex, an important question that needs to be addressed is how much space girls have to say ‘no’. By threatening to end the relationship boys put girls under pressure to reply positively to their wishes. The effectiveness of this threat is based on how badly the girl wants to continue dating this particular boy. How much does she love him? How much does she depend on his presents and money? And what are her chances of finding another relationship? Apart from assessing this value of the relationship, the girl also has to determine how much space she has to keep refusing sex. As discussed in the previous chapter, boys employ strategies to convince girls to sleep with them. This ranges from ‘sweet language’ to force and sometimes even violence. Sometimes boys mean what they say in their ‘sweet language’, but sometimes they do not and only say what a girl wants to hear (cf. Dilger 2003:37-39). Girls urge each other to be sceptical about boys’ smooth talk. Girls have to learn to distinguish between a ‘discourse of deceit’ and one of real love and sincere intentions of a boy, and not to give into sex when the boy is not serious. The pressure of the ‘sweet language’ used by boys does not make it an easy test for girls, but it would be too simple to argue that girls have no room to say ‘no’. It provides them with the opportunity to act out their proper feminine subjectivity and establish themselves as a ‘good girl’, and to test the patience and seriousness of the boy by making him wait.

When the ‘discourse of deceit’ loses all its sweetness, the pressure boys exercise becomes force. Violence is not a reason that is explicitly and voluntarily mentioned by the girls in the focus group discussions or individual interviews, but when asked about it, they indicate that it happens and that fear of violence can push a girl to have sex. In the former chapter however, boys themselves did provide insights into the role force and violence – insults, threats, operating in groups - can play in making girls have sex with them. Although concrete cases of violence, assault and rape are not easy to detect, studies have reported “intimate partner violence” in different African countries (Koenig et al. 2004; Erulkar 2004; Lary et al. 2004; Watts & Mayhew 2004). The limited information in my study nevertheless points to the inequality of the negotiations between girls and boys on
sex. The gendered power relations between girls and boys are often disadvantageous to the former. Saying ‘no’ and refusing sex is not always a possibility.

5 Glimpses of pleasure

Talk about girls’ sexual experiences is loaded with the dominant virginity discourse that does not leave them space to express their sexuality or be sexually active. The hypothetical case has proven to be a way through which girls can talk about girls’ sexuality. They can name different reasons to explain why girls engage in sex, and can produce an account of how love, money, proof of love, pressure play into this. The way the explanations are being repeated, reproduced and linked to each other in the discussions, gives momentum to the debate. This momentum illustrates that, despite the fact that they are discussing a hypothetical case, the interpretations that are provided do have resonance with the life-worlds, and maybe even experiences, of these girls. It is interesting to note that these reasons to explain sexual activity are however never valid for themselves. The explanations given can hardly be detached from the connotations of a ‘bad’ girl. The line between their reconstructed explanations and the notions of ‘loose’, ‘easy’, ‘weak’ or materialist girls is extremely thin, porous and permeable, which makes it far too dangerous for girls to apply these explanations openly to themselves. Sex then remains something ‘bad’ for girls to do, and is therefore treated as something other girls might do, but they themselves do not.

Yet, although girls themselves largely reproduce dominant, restrictive discourse on female premarital sexuality, there are also rare occasions where girls resist these views. I want to examine the following excerpt in which the girls are talking about out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Of course, the issue of abstinence comes to the fore, and Mariem has just listed all the reasons for remaining a virgin until marriage. Then Ramata points to the fact that sometimes girls do have sex prior to marriage:

Ramata: But sometimes the girls do not do it on purpose (expres), sometimes. [...] 
Mariem: [One day a friend told me she had slept with a boy and I was really surprised.] 
Ramata: But me, I think that she did not do that on purpose (expres).
Mariem: I say to myself, before doing certain things, you have to think, you have to think. 
Ramata: But sometimes, she is just looking for fun and she does not think about the consequences. 
Mariem: But you should always think about the consequences before doing it. 
(girls, 17 to 19, in-school, FGD 1)

Ramata argues that sometimes girls do have sex, knowing that they should not, but they do not do it on purpose, pas expres: it is not deliberate nor intentional. She means that girls are not looking for sex, it just happens. There are two ways to read this expression pas expres. The first is that Ramata reinforces the norm of abstinence until marriage, but at the same time acknowledges a reality that can make it difficult to live accordingly. In reality, girls can sometimes not say ‘no’, and thus cannot follow the rules. There can be two types of breaking the rules: deliberately or by accident. In the first case, that girl does not respect the rules at all and thus is a threat to the norm. An example of this is a girl engaging in sex with the aim of getting pregnant and marrying the boyfriend whom her parents disapprove of. In the second case, the girl does respect the rules of how things should go, but by accident came into a situation where it was too difficult to act accordingly. The righteousness, justifiability, and thus acceptability of the rules are not contested in this case, but actually kept in place. This way of reasoning has a parallel with the notion of
‘surprise’, that I discussed in the chapter on boys, in the sense that both contain this element of ‘not looking for sex’. Both the notion of ‘not on purpose’ and of ‘surprise’ do not go against the unacceptability of premarital sex, but at the same time do explain and create room for deviances from this norm.

A second way to read the phrase *pas expres* is in terms of an attempt to give meaning to girls’ sexuality outside the dominant judgemental discourse on female premarital sexuality. In this way, Ramata is reading against the grain by giving voice to a reality in which the sexuality of unmarried girls can be understood in other terms than ‘bad’ or unacceptable. She tries to define girls’ sexual activity not so much in terms of its consequences, but in terms of its enjoyable aspects. When she said that “sometimes, [a girl] is just looking for fun and she does not think about the consequences”, a glimpse is seen of sex as something that is related to pleasure, and not merely with negative consequences and ‘bad’ behaviour. This reading reworks female sexuality in positive terms.

The aspects of fun and pleasure in sex are hardly ever elaborated on by girls, although they implicitly come forward in the idea of a *flirt poussé*. Whereas actual penetrative intercourse is off limits, flirting – in the sense of hugging, kissing, caressing, touching – is allowable. At one point Ramata called this *faire l’amour avec limite*, making love within limits. It is a compromise between not having sexual intercourse with the person you love and not leaving each other completely untouched, so to speak. The assumption is that both partners will not cross the line and stop before getting to actual intercourse. The reality is that these flirts can sometimes get out of hand, when partners get too excited. A *flirt poussé* thus points to how the pleasurable and enjoyable aspects of sex play a role in why a girl has sex: being caught in the moment, it is the pleasure that draws a girl into having intercourse. Sex is tempting and girls can have feelings that make them want to have sex.

Both readings of the phrase *pas expres* provide openings to the strict and dominant virginity ideal, though in different ways and with varying potential. The first reading points to a reality in which it is hard to live by the rules and abstain from sex. It is in this interpretation that the reality of pleasure and temptation with respect to sex of girls is noted, although not approved of. The possibility of engaging in sex because of the pleasurable aspects of flirting is considered a weakness: as having sex *par faiblesse*. By referring to weakness, it remains clear that girls are not supposed to loose control and sex remains negative. As such, the dominant discourse on female premarital sexuality is being reproduced and reinforced. The second reading, however, in which an attempt is made to grasp the extra-discursive reality of sex for girls, accepts the pleasurable and fun aspects of sex for girls. It is a reworking and transformation of girls’ sex, because it does see female sexuality in positive terms. As such, it has the potential to change the way girls’ sexuality is perceived and organized.

72 Although both young and old people in Dakar have mentioned this possibility (of getting pregnant to marry a partner whom is not desired by parents) to me, I would be reluctant to conclude that this is a widespread trend among girls (and boys) in Dakar that is central in explaining the occurrence of premarital sex. This in contrast to Victoria Burbank, who with respect to an Aboriginal Australian community where she conducted research, argues that “premarital pregnancy and single motherhood are, in large part, consequences of adolescent resistance in an intergenerational contest over arranged marriage. […] Although adolescent sexual activity may spring from diverse motivations and premarital pregnancy may be its unintended consequence, pregnancy has come to be seen, at least by some, as a means of marrying a desired partner” (Burbank 1995: 35). With respect to sub-Sahara Africa, Bledsoe & Cohen (1993) indicated that “becoming pregnant deliberately is often a strategy for obtaining a husband and gaining social status” (in Silberschmidt 2001b: 1821). A study in Dar es Salaam however did not find such intentions to ‘trap’ a husband among girls (Silberschmidt 2001b), nor did a study in Kenya and Nigeria (Barker & Rich 1992).
The next sub-section will further explore the issue of pleasure, but first I want to briefly consider the way girls relate to dominant discourse. Despite its highly restrictive impact, there is room to negotiate. Looking at the discussions these girls have on the hypothetical case, it can be noted how the girls are switching positions and taking different stands on the subject of sex. At one moment, a girl can reproduce dominant notions and argue that a girl has to think and has to respect herself, while at the next moment she can speak of how difficult it is to actually say ‘no’ to a boyfriend who wants to make love. The extent to which girls are switching and moving between positions varies. Aissatou for instance, the conservative religious girl, does not step out of the dominant discourse. Mariem, by contrast, does it, albeit rarely. Ramata is the clearest example of the switching and negotiation of different position. Just as Aissatou and Mariem, she is strict on premarital sex for girls, when she for instance says that accepting sex is too easy. However, on numerous occasions she also tries to break away from this perspective and tries to open the debate: she brings in the idea that sometimes a boyfriend loves you and asks you to sleep with him, and she uses the notion of *pas expres*. I take the switching of positions that girls display in these different parts of the discussion as a sign that they are negotiating dominant discourses from the point of a reality that does not completely match it. Whereas they cannot escape dominant discourse, they do bring in non-matching realities and sometimes even attempt to rework meanings and perceptions of female premarital sexuality. The multiple ways in which they relate to restrictive virginity discourse also points to the heterogeneity among girls.

So far, girls have only made indirect and small references to a discourse and a reality in which sex is tempting, in which girls have feelings that make them agree to or want to have sex. In the next section, I further investigate in what ways the girls’ own sexual feelings and needs are a reason to engage in sex.

### 6 Sex, pleasure and female desire

There was only one girl of the seven groups that I originally worked with who talked about her own sexual experiences: Ndèye. Because I found so much difficulties in having girls talk about their actual sexual experiences (even though some were quite open about multiple boyfriends), I hoped that teenage mothers would be able to give me more insights into the sexual world of girls, as they could not claim to be virgins anymore. I interviewed two teenage mothers, Khady and Nafissatou. Listen to what Khady, who at the age of 16 fell pregnant from her 15 years older boyfriend, says about how they came to have sex:

Khady: It was the first time that I slept with him. One day he had invited me. Most of the time when he invited me, we would not go far away, but this time we were in his car. I do not know how it happened. Because at that time, I was still young, and I did not have these sort of things in my head. And he had never talked to me about it. But one day, I do not know how it happened. All I know is that I felt as if I was ill, but it was because we had had sex and that made me feel like that. I had pain in my legs and I got the flu, and I was pregnant. I wanted to talk about it to my mother’s younger sister, but I was afraid. But it was the only time that we have had sex.

K: So, it was the only time that you slept together and then you got pregnant?
Khady: We did not even have sex (..).
K: Well, you tried to have sex?
Khady: Yes.

(unmarried mother of three children, approximately 25, out-of-school, INT 29)
Khady uses vague words to describe what happened and actually talks more about what happened before and after the sexual act, than about how she came to have sex. Her account does not reveal much about her sexual experience. In fact, it is as good as impossible for her to speak in a factual matter about what happened. It turned out that talking about sex was just as sensitive for unmarried mothers as for other girls.

A first point to be made with respect to the three sex accounts from the girl and unmarried mothers is that they are not comparable to the ones I collected from boys. When I asked boys about their sexual experiences, they were rather willing to tell me about how things had evolved and gotten that far. Khady’s, Nafissatou’s and Ndèye’s accounts, by contrast, did not come out in direct response to my questions on their sexual experience. Ndèye actually denied to have slept with her boyfriend during the three group discussions she participated in and the largest part of the individual interview. It was only at the end of the individual interview that she acknowledged to have had sex. Like Khady, Nafissatou initially also tried to play down her sexual experience. This suggests that although these girls do talk about their sexual experiences, it is clear that the silencing of female premarital sexuality still impacts on the way the girls can do this. Nevertheless, their narratives provide insights into the hidden, almost invisible but nevertheless existing reality of the sexual lives and sexual pleasure of girls. I will illustrate this by looking at Ndèye’s account, before turning to the experiences of Nafissatou.

A sex account: Ndèye
Ndèye is 21 years of age, and originally comes from a village in the north of Senegal. Since her father passed away some years ago, she lives with her uncle in Dakar where she is in the pre-final year of secondary school. Since a couple of years, she has a fiancé, who lives in the region where she originally comes from. His family is getting eager for the couple to get married, but Ndèye has been trying to postpone the marriage, because she wants to continue her education as long as possible. At the very end of the interview, Ndèye tells me that she has had sex. I consider this interview in detail here in order to show how this ‘confession’ came about after a long discussion of boyfriends and sex.

Ndèye told me that before she met her fiancé, she had another boyfriend. But, as she put it, he was trouble. In the village, they often went for a walk in the evening, in the dark, and then they would go to his room. He asked her to take her clothes off, but she told him that he should be her husband if he wanted her to undress. He insisted, but she refused. Ndèye said that she did not really love this boyfriend, and that she left him. She made clear to me that she does not want to engage in “these sort of things” prior to marriage. Ndèye does not like to get involved in sexual matters, because religion says that that is not right, but also affirms that it is difficult to follow religious prescriptions. With respect to her current boyfriend, she claims to refuse his requests to sleep with him. Ndèye explains that she feels ashamed to take her clothes off in front of him, even though he invites her to do so. He tries to convince her to have sex with him by saying that he is her fiancé and will be her husband, but she still says ‘no’ to him. When he argues that one day she will no longer be ashamed to do this, she responds that anyway, she cannot do it.

I asked Ndèye whether boys and boyfriends interest her. She complained that there are a lot of boys who are only playing around. For them, it is not about love. And because of that, she sometimes retreats from it. Boys, she said, are only interested in sex:

Ndèye : [...] and when they come to the point that they want to have sex with me, they leave me. They think that I am an easy girl. The majority of the boys that I meet, they only
want this one thing, sex. This first boyfriend to whom I refused to take my clothes off, he left me for that. I say to myself, if he really loved you, even if I refused, he should not leave me, but continue to see me. But he told me that if he asks me to sleep with him, and I refuse, then he will leave me. [...] If you can accept, we can continue to see each other. If you refuse, it is over.

A: Why do they say that you are an easy girl?
Ndèye: Every time when they ask me to have sex with them, and if I accept, then they say that I am an easy girl. [...] If I accept, they say I am easy.

A: If you accept?
Ndèye: They think I am an easy girl. They will say, that one, if one of us asks her, she will accept. The next day, he will say [...] that girl, if you ask her, she accepts, she is very easy. And they will tell their friends that when they ask her, she will also accept, that I am very easy.

A: Did you have sex?
Ndèye: Yes, with my fiancé. (silence) But the thing that poses me with problems, is to take my clothes off in front of him.

A: What was it like, the first time?
Ndèye: There is some pleasure to it, it is pleasurable. [...] He caresses me, he kisses me, and it is nice. (silence)

A: Did it hurt, the first time?
Ndèye: Huh? Not really, it did not hurt, not really.

A: Why did you accept with him?
Ndèye: I thought it was OK, because he was my fiancé, and because he is going to be my husband. [...] I accepted three times, but only with him. It is difficult to accept.

A: Why did you accept those three times?
Ndèye: Because he talks and talks too much. [...] He says that I am his fiancé, that if God wants it, he is going to be my husband, that I should not be ashamed with him, that we are going to stay together, etc. He talks too much.

A: What did you think about it?
Ndèye: There is pleasure in it. It gives pleasure. ([Il y a du plaisir dedans, ça fait plaisir.])

A: Did you regret it?
Ndèye: No. No regrets. But I am still embarrassed to do it. [...] Maybe that will be different when I am more used to it.

For the largest part of the interview, Ndèye claimed that she had never been sexually active. She also talked about her fears of sex in the wedding night, which made me think that she was a virgin. It is after almost an hour, that Ndèye tells me that she has had sex, and this comes out in a slip-of-the-tongue kind of way, when she starts talking about boys calling her an 'easy' girl. Several points that I made earlier come forward in her account. For instance, with both boys, the initiative to have sex comes from them: the boy asks her to sleep with him. The 'sweet language' or 'discourse of deceit' that boys employ to support their requests for sex are also clearly detectable. The boys put her under quite a lot of pressure to have sex. Indeed, the first boyfriend threatened to and eventually did break up with Ndèye, which makes her conclude that he must not have really loved her. Interestingly, her case shows that girls can resist such pressure, and do refuse sex even when that means they lose the boyfriend. Pressure is also definitely exercised by the fiancé: in the end he convinced her by talking, talking and talking. It is clear in Ndèye’s story that irrespective of the girl’s final answer, she always starts with refusing sexual proposals. As such, she shows her character and makes clear that she is not ‘easy’. Ndèye’s experience of being labelled an ‘easy’ girl demonstrates the impact of sex, and especially of boys talking about it, on a girl’s reputation. When boys talk about her (presumed) acceptance amongst themselves, and label her as ‘easy’, Ndèye looses her respectability. It
is also painfully clear how little she can do against this judgemental labelling.

Two points are of special interest in Ndèye’s case. The first one is that she has slept with her ‘real’ boyfriend. Reasoning as the boys did in the previous chapter, it could be expected that girls are more likely to be sexually active with those partners that are not their ‘real’ boyfriends. By saying ‘no’ to their ‘real’ boyfriend, they remain respectable and do not jeopardize their position in a future marriage, because as far as this boyfriend or fiancé is concerned, the girl is still a virgin: he does not know that she has had sex. But Ndèye tells that she has had slept with her fiancé. The explanations she gives for accepting to sleep with him match the reasons girls developed in relation to the hypothetical case: Ndèye claims that they have a future together, she trusts that he will be her husband and is confident that he really loves her. It is not directly clear whether her fiancé is the only boy she has had sex with. She literally says that she has slept with him only, and does not talk directly about sexual experiences with other boys. Yet, she also says that other boys find her ‘easy’, when she accepts to have sex when they ask her. The fact that she does not want to talk about her possible sexual experiences with boys who are not her fiancé, even though she indirectly hints at them, can be explained from the fact that talking about sex with her fiancé is less damaging to her reputation. By speaking of sex with other boyfriends, she discloses unrespectable behaviour of an ‘easy’ girl to me, and she probably is trying to preserve her image. These issues notwithstanding, an important point to draw from Ndèye’s narrative is that the sexual activity of girls is not restricted to their less serious boyfriends, but can actually take place with the ‘real’ boyfriend as well.

A second point of interest is that Ndèye is the first girl who mentions pleasure when talking about female premarital sex to describe what it was like to sleep with her fiancé. She falls quiet when trying to explain in more detail what this pleasure is, but it is clear that she found some pleasure in having sex. During the focus group discussions that she participated in, she also referred to the notion of pleasure of sex. She for instance defined ‘making love’ (faire l’amour) in terms of having pleasure, in which pleasure refers to both partners (FGD 9). Ndèye also argued that pleasure is one of the reasons that girls engage in sex: “at the moment that one makes love, we do it for .., it is to have pleasure that we do it. […] We do it simply for pleasure” (FGD 9).

Pleasure is central in Ndèye’s definition of sex. Her view resonates with the way Ramata was talking about ‘looking for fun’. Both Ndèye and Ramata then give insights into an invisible world where sex is something - at least potentially - pleasurable and enjoyable for girls. It is (partly) out of this perspective that Ndèye’s remark that it sometimes is difficult to follow religion and abstain from sex, can be understood. Pleasure makes it difficult for girls to refrain from sex and refuse their boyfriend’s invitations. In fact, pleasure might actually be a reason why girls are having sex, as Ndèye says that “we do it simply for pleasure”. That this point of view is difficult to voice for girls is underlined by the fact that Ndèye has not mentioned pleasure as a reason when explaining why she slept with her boyfriend. Ndèye’s account permits the argument that sexual pleasure and sexual needs do exist for girls in Dakar, even though the other girls in the group do not go along with the openings that Ndèye is creating. On the contrary, they react by defining premarital sex as unacceptable, or by keeping quiet, and as such silencing Ndèye’s attempt to openly talk about pleasure for girls in premarital sexual relationships. That does not necessarily mean that Ndèye’s ideas about the pleasurable aspects are not shared by these girls, but does illustrate that female sexual pleasure cannot be voiced in the silencing dominant discourse on female premarital sexuality.

It is Mariem, the girl who so fiercely defends the importance of virginity (see section 4, “You should not even think about it”), who makes me see that pleasure definitely exists
in the sexual lives of girls. Three years after my main fieldwork period, when I returned for a short three weeks to Dakar, I met her again. She had finished secondary school and had entered university, where she was sharing a room on campus with a cousin. We talked about how campus life differs from the time when she lived with her parents, and also discuss her relations with boys and men. Like before, she fiercely defended the importance of virginity and of knowing how to refrain from sex: "[my virginity] is the only thing I have, I say to myself that it is dignity" (INT 32). At the same time she kept puzzling me: the sexy way she dresses, the playful way in which she talks about boyfriends and dating made me wonder again whether she really is a virgin. This is also stimulated by the way she talks about pornographic materials: movies, films, books, magazines, websites which are most of the time made in Europe or the United States and feature white people in explicit sex scenes. Mariem borrows pornographic books from her female peers, and sometimes reads them together with them. Sometimes young people watch pornographic movies together, and at such occasions "we take the remote control of the television, we forward or rewind the tape so that we can look once more what is actually happening". The watching of such movies or reading of books is often accompanied with a lot of jokes and laughter. Apart from the fun, they also have another function: "I tell myself that sometimes it is a way to learn, how to do these sort of things" (INT 32).

Although I will never know whether Mariem was actually a virgin or not, she did provide an important insight into the meaning of virginity. She explained that when you have been caressing or kissing your boyfriend, you have to purify yourself before prayer. But, she said, this flirting is not the same thing as having sex. There is a grey area between virginity and sex, in which certain acts are possible while safeguarding one's virginity. Nafissatou and Penda shed more light on this in the next section.

**Talk of needs and desire: Nafissatou and Penda**

Nafissatou is an unmarried mother of a 5 months-old son and I spoke of her in the first lines of the introductory Chapter. She claims to have fallen pregnant the first time she slept with her boyfriend. I talked to her and Penda, one of her best friends. With the two of them I also came to talk about pornographic films and books, and Nafissatou indicated that she regularly watched such movies with her boyfriend. She claims that they are useful because “you can learn how to satisfy your guy without sleeping with him”. This statement was the opening that I had been looking for. Nafissatou and Penda explained that being a virgin implies not engaging in penetrative vaginal sex, but does not mean that other sexual acts cannot be practiced. In fact, apart from vaginal penetration, everything is possible: “you can touch the penis, you can caress it, you can suck it until you make him come, without penetration, yes that can go". Girls can actually satisfy their boyfriend and at the same time safeguard their ‘virginity’ by practicing alternatives such as oral sex, manual stimulation or anal sex (see also Koenders 2005 for similar findings in Mombasa). With respect to the latter, Penda said that it is not allowed by Islam, not even between husband and wife. In reaction to that, Nafissatou told that some of her friends have boyfriends who like to have anal sex with them, and who actually prefer anal sex because it gives them more stimulation. The very narrow definition of virginity, in terms of preserving the hymen by not engaging in penetrative vaginal sex, means that girls who claim to be virgins can actually have an active sexual life by engaging in a range of alternative sexual acts. This provides an escape for girls from the contradiction between the societal demand for female virginity and the reality of wanting to respond to the boys’ sexual needs and the girls’ own sexual desires.
The creativity in defining sex and virginity suits the needs of girls. As Penda put it: “There are a lot of other good things [apart from penetration]. Luckily, otherwise we would not know what to do. [...] We cannot just stare at each other”. Although non-penetrative sex can be an escape from the contradictory demands that girls have to negotiate, it is not always satisfactory. Although non-penetrative sex is a good alternative that satisfies the needs of the girls’ boyfriends, Nafissatou also indicated that some boys ask for penetrative sex if the girl really loves them. Alternative, non-penetrative sex is in those instances not valued as highly.

Penda acknowledged that it is “an advantage to know that you can do something else, that you can have pleasure, and the guy as well, without penetration”. This brings me to the issue of pleasure. The two girls indicated that when they talk about sex prior to marriage, they might wish to protect their virginity. But when they are alone with their boyfriends, it is not easy to resist:

Penda: Sometimes, you, you want to, [...] your body does not leave you at ease, you know.
Nafissatou: We need it.
Penda: There is nothing you can do, you know. You want to resist, but there is nothing you can do.
(girls, 18 and 20, in-school and out-of-school, INT 33)

This explanation expresses two points that were invisible so far. First of all, girls do have bodily sensations and ‘natural’ sexual urges. Secondly, these bodily desires are exciting and difficult to resist. As such, these ‘natural’ sensations and sexual desires are an explanation for why girls do engage in sex with boys. This means that girls do not have sex because they have to – in the sense that because they are forced or convinced, but because they want to. It is the pleasure that draws them into sex. How important is sexual pleasure for Nafissatou and Penda?

Penda: I think that this thing has to be shared, you know.
Nafissatou: Right, it has to be shared. (we all laugh)
Penda: I think that the boys, them, it is selfishness, they come in the first place. You have to do everything to please them. Afterwards, the girl, she comes afterwards, you know.
A: But is it important, when you have a boyfriend, that he tires himself to give you pleasure?
Penda: Yes, yes, it is important.
Nafissatou: It is important.
(girls, 18 and 20, in-school and out-of-school, INT 33)

The two girls said that some boys make an effort to satisfy the girl, while others do not really bother. They agreed that “it is not interesting” when the boy does not respond to their needs. When the girl takes the time to give him pleasure, it is “frustrating” when he just stops there. So, one of the reasons girls engage in sex is because of its – potentially – pleasure, and sex that does not give them pleasure is “frustrating” and “not interesting” (see also Spronk 2005b who argued for the recognition of sexual pleasure of women in studies dealing with sexualities in Africa).

With these explicit references to female sexual desire and pleasure, Ndèye, Nafissatou and Penda tell a different story about female premarital sexuality than the dominant one, which girls to a large extent reproduce. In the dominant version, girls do not engage in sex, or might be convinced to do so because of a combination of trusting the boyfriend, wanting to secure the relationship (for emotional and/or material reasons) and being convinced by the boy’s ‘sweet language’. Sexual pleasure and bodily sensations seem
to be absent in this dominant narrative on the sexual lives of unmarried Dakarois girls, in which silence predominates with respect to girls’ sexual agency. Only in the notions of pas expres and flirt poussé the enjoyable aspects of sex can be traced. Ndèye, Penda and Nafissatou talk about pleasure, bodily desires and sexual needs as reasons for which girls have an interest in sex. As such, they provide reveal a radically different view on female premarital sexuality, notwithstanding the fact that they also indicate that boys and men always come in the first place and not always or often attend to the girl’s sexual needs. The next and final section of this chapter analyses the implications of acknowledging female sexual desires and pleasure for understanding the sexuality of girls.

7 Exchange, love and the sexual agency of girls

The different narratives of girls show that female premarital sexuality cannot be understood in a one-dimensional way. Gendered sexuality is multilayered and these different, sometimes contradictory, dimensions have to be taken into account to do justice to girls’ experiences. Girls reproduce and reinforce dominant female sexuality, in which the high value attached to virginity silences female desire and sexual pleasure. There are also openings and cracks in this omnipresent image of a respectable and sexually innocent girl: sex is also something enjoyable and pleasurable, and girls appear to experience bodily desires and sexual needs. This implies that they not only have sex in response to the demands of men, in relation to whom they find themselves in a disadvantaged position, but also engage in sex out of their own needs and because it gives them pleasure. The multidimensional view on gendered sexuality brings out female agency and pleasure and puts the sexual lives of unmarried girls in a more dynamic perspective.

Unfortunately, the sexuality of unmarried girls, and especially their power to negotiate sex and safe sex has often been addressed in a narrow and one-dimensional way in scientific literature that singles out the aspect of exchange of girls’s sexual relationships (e.g. Caldwell et al. 1989; Ankomah 1999; Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994: 60-62; Kaufman & Stavrou 2004; Nyamnjoh 2005). Such views imply that money and gifts are the prime motive for girls to have boyfriends. My findings in Dakar show a different picture, in which girls clearly indicate multiple motives and interests: they talk about love, about looking for a companion, or otherwise company to spend a good time with, they are curious about discovering what it is like to have a boyfriend, or want to get to know potential marriage candidates. That does not mean that material interests do not play a role at all: either as an expression of his love for her, or in a more or less explicit exchange, the presents and money remain one of the limited financial resources girls can access to cover their expenses. Yet, money is not the only thing that matters, but part of an interconnected whole through which the meaningfulness of the relationship as well as the gendered sexual identities of both partners are constructed. This recognition requires a more nuanced perspective on the role of money; a more nuanced perspective that also suggests an alternative power analysis. I will first argue against the popular view on transactional relationships, and then come back to the question of the agency of girls in sexual matters.

Judgements about materialism

The matter of money and sex came to the fore in a discussion in the literature on the term ‘prostitution’ in African contexts. This debate sparked off in reaction to the attention of much (early) literature on HIV/AIDS in Africa to commercial sex work (in Senegal, e.g.
This focus on prostitution and sex workers was criticised for its stigmatising effects on so-called ‘prostitutes’ as a risk group. It was pointed out that the term ‘prostitution’ did not cast any light on the actual kind of sexual relations that are taking place. In particular, warnings were made “against conceptualising prostitution as a universal phenomenon by merely defining it as sexual services that are exchanged for material goods” (S. Day 1988, cited by Gysels et al. 2002: 180). Critics argued that different practices that included sex and exchange had different names and meanings in different places, and that as a consequence, it is difficult to determine what counts as prostitution (Seidel 1993: 180-181; Njikam Savage & Tchombe 1994: 60-62; Gysels et al. 2002). The common sense use of the term ‘prostitute’ in much literature and policy documents was found to be problematic because:

(a) […] much sexual exchange in Africa has a monetary component but it would be quite inappropriate culturally to define it as prostitution,
(b) […] the absence of any definitional criteria in [different] studies renders it difficult to know whether they are referring to equivalent phenomena, and
(c) […] simply labelling categories of the population without contextualising their behaviour so labelled contributes nothing to an understanding of the social phenomenon lying behind the label. (Standing 1992: 477)

Whereas many different types of sexual relations were said to involve a transactional element - in the sense that there is an expected reciprocal relation between sexual services and money or presents -, it is not accurate nor helpful to describe them with the western term ‘prostitution’. In fact, many marriage relationships also involve an exchange of goods, money and sexual services, both in Africa and in the West. “Often, there is no dichotomy between marriage and other relations implying sexual-economic exchange, but, rather, a continuum of forms of sexual service” (Seidel 1993: 180). The criticisms made both scientist and policymakers weary to use the term ‘prostitution’. Yet, without labelling the diverse exchange relations as ‘prostitution’, much literature still continued to pay a lot of attention to the transactional element in sexual relations (e.g. Caldwell et al. 1989: 217-222). Moreover, the exchange aspect continued to be seen as ‘risky’ in terms of HIV infection because of its sexual networking character and the assumed high number of partners, as I discussed in Chapter 2. The replacement of the term ‘prostitution’ with the reference to transactional or exchange relationships did not solve the critique that little insight was generated in the phenomena behind the label, that is into how the ‘exchange’ affects the position of girls to negotiate (safe) sex.

In fact, the transactional character of women’s and girls’ sexual relationships was taken as a for-granted key explanation for women’s limited power to negotiate safe sex. In the debate about women and AIDS in Africa, it has become rather common to talk about the “apparent powerlessness of young women in premarital sexual exchange relationships […] which are contracted with a material gain in mind”, as Ankomah for example does for urban Ghana (1999: 291). In such lines of thinking, girls are said to be materially dependent on their boyfriends, as a result of which they have only limited power to negotiate sex, and in particular safe sex. This argument connecting money to the negotiating power of girls ignores the other motives girls have in their relationships with boys, and also fails to take the non-sexual motives of boys into account. In the particular context of Dakar, the meanings of sexual relationships as well as the power processes between partners are complex and encompass different dimensions. Although the role of money and presents in the relationships of girls clearly comes to the fore in my findings, their value and relevance has
to be assessed in relation to the multiple motives and interests girls (and boys) have for engaging in relationships with boys. That means that apart from money, motives such as love, or looking for companionship, or wanting to spend a good time with someone, all in different ways shape the relationships between girls and boys and the power dynamics in it. Moreover, the acknowledgement that boys also have different interests in intimate relationships gives girls room for manoeuvre. Without dismissing the unequal power relations girls often have with boys, nor their limited space to make decisions regarding their relationships and sex lives, I argue that a one-dimensional perspective on power and the position of girls based on a simplistic and simplified link between money and sex is seriously flawed and blind to the agency and room to manoeuvre girls have to shape their (sexual) relationships.

My reluctance to exclusively focus on material interests of girls is strengthened when I take the western notion of romantic love into account. As noted earlier, the feelings of love and passion which are central to the notion of romantic love are assumed to be incompatible with material interests. This does not mean that there is no exchange of money between partners, but rather that such an element of exchange is looked down upon and earmarked as problematic. This is what happens in the moral judgement of prostitution as sex for money (see also Rubin 1999), but also for instance in the feminist critique of the exploitative character of heterosexual marriage (Andermahr et al. 1997: 71-72). Implicitly, the western romantic love perspective has come to affect ‘scientific’ views on love and sex relationships in Africa. Numerous studies on relationships in Africa, most often addressing marriage (rather than premarital) relations, pointed out that money and exchange are important aspects that shape these relations (e.g. Geschiere 1983; Caldwell et al. 1989; Van der Laar 1995). Given the problematic status of exchange in the cultural complex of western romantic love, this transactional element seems to have fascinated scholars. Against this background, the scientific and predominantly western view on African marriages and relations became vulnerable to a polarized perspective on the role of love and money. In such a way of thinking, it is relatively easy to draw the conclusion that given the strong presence of transaction and exchange in ‘African marriages’, romantic love did not exist in Africa, a popular idea as I showed above. Put differently, the western perspective on love rendered the complexities of multiple interests in relationships invisible (cf. Arnfred 2004b: 71-73). This study cannot shed light on the extent to which marriages and relationships in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa actually are or were primarily based on exchange and transaction, nor can it provide a complete analysis of the changes that might have made that both exchange and love have come to make up part of contemporary relationships. Nevertheless, it is paramount that for both the Dakarois girls and boys in this study an either love-or exchange perspective does insufficient justice to their experiences in intimate relationships.

Interestingly, the scientific representations of sexual relations have found their way into the reality that they claim to represent. Although the term ‘prostitution’ did not fit the reality of much relationships involving exchange in ‘Africa’, the term is now more and more used in local African contexts to label such relations. In Dakar, girls that allegedly enter into (sexual) relationships with a strong monetary component are sometimes referred to as ‘informal prostitutes’. The practice of the mbaxal (multiple partnerships) which is said to be intrinsically linked to money and exchange, is in a similar fashion also called ‘informal prostitution’. The label of prostitution reinforces judgemental attitudes towards these practices. Some people would argue that these ‘informal prostitutes’ – that is girls who have multiple partners from whom they get money and presents and with whom they have sex - are even more problematic than ‘real’ or official prostitutes. With
'real' prostitutes you know what you are dealing with, but with 'informal prostitutes' the problem, it is said, is that it is not clear with how many men they have sexual relations nor what their health condition is. Apparently, the western notions of prostitution have entered the symbolic matrix in which relationships and gendered sexual identities in Dakar are given meaning. The notions of prostitution as well as romantic love turn out to provide powerful tools in the context of Dakar to problematize and stigmatize the transactional element of many relationships. This means that the invisibility of the different meanings of relationships that can be noted within the scientific discourse can also be noticed in the judgemental attitudes in the local Dakar context, which in a similar way highlight the transactional character and overlook the other interests and motives that come to shape these relationships and the power dynamics in them.

It is important to note that girls themselves also reproduce the black-and-white stereotypes that contrast idealized love relationships – that lead to marriage and do not involve sexual intercourse – to exchange relations centring around money and sex, and which were essentially expressed in the boys' typology of different types of girls. The reasons that girls give for the acceptance of sex by the girl in the hypothetical story fit in with this stereotyping because the reasons are always 'negative' and sex remains 'bad'. The reproduction of the stereotypes also occurs through the girls' complaints about the unproper behaviour of materialist girls who do not understand what love really means. It is clear that the distinction between 'real' girlfriend and 'easy' girl makes it extremely difficult for girls to express their sexuality in a non-judgemental way, because the category of 'easy' girl is not a socially acceptable option for being sexually active. As such, the girls' reproduction of the distinction between the 'real' girlfriend and the 'easy' girl enables girls to to save their own reputation, but does not solve the tensions between the contradictory female sexual identities that they have to negotiate. This raises three questions: do girls have a typology of boys, what is its effect on boys, and how do girls balance the contradictory sexual identities of virginity and sexual desire?

Girls do distinguish between different types of boys in two ways. First of all, they differentiate the ideal boyfriend from undesirable one who 'spends his time drinking tea'. The latter is 'not serious' and therefore not a desirable partner for a relationship. The former obviously is a wanted partner, and it is interesting to note that in girls' definition of that ideal boyfriend actually connects money and gifts to feelings of live and sees them as an expression of his care for the girlfriend. The categorization by girls of boys is important in the sense that, by connecting money to the ideal boyfriend's love, girls resist the boys' typology of girls in which 'real' love is split from money and gifts. As such, girls in a way blur the simplifying typology that boys rely on and make it less easy for them to balance their contradictory masculinities and act out hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, the undesirability of not-serious boyfriends reinforces the second norm of male sexuality, the one of seriousness and responsibility. As such, the wishes of girls to find an ideal boyfriend that takes his responsibility by being respectable, caring and serious puts limits on the sexuality that boys can enact. The ideal of the girls is thus a factor that pushes boys and men to put constraints on their potency and virility.

A second distinction girls make is between their 'real' boyfriend and their 'other' or additional partners. This distinction can be understood as an expression of the girls' desire or need for love and a trustworthy intimate relationship (also against the background of the value of friendship and marriage). In many ways, the differentiation between 'real' and other boyfriends mirrors the boys' typology of 'real' girlfriends and 'easy' girls. Girls are however far less explicit in the transactional character of the relationships with the 'other' boyfriends, and actually attempt to play down such a connection. The mirroring of the
boys’ typology in the girls’ distinction between ‘real’ and ‘other’ boyfriends points to the impact of the former and the little space girls have to come to another categorization of intimate premarital relationships. Apart from resisting the typology by linking money to love in their definition of the ideal boyfriend, girls are not capable to successfully counter or break down the boys’ typology. Being a mirror of the boys’ typology of girls, the girls’ differentiation of types of boyfriends is a reflection of male rather than female sexuality. It is obvious that the girls’ typology of boys does not enable girls to negotiate the contradicting identities of virginity and female sexual desire. That means that whereas boys can redirect the tensions involved in balancing different norms of male sexuality towards girls, girls do not have a similar opportunity to negotiate contradictions. In the end, that implies that girls carry a double burden in the sense that they on the one hand have to deal with the typology of ‘real’ girlfriends and ‘easy’ girls, including the judgemental attitudes that these carry towards sex and exchange, and on the other hand have to solve the tensions between their own conflicting female sexual identities. Where does that leave the agency of girls in sexual matters?

Agency of girls

Feminist work on women’s sexuality has often addressed the “repression of women’s sexual agency” and “women’s lack of negotiating power” in heterosex (Shefer & Foster 2001: 375). The absence of a discourse of female sexual desire has been noted in diverse contexts, including Europe, Northern America, Australia, and also for instance South Africa (Hollway 1984, 1995, 1996; Fine 1988; Kippax et al. 1990; Shefer & Foster 2001; Allen 2003, 2004). One of the most cited studies on the sexuality of girls, carried out in the United Kingdom (Holland, Ramazanoglu & Thomson 1996, and with Sharpe 1994, 1998, 1999), analyses how men’s sexuality is constructed as active and focusing on lust and sex, whereas women’s sexuality is produced as passive and organized around the need for relationships and love. “The social construction of femininity encourages young women […] to cede agency and submit to […] male power” (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thomson 2003: 92). In this context of gendered and heterosexualized patterns of behaviour, it is argued, women’s sexual pleasure is excluded from sexual experiences and women’s ability to practice, negotiate and insist on safe sex is limited. With respect to Africa, or more broadly developing countries, it is common to read the following conclusions:

Women, particularly those in developing countries, occupy a position characterised by social and economic disadvantage and lack of control compared to men. Women’s disadvantaged status may have repercussions on their sexual and reproductive health in that their lack of control reduces their ability to determine the spacing of their children and to protect themselves from sexually transmitted disease. (Green, et al. 2001: 585; emphasis added)

What about girls in Dakar? The next chapter will in detail investigate the specific agency of girls to practice safe sex. In this section, I can therefore focus on the question whether Dakarois girls have agency to shape their sexual lives and intimate relationships with boys according to their needs and desires.

In line with the views referred to here, the findings presented in this chapter allow for a conclusion that in Dakar female sexual desires and agency are being repressed by dominant male-centred sexuality: first of all, heterosexuality is organized around the satisfaction of male sexual needs, secondly, men and boys generally take in a dominant position vis-à-
vis women and girls, and finally, the sexual needs and pleasure of women and especially girls are silenced. Yet, this recognition does not necessarily mean that female sexual agency is completely absent or missing. The dominant discursive construction of female premarital virginity, which silences girls’ agency and pleasure in sexual matters, does exist, but it is not the whole story. In fact, Dakarois girls are confronted with a complex set of values and norms that they have to negotiate. On the one hand, they have to live up to the virginity ideal by showing character and preserving themselves. On the other hand, they seek for space to express their desires for sexual satisfaction and pleasure. While negotiating these contradictions, they have to relate to their boyfriend’s demands to be intimate. This means that girls have to make sure that sexual activity does not damage their reputation, does not make the partner break up the relationship, nor allows him to treat her disrespectfully (see also Spronk 2005b for similar observations in Nairobi). Even though the dominant norm is powerful and omnipresent, it is important to look beyond it. As Hoskins rightly points out, feminist analysis that only focuses on patriarchal control, without concentrating on creativity, diversity and empowerment, reinforces the heteronormative and gendered values it seeks to challenge (Hoskins 2000; see also Nencel 2004). They also reinforce stereotypes in which “women are presented as being responsible for protection, whereas their sexual desire is rarely referred to” (Spencer 2000: 128, translation mine) and result in a flawed conceptualization of ‘African female sexuality’ in which “not much is said about pleasure and enjoyment, or desire – certainly not female desire” (Arnfred 2004b: 59).

In the exploration of multiple dimensions of female (and male) premarital sexuality, this study fits in with research that attempts to capture the multiple meanings of intimate relationships and sex. When writing about young women in urban South Africa, whose relationships could easily be classified as transactional, Gibson (2004) for instance shows that these women do not view themselves as prostitutes, because “no outright exchange of money is involved” (p. 17). On the contrary, sex and sexual acts have multiple meanings, and in the South African context these include, amongst others, the exchange of bodily substances, exchange of value and material gains, the construction of relations and networks of reciprocity and obligation, and of course the construction of gendered and sexual identities. In line with Vance (1984), Gibson argues that “to only emphasize danger, violence and oppression, ignores the women’s own experiences and understandings of sexual agency and choice” (Gibson 2004: 9). In a similar fashion, Spronk (2004; 2005a; 2006) provides insights into the ambiguities of sex and sexuality for young urban professionals in Nairobi, Kenya.73 Her informants link sex to modern lifestyles and relate sexual experience to being feminine or masculine and to one’s sense of self. Furthermore, in the Kenyan context of HIV/AIDS, sex becomes a moralised issues and is perceived as a threat. Moreover, sex also carries meanings of passion and pleasure, as well as connotations of suspicion or violations of trust. Spronk also refers to Vance, who has argued that “the hallmark of sexuality is its complexity: its multiple meanings, sensations and connections” (Vance 1984: 5).

The acknowledgement of the variety and fluidity of female premarital sexuality allows for a recognition of the heterogeneity of girls’ sexual experiences in intimate and

73 Spronk has focused her study on a relatively small and very specific group of young professionals in contemporary Nairobi: those who are employed in the private sector or with local or international NGOs. They are financially independent and in most cases have trendy lifestyles. Unlike their parents, they were born in Nairobi and do not speak their ethnic vernacular. This group is not representative for the Nairobian or Kenyan population, but a very interesting group to study in the context of globalisation, modernisation and societal change (Spronk 2004, 2006).
sexual relationships. It also allows for multiple answers to the question whether Dakarois girls have agency to shape their sexual lives and intimate relationships with boys according to their needs and desires. This question cannot be answered without clarifying what the needs and desires of these girls are. These needs can however range from between wanting to remain a virgin to wanting to satisfy one’s sexual desires. This variation can occur between girls - with one attaching far more value to virginity than another -, but also within girls – with the same girl treasuring virginity and also seeking to respond to her sexual desires. The question then becomes what agency girls have to say ‘no’ when they do not feel like engaging in sex, and say ‘yes’ when they do desire to respond to their sexual needs?

With respect to the first, the reproduction of the dominant norm allows girls to say ‘no’ to sex. It has been pointed out that women’s denial of their sexuality can be interpreted as an active act of deference, through which women become subjects in the existing social order (Abu-Lughod 1986: 118-167). The virginity norm then positions girls as subjects with the capacity not to engage in sex. The girls’ agency to shape their sexual lives and intimate relationships is of course not only determined by discursive constructions, but also by the nature of the relation with their male partner(s). This brings me to the issue how much space girls have to say ‘no’ to their boyfriends. As this chapter – and the previous one - has shown, this question can receive different answers: in some instances, boys indeed do not want their ‘real’ girlfriends to become sexually active, and in other instances boys can exercise pressure on or force to girls to accept sex. The ‘sweet language’, ‘discourses of deceit’ as well as use of violence put limits on the agency girls have to shape their sexual lives and intimate relationships in accordance with a desire not to engage in sex.

To turn to the capacity of girls to say ‘yes’ to sex, a crucial issue of course the recognition of female sexual desires. Whereas a Tanzanian study in which girls “did not consider sex as an activity by which their own sexual needs would be met” (Silberschmidt 2001b: 1822), this thesis noted the opposite in Dakar. Despite the processes of silencing, girls do speak of female sexual pleasure and needs. Pleasure is one of the reasons to engage in sex, and girls do seek and appreciate sexual satisfaction. This has also been noted by Nyamnjoh (2005: 303), who quotes an unmarried and single mother in her late twenties saying:

> For a long time, Senegalese women have had only their charms as commodity. They had nothing to offer but their virginity, their body, their housekeeping expertise. And sex was considered pleasurable only to men and it was one of those things women used to get their husbands to do what they wanted. Nowadays, many women go for their own pleasure, and sex is not just something you do when you are married.

A study among young urban professionals in Kenya drew similar conclusions and noted that “in the newly emerging sexual culture in Nairobi, female sexual enjoyment has become an objective” (Spronk 2005b: 276). To come back to Dakar, the acknowledgement of the importance of sexual pleasure for girls means that sex also originates from and is, or might be, directed towards the girls’ own sexual needs and satisfaction. This recognition of female sexual desires of Dakarois girls is required in order to answer whether girls can shape their intimate relationships in accordance with their needs.

It is obvious that the dominant discourse makes it difficult for Dakarois girls to appropriate their sexual desires and need for sexual pleasure, and thus say ‘yes’ to sex, in a socially acceptable way. When expressing sexual desires or showing sexual knowledge or experience, girls are subject to normalization and discursive punishments: they are labelled as ‘loose’, ‘easy’, ‘weak’ or materialist girls who are not to be respected. Yet,
compliance to dominant gender identities, however restrictive and silencing they are, can provide subversive space to enact deviations. Girls are not merely subordinated by dominant discourses, but are agents who actively (re)produce and reinforce them in their performative enactment (see also Saakes 1993; Moore 1994; Villarreal 1994). In their refusal of sex and the denial of female desires, girls embody the ideal of ‘a respectable girl’, and this can create room for manoeuvre and space to engage in sex. That can be either penetrative vaginal sex or other variations including anal or oral sex. In fact, with virginity being defined in terms of no penis-vagina penetration, girls (and boys for that matter) have space to meet their sexual needs without harming their virginity status.

But engaging in sex does not necessarily mean that girls can satisfy their own needs. In fact, the narratives of the girls indicate that such sexual satisfaction is not always nor easily realized, because boys and men put themselves in the first place. This has to do with the fact that female sexuality is caught within a male-centred construction of heterosexuality and is directed towards the men’s needs and pleasure. The agency girls have in relation to their male partner(s) is limited, given the dominant position of the latter. This male-centred and male-dominated frame notwithstanding, girls can and do exercise agency to shape their relationships in different ways.

Firstly, women and girls have sexual agency in being seductive and sexy, and in satisfying their partner. In Dakar, this means that, amongst others, women encourage each other to be experts in sexually seducing and pleasing their ‘man’. This sexual agency is directed towards male satisfaction, but it nevertheless positions girls and women as active sexual agents. The fun women and girls have in sharing and acquiring this expertise points to the enjoyment of their sexuality. Secondly, it is true that girls have to establish themselves as ‘respectable’ (and that this limits their sexual agency), yet boys also have to establish themselves as ‘serious’ and trustworthy, before girls trust them sufficiently to have sex with them. Girls are agents in this process of mutual testing and as such can shape their intimate and sexual relationships with boys. Moreover, the dependence of male partners on the girls’ acceptance or refusal of sex also gives girls a degree of power in the relationship. That means that boys and men have to ‘work’ in order to have intimate and/or sexual relationships with girls: boys have to invest in their reputation, their approach to girls, in making the relationship worthwhile for the girl. If they fall short, girls can put an end to the relationship and refuse sex. This ‘work’ might or might not include that the boy caters for the girls’ sexual needs and satisfaction. Girls can also use their capacity to refuse or accept sex to realize other interests. In her study in Tanzania, Silberschmidt notes that sugar-daddy relationships are “not a one-way exploitation”, but that the girls are “also active social agents, entrepreneurs who deliberately exploit their partner(s)” (2001b: 1822). For Dakar, it has been argued that in their intimate relationships, girls are active social beings par excellence! Yet in some ways, they are passive victims of structural inequalities as well! (Nyamnjoh 2005: 313)

Put differently, within the male-centred and male dominated construction of female heterosexuality in Dakar, girls are not just passive objects and victims, but also agents who exercise agency, who can pursue their own interests - sexual satisfaction or other - and who can influence the conduct of boys.

I have elaborated on several answers to the questions as to the agency of Dakarois girls to shape their sexual lives and intimate relationships with boys. Girls are ascribed agency to say ‘no’, but also find themselves in a sub-dominant position vis-à-vis boys, which makes that they are not always capable to actually refuse sex. On the other hand, girls are
ascribed little agency to say 'yes' when they seek satisfaction of their own desires. They always have to start with refusing sex to maintain their respectable status. Moreover, the acceptance of sex does not necessarily mean that their own sexual desires will be met. The limited agency girls have to shape their intimate relationships and their own sexual lives according to their wishes and needs does, however, not mean that girls are not endowed with a capacity to influence their male partners.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, love, sex and money have been analysed as central themes in the narratives of girls on their relationships and sexual lives. In these narratives, girls’ sexuality is constituted within a male-centred and male dominated heterosexuality, in which female virginity until marriage is an omnipresent norm. In this context, girls find it difficult to talk about their sexual experiences and to define premarital sex in positive terms. Love and money are subjects that are more easily discussed, and both come forward as reasons why girls enter into relationships with boys. Contrary to the idealized notion of love that excludes material gains - and that supports the typology of boys of ‘real’ girlfriends and ‘easy’ girls -, the relationships that girls have with boys display much more variety, and show that love, money and sex (can) go together, and are part of an interconnected whole through which the relationship is given meaning.

At first sight, girls reproduce dominant discourses on female premarital sexuality. They tell about their boyfriends, but rarely speak about their sexual experiences, and reinforce the virginity norm that they should not even think about sex. The sexual activity of the girl in the hypothetical story is explained from a combination of trusting the boyfriend, wanting to secure the relationship (for emotional and/or material reasons) and being convinced by the boy’s ‘sweet language’. In this dominant narrative on the sexual lives of unmarried Dakaros girls, sexual pleasure seems to be absent and silence predominates with respect to girls’ sexual agency. Glimpses of pleasure can be traced in the notions of pas expres and flirt poussé that move beyond the dominant discourse and show glimpses of how sex can be tempting. Ndèye further underscores the enjoyable aspects in sex by defining sex in terms of 'making pleasure' and by identifying pleasure as a central reason why “we do it”.

A crucial step in seeing the almost invisible reality of girls’ sexual lives is to question the meaning of the terms ‘having sex’ and ‘virginity’. It turns out that these have very specific and narrow definitions, concentrating on penetrative vaginal sex. Girls claim to safeguard their virginity as long as they do not engage in penetrative vaginal sex. This means that virgin girls can have an active sexual life, practicing a range of sexual acts, possibly including oral, manual and anal sex. When discussing the possibilities of non-penetrative sex, Penda and Nafissatou talk about pleasure, bodily desires and sexual needs. These make girls have an interest in sex, an interest to find pleasure by seeking to satisfy their desires and needs. Whereas the two girls also indicate that boys and men always come in the first place and that they do not primarily attend to the girl’s sexual needs, female desires and pleasure are not absent from their sexual experiences. An interesting point that came forward from girls’ talk about the possibilities of non-penetrative sex, is that girls share pornographic materials (booklets, magazines, and sometimes movies and websites) from which they learn the different ways of having sex. This implies that for both boys and girls pornographic materials are important given the explicit information they provide on sexual acts.

In this chapter, I have taken quite a lot of space to discuss in detail how girls talk about
sex and sexuality, and how and why they are sexually active. This elaborate exploration of girls’ narratives was necessary for accessing the multiple layers of female premarital sexuality in Dakar. It would have been easier to take the girls’ denial of sexual activity at face value, but the reading-between-the-lines gives a more accurate picture of the intimate lives of Dakarois girls by highlighting, on the one hand, their sexual activity and creativity and the presence of female sexual desires and pleasure, and on the other hand, the struggle girls fight to express their sexuality. I have chosen for such an elaborate presentation of how girls talk about sex and sexuality, because it not only provides insight into the validity of the conclusion that girls negotiate their sexual identity in the tension between virginity and female sexual desires, but also points to the strong normalization processes that girls face when shaping their intimate relationships with boys. Moreover, the detailed discussion has provided insights into the process through which I learnt about girls’ sexuality and collected and analysed my data. My analysis allows for making sense of the apparent contradiction between the verbal silence on girls’ sexual experiences and their non-verbal expressions of female sexuality in dress, dance, seduction techniques and jokes. The findings on female sexual desires, pleasure and agency therefore carry further than the three girls that spoke about it. My analysis is not focused on counting the number of respondents that give a specific explanation for engaging in sex, but seeks to understand the different meanings and interpretations that are given to sex and accepting sex. This means that I do not come to statements about the population – for instance the degree of sexual activity among unmarried Dakarois girls –, but about the construction of female premarital sexuality of this group. Even though some of the findings on female sexual desires, pleasure and agency were only voiced by only a few girls, they resonate with implicit references to pleasure in notions such as *pas expres* and *flirt poussé* that are employed by many girls. Moreover, they also resonate with the non-verbal expressions of female sexuality.

The point of investigating the way unmarried Dakarois girls construct their sexuality and shape their intimate relationships with boys is to provide insights into their ability to negotiate sex and this in turn affects their space to negotiate safe sex, the core interest of this thesis. I argued for a multidimensional perspective on girls’ sexuality that accounts for the reproduction of dominant silencing discourse of female premarital sexuality as well as the resistance of girls and their attempts to express their sexual desires, fulfill their needs and enjoy sexual pleasure. The acknowledgement of variety and fluidity is why this chapter both confirms that in Dakar female sexual desires and the agency of unmarried girls is being repressed by dominant male-centred sexuality, and argues against this perspective by pointing out this that does not necessarily mean that female sexual agency is completely absent or missing. The dominant discursive construction of female premarital sexuality in terms of virginity, which silences agency and pleasure, is not the whole story. Girls exercise agency in different ways. One way is by saying ‘no’ to sex, even though the girls’ sub-dominant position vis-à-vis boys does not always allow them to actually refuse sex. The girls’ compliance to the virginity norm not only enables them to decide not to have sex, but can also function as create room for manoeuvre to do the opposite, that is engage in sex. It remains questionable to what extent girls manage to satisfy their own sexual needs, rather than their male partner’s ones. But still girls exercise agency in the shaping of their intimate relationships and sexual lives by being experts in seduction and by making boys work to get what they want. Girls are thus both active agents and restricted by structural inequalities. It is clear that the boys’ typology of ‘real’ girlfriends and ‘easy’ girls - and with it the construction of male sexuality -, has more impact on girls than the girls’ typology of different boyfriends has on boys. The judgemen-
tal attitudes carried by the label of ‘easy’ girl, which include condemnation of girls’ alleged materialism and association of multiple partnerships, allows boys to engage in sex, but constrains girls from finding an acceptable space to express their sexuality. That means that even though boys and girls both have to negotiate conflicting sexual norms, boys are enabled to balance the demand for abstinence with the desire for sexual activity, whereas girls have far less space to step away from the virginity norm and explore their sexuality. How does this impact on the practice of safe sex? That will be explored in the next chapter.
In this chapter, I come to the core of this thesis: safe sex practices. I will discuss how unmarried boys and girls in Dakar seek to protect themselves from STI/HIV infections and unwanted pregnancies by looking at their attitudes towards and practices of safe sex. The principal question that I seek to address is how their safe sex practices are embedded in the way they construct their gendered sexuality. How does the construction of female premarital sexuality in terms of virginity impact on the capacity of girls to practice abstinence, fidelity and condom use? And what about female sexual desire? What is the impact of constructing male premarital sexuality around potency and virility on boys' safe sex practices? And what role does the idea of 'seriousness' play? By taking up these issues, I intend to show how safe sex is more than an individual or medical concern. The three foregoing chapters have provided insights into the intimate lives of Dakarois unmarried girls and boys, through an analysis of their in-between situation and the gendered ways in which they shape their intimate relationships and sexual lives. This chapter will build on these insights and show how these elements, that are part of the wider social and cultural context in which young people's sexuality is lived and constructed, are crucial to understanding young people's safe sex practices. In other words, it shows how young people's safe sex behaviour and attitudes are shaped by the way their gendered sexualities are performatively constructed and constituted.

The safety aspect in the term 'safe sex' refers to the health consequences of sex in terms of preventing unwanted pregnancies and/or infections with HIV or other STIs. From this point of view three types of sexual behaviour can be distinguished: no sex, unprotected sex, and protected sex. Both the categories of no sex and protected sex fall into the category of safe sex. Unprotected sex does not, and reproductive health and AIDS campaigns aim at the prevention of unprotected safe, that is sex without protection against pregnancies and infections. In this chapter, three safe sex strategies are taken into consideration: abstinence, being faithful and condom use - the safe sex ABC. At some instances I also briefly discuss other ways to protect against unwanted pregnancies or STI/HIV, such as the contraceptive pill, coitus interruptus or periodical abstinence. These are however not dealt with as elaborately and extensively as the ABC strategies.

The chapter can be divided into three parts, which differ in terms of the types of data and analyses they involve. The first part (section 1) provides an overview of, on the one hand, knowledge of reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and STIs, and protection methods and, on the other hand, use of contraceptives and condoms among (young) people in Senegal. This section largely draws from secondary data of statistical surveys, which I supplement with fieldwork data on how young people see reproductive health issues as unwanted pregnancies, STI infection and AIDS. The second part covers the sections 2, 3
and 4, and focuses on how Dakarois girls and boys look at the strategies of abstinence, fidelity and condom use respectively. For each strategy, the advantages and difficulties will be discussed from the perspective of Dakarois boys and girls. The analysis in the second part is based on data from my fieldwork. The third part (section 5) analyses how young people's safe sex attitudes and behaviour are embedded in the construction of their gendered sexuality. This part explores how the gendered sexual subjectivities match or mismatch with the agency required to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use. The limited practice of safe sex is also related to a degree of indecisiveness and this is placed in the context of wider societal upheaval over premarital sexuality. In this third part, I do not actually present new data, but analyse the findings on safe sex practices in relation to the findings of the Chapters 3, 4 and 5. By bringing these different elements together, I intend to provide an alternative perspective on understanding young people's safe sex behaviour.

1 Statistics on knowledge and use

Awareness of the risks of unprotected sex and of possible prevention methods can be important for the use of contraceptives. Generally speaking, knowledge of contraceptive methods is high among the Senegalese population, with approximately nine in ten of both women and men being able to name at least one method of contraception (EDS-III 1997: 117). The quality of that information can however be questioned, considering some widespread misconceptions, such as the idea that diaphragms protect against STIs, that the pill is more effective because it protects from STIs, or that using the pill will cause sterility (Naré, Katz & Tolley 1997: 19-20; see also Ndione 1993; Naré, Katz & Tolley 1996). The most frequently mentioned methods of contraception among the young people in my study were abstinence and condoms, followed by the pill. Other means of contraception were hardly mentioned, although some participants talked about ‘coitus interruptus’ (withdrawal of the penis from the vagina before ejaculation) or periodical abstinence (limiting sex to non-fertile days of the month). These two latter methods are not completely reliable, and their safety is compromised by the limited knowledge of the menstrual cycle. Diop (1995a: 77) signals the existence of misconceptions with respect to the risks of getting pregnant: only one tenth of the adolescent girls knows on which days of the menstrual cycle they are fertile, few of them know that they can get pregnant the first time they have sexual intercourse, and a number thinks that pregnancy can be avoided by taking a shower or urinating after sexual contact (Diop 1995a: 77). Almost none of the girls and boys in my fieldwork properly knew the menstrual cycle and the fertile days. The education most girls received when they had their first period was limited to the message that ‘they are big girls now and that they have to avoid boys’ (“tu es une grande fille maintenant; il faut éviter les garçons”), without having a full understanding of the reproductive process. In sum, because not all the ins and outs of the reproductive process nor of the use of contraceptive methods are well-known, it is clear that knowledge of contraception is superficial.

74 Knowledge of at least one method of contraception is 90% among married men, 95% among unmarried men and 86% among married women (EDS-III 1997: 117; no data are presented for unmarried women).
75 Coitus interruption, “the oldest recorded form of contraception”, “is a very unreliable method of birth control with a failure rate of 19 per cent, due to either late withdrawal or the presence of sperm in the ’dew drop’ of fluid produced by the man while aroused but before ejaculation”. Moreover, “it does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases” (Eadi 2004: 34).
This limited and inadequate awareness and knowledge of risks and possible prevention methods partly explains low contraceptive use among young women. Use of either so-called ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’ contraceptive methods is very limited among women of all ages and backgrounds in Senegal: 78% of all women has never used a contraceptive method (EDS-III 1997: 39). Despite the declining fertility rate, Senegal can be characterised as a pro-natalist society, and the desires to limit births or not to have a child are not particularly strong (Mbodj et al. 1993: 185; Ndione 1993: 132-135; Journet 1990; EDS-IV 2005). Contraceptive use is higher in cities than in the rural areas, and higher among higher educated women and men (EDS-III 1997: 41-42; confirmed in EDS-IV 2005: 13-15). The most frequently used method by women is abstinence, and the most frequently used modern contraception is the pill. The condom is the most popular method among men (EDS-III 1997: 119-120; also EDS-IV 2005: 14-15). Contraceptive use is higher among older women and is more likely when the number of children rises. Only 4.7% of the women in the ages 15-19 uses a modern method of contraception, and this percentage is 7.3% for women in the age group 20-29, and rises to 13.3% for the age group 30-39 (EDS-IV 2005: 14). The moral restrictions on premarital sexual intercourse confine contraceptive use to those who are married. According to dominant norms, adolescents do not need contraception, since they are either not married and therefore presumably not in need of protection as they are not supposed to be sexually active, or they are newly weds who need to respond to the desire to have an offspring. Among the young people in my study, none of the girls indicated use of modern contraception and the only means of protection used by boys was the condom. The participants’ knowledge of contraception seemed to be rather theoretical, in the sense that they had heard of some methods, but often had never actually seen the pill or a diaphragm and know little about their exact workings.

I want to briefly consider another form of birth control: abortion. Induced abortion is forbidden in Senegal, with the exception of ‘therapeutic abortion’, that is the termination of a pregnancy in case the mother’s health is endangered by the pregnancy or in case the child is severely handicapped and deformed (CRLP 1999b). There are, however, indications that abortion is practiced. Referring to two surveys, carried out in 1978 and 1986, Demba Diouf suggests that between ten to 30% of the women interviewed had had an abortion, either induced or spontaneous (1994: 410-414). An especially high percentage is noted among women in the ages 15 to 19 years (ibid.: 413-414): a study in 1995 found that 52% of 76 'Traditional' methods of contraception include black magic such as gris-gris amulets and potions. 'Modern' contraceptives are those methods that have been developed by (western) medicine and include the pill, the intra-uterine device, injectible or implantable hormones, diaphragm, condoms, spermicides, and surgical sterilization (e.g. Ndione 1993; Eadi 2004). Comparing married men and women, it becomes clear that contraceptive use is higher among married men of whom 68% has used a method of contraception at least once, than among married women, where this figure is 27% (EDS-III 1997: 118). This difference is explained by the higher use of condoms among men. Use of contraceptives has been rising in the Senegal since the late seventies. In 1978, use of modern contraceptives was zero, in 1986 it was 2.4% (of all married women), continuing to rise to 4.8% in 1992 and 8.1% in 1997 (EDS-III 1997: 43). 77 The fertility rate was 6.6 in 1986, 6.0 in 1992, 5.7 in 1997, and 5.3 in 2005 (EDS-IV 2005: 13) 78 Contraceptive use is three times higher in urban areas: of all married women in Senegal as a whole 7.1% uses contraception (modern or traditional), in contrast to 23.8% for married women in cities (EDS-III 1997: 42). Among married men contraceptive use is 25% in urban areas and 10% in rural areas (EDS-III 1997: 119). With respect to educational level, it can be noted that less than 5% of the women who have not received any education uses any contraceptive method, while this is 22% among the women who have been in primary school, and 43% for the women with secondary education or higher (EDS-III 1997: 42). For married men these figures are 8.8%, 21.2% and 46.5% respectively (EDS-III 1997: 119). 79 Diop (1995a) reported figures of use of modern contraceptives of 1.4% for the age group 15-19, 6.3% for the age group 20-29, and a meagre 10% for the age group 30-39 (p. 76-77).
the women who have an abortion are 15 to 19 years of age (CRLP 1999b). Women of all ages mention a variety of methods to terminate pregnancies: pharmaceutical products (tablets, nivaquine and other medication at a strong dosage), or traditional medicine (bark, roots, potions) or otherwise by using needles or washing powder (Diouf 1994: 413). Among the young people that I spoke with for this study, induced abortion was known, and was discussed as one of the options in case of unwanted pregnancies. Both girls and boys are aware of the fact that abortion is illegal in Senegal, and that it is condemned by their religions as a sin. Nevertheless, they have heard about methods to terminate pregnancies. Nafissatou, the teenage mother who just gave birth to her son (Chapter 5), knew of several girlfriends and cousins who had undergone an abortion when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. Her boyfriend also suggested to terminate her pregnancy, but she refused. The girlfriend of Malick, whose case I discussed in Chapter 4, terminated her pregnancy through an abortion at a clinic. According to Malick, normally the abortion would have costed 100,000 francs CFA (153 euro), but because it was arranged through a ‘friend of a friend’ he ‘only’ paid 50,000 francs CFA (77 euro). Aminata had heard of doctors who perform abortion in clinics, but also in rented apartments. She had heard prices varying from 10,000 CFA (for an injection that is to start contractions) to 100,000 (for an abortion in a clinic). Most girls and boys in this study are aware that there are serious health risks to illegal abortions. Diouf notes that “the complications of induced and illegal abortions are one of the major causes for which women in their reproductive ages are hospitalized” (1994: 417).

Turning to HIV, it has to be remarked that knowledge of AIDS is high in Senegal: 97% of the women and more than 98% of the men know AIDS exists (EDS-IV 2005: 29-30; see also UNAIDS 1999b; Lagarde, Pison & Enel 1996). Among both women or men, those who are not married and who are sexually active, and those who live in the cities are most knowledgeable. Moreover, knowledge about AIDS rises with educational levels, for both women and men. But the modes of HIV transmission are less well-known by both women and men, and ‘only’ 76% of the women and 80% of the men are aware that sexual contacts can cause HIV infection (EDS-III 1997: 135; see also EDS-IV 2005: 29-30). For urban areas, these figures on the identification of the sexual mode of transmission of HIV are 85% for both women and men. Education plays a role: 70% of the uneducated women and 74% of the uneducated men mention sexual contacts as a mode of HIV transmission, at primary school level these are 83% and 87% respectively, rising to 92% for both women and men at secondary level or higher (EDS-III 1997: 135). In terms of prevention from HIV infection, it is striking that one in five women and almost one in seven men cannot mention any method at all to prevent HIV infection. This is less common in urban areas (resp. 10% and 7%), and is rare among those who have received secondary education or higher as can be seen in table 6.1 (Ibid.: 138-139). Having one partner and being faithful are the most often mentioned protection measures by women, although condom use is well known among

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80 Two remarks have to be made here. With respect to questions on knowledge of the existence of STIs and AIDS, and the modes of transmission of AIDS, the generation of men from 50-64 years old stands out in EDS-III of 1997. Knowledge is remarkably lower among this group. Furthermore, comparison of figures from men to those of women has to be done with caution, as the Demographic Health Survey EDS-III of 1997 does not include the age group 15-19 for men, while it does for women.

81 Eighty per cent of all women and 85% of all men can mention at least one mode through which HIV infection can occur (EDS-III 1997: 135). Knowledge about transmission of HIV is rising, as these figures were 65 and 71% respectively in the Demographic Health Survey of 1992/1993.
women with secondary or higher education. Men refer most often to condom use and fidelity as means of protection. Condom use is by far most mentioned by men in the ages of 20 to 24 and men with secondary or higher education, and is less known among uneducated men and men older than 50 years (Ibid.: 136-139).

Although a large part of the population has heard of AIDS, this does not immediately mean that their knowledge of AIDS is complete and correct (de Loenzien, Charbit & Akoto 1997). Despite the high levels of knowledge of AIDS, ideas that the disease does not really exist or that ‘I cannot get AIDS because I do not believe in it’ also are reported (Naré, Katz, & Tolley 1997: 19, see also Naré, Katz & Tolley 1996). The number of young women (15-24 years old) who have sufficient knowledge of how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS is consequently rather low at 10% (UNICEF 2003a: 113).82 Moreover, besides the high knowledge of

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82 The percentage of people with sufficient knowledge of how to protect oneself from HIV/AIDS is defined in The State of the World’s Children as those “who both correctly identify ways of preventing sexual transmission of HIV and reject major misconceptions about HIV transmission or prevention” (UNICEF 2003a: 113; emphasis mine). Respondents have to name two prevention methods (condom use and one faithful partner) and reject three local misconceptions in order to be considered having sufficient knowledge.
AIDS, other STIs as gonorrhoea and syphilis are much less known (17% and 9% for women and 59% and 18% for men respectively), especially in rural areas and among those who have never gone to school (EDS-III 1997: 132-133). Summarising, one can see that knowledge of AIDS is generally high, but there are also indications that this knowledge is superficial, as knowledge about STIs, or about modes of transmission of HIV and ways to protect against it, is not widespread. Interestingly, a study in rural area in southern Senegal found that AIDS-related knowledge or levels of education did not lead to behaviour change in the direction of safer sex (Lagarde, Pison & Enel 1996: 331).

In this context of high but superficial knowledge of HIV/AIDS, condom use is rising, but far from universal. Condom use was less than one percent before the existence of HIV in Senegal, and still remains low as a means of contraception and is not often used between spouses (UNAIDS 1999b: 17). In contrast to the meagre 3% of the women (age 15-49) who reported to have used condoms in during their last sexual contact, 23% of the men did report condom use (EDS-IV 2005: 30-32). But this hides large differences in condom use according to type of sexual relationships referred to or the users’ marital status, as can be seen in table 6.2 below. Only 3% of the women living in a union, and 11% of the men with a similar marital status reported condom in the last time they had sex (Ibid.: 30-32). In non-marital relationships use of condoms is higher and rising: for instance, 40% of the women and 73% of the men of reproductive ages (15-49 years) in Dakar who reported to have used condoms the last time they have sex with a partner they were not married to. For the age group of 15 to 19 years that is of specific concern to this thesis, 34% of the women and 45% of the men reported to have used condoms during their last sexual non-marital encounter (Ibid.: 30-32). A factor influencing condom use is educational background: in all types of relationships condom use is highest among women and men with secondary or higher education and lowest among those with no education in all types of relationships. For non-marital relationships, condom were used during the last sexual encounter by 53% of the women with secondary or higher education (all age groups and Senegal as a whole), 45% for women with primary education, and 19% for women without education. For men, these figures are 74%, 62% and 48% respectively (Ibid.: 30-32). UNAIDS reports that condoms are almost always used in encounters with prostitutes, who claim condom use with 99% of their partners (UNAIDS 1999b: 17-18). Condom sales also reveal rising trends: in 1988 a total of 800,000 condoms were sold, while in 1997 the sale had risen to 7

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83 According to the EDS-III contraceptive use, for Senegal as a whole, is “marginal” for women younger than 25, and the only exception to this is the condom that is used by 6% (EDS-III 1997: 39). With respect to men on the other hand, approximately 90% of a group of male students claims to have ever used a condom, and nearly two thirds of male students in casual relations says to use a condom at every occasion (UNAIDS 1999b: 17).

84 An earlier study reported that 36% of the women and 59% of the men of reproductive ages (15-49 years) in Dakar who reported to have ‘casual’ sex indicated to have used condoms on a systematic basis (ECP 1997: 46-47). Casual relationships and casual sex are defined in that study as relationships and sex “that take place between a man and a woman who are not husband and wife” (ECP 1997: 34). Marriage is defined in this study as “a union recognised by religion, customs or the law” (ECP 1997: 18). Casual relations might last a long time, but can also be very short. A distinction is made between relations that last less than 12 months, and those that last more than 12 months, of which the former are assumed to be more risky in terms of sexual and reproductive health (ECP 1997: 37).

85 The ECP noted a difference in systematic condom use in terms of educational background, varying from 43% among the non-educated men to 75% among higher educated ones (ECP 1997: 46-47).

86 The UNAIDS report that mentions these high rates of condom use among women who work as prostitutes, also questions this later on, after having discussed the prevalence rates of STIs among those women. Although these rates are not high, UNAIDS remarks that they are relatively high considering the high levels of reported condom use of sex workers, hereby implicitly suggesting that STI prevalence rates might implicate that condom use is not as high as reported (UNAIDS 1999b: 19).
million (UNAIDS 1999b: 18). In conclusion, contraceptive use is generally low among unmarried young people, although condoms are used more frequently than other methods. The rising trend of condom use notwithstanding, sexual intercourse without protection against either pregnancies or STIs/HIV is not uncommon among those unmarried young people who have sex.

The participants in this study are generally more concerned about unwanted extra-marital pregnancies than about HIV/AIDS and STIs. They are all aware of HIV/AIDS, but do not know people who are seropositive and have never consciously seen or met someone with AIDS. By contrast, they are regularly confronted with out-of-wedlock pregnancies in their neighbourhoods and their families. Parents, relatives, and teachers underline the problematic nature of these pregnancies for the communities, families and teenage mothers and fathers. In this context, young people experience the risks and consequences of unwanted pregnancies as much closer to their lifeworlds than an ‘invisible’ disease like AIDS. It is important to consider how the concerns over pregnancies differ for girls and boys. A major worry of girls is that boys almost always try to avoid the responsibility of a pregnancy, by not marrying the girl or forgoing financial support for the child’s upbringing. When the boy rejects the pregnancy, the girl is left solely with the responsibility to raise the child. This is not only difficult in financial terms, but can also jeopardize her schooling or work as well as marriage prospects. Boys have other concerns about unwanted premarital pregnancies, and they mainly fear to be accused of a pregnancy that is not theirs. Most boys

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87 See Bardem & Gobatto (1997: 53) for a similar attitude among unmarried girls in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Table 6.2: Condom use during last sexual encounter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With marriage partner*</td>
<td>With non-married partner**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married***</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no education</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary or +</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakar</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Senegal)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EDS-IV 2005, p. 31-32.
* marriage partner, or partner that one lives with
** partner to whom one is not married; can be both casual and non-casual relationships
*** married, or living together
indicate that they will first refuse their responsibility and maybe later reconsider, as they are worried to take care of a child of whom they are not the biological father. In order to be sure whether they are the biological father, boys will try to find out whether the girl has possibly had sex with other boys or men, and if they are not completely convinced that this is not the case, they will not accept responsibility. In practice, it is rather difficult for girls to have their premarital children recognized by their fathers. This also has implications for the child’s future in the sense that the recognition of the father is needed to get a birth certificate, which is a requirement for registration for schools, exams and diplomas as well as identity papers. A child that has not been recognized by its father, will carry the mother’s name, and as a result everyone will know that—and wonder why—(s)he has not been given the father’s name.

I conclude this first part by pointing to the discrepancy between the generally positive attitudes of Dakarois young people towards safe sex and the limited actual practice of it. In the focus group discussions, individual interviews and informal conversations during fieldwork, girls and boys underscored the importance of avoiding and preventing unwanted pregnancies and STI/HIV infections. Their actual behaviour does however not fully correspond to these positive attitudes: girls as well as boys are sexually active, and do not use contraceptives or condoms on a regular basis. The perspectives of Dakarois girls and boys on the advantages and disadvantages of the ABC strategies are central to the second part of this chapter that encompasses the next three sections. A consideration of these perspectives will point to the difficulties girls and boys experience in practicing abstinence, fidelity and condom use.

2 Abstinence, desire and sexual acts

How to protect oneself against unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STI infections? A common response of the unmarried girls and boys in Dakar that I spoke with was: “The first thing to do is to abstain. After that, you have to use the condom and be faithful” (boy, 19, in-school, FGD 12). Abstinence clearly stands out as the first option for protection for the young people in this study. It fits in with the traditional and religious importance of limiting sex to marriage. By opting for this strategy of protection, young people confirm and live up to societal expectations of premarital abstinence. In the three previous chapters, I highlighted the profound genderedness of the norm of premarital abstinence. Whereas in religion abstinence until marriage is equally important for boys and girls, in practice the importance of abstinence varies greatly between boys and girls. Chapter 5 showed how the norm of virginity is omnipresent with respect to female premarital sexuality: girls’ sexuality is silenced and almost invisible because girls are expected to enter marriage as virgins. Abstinence is the socially acceptable means of protection against STIs, HIV and pregnancies for girls. In Chapter 3, I discussed how being a virgin at the wedding night is not that relevant for boys, and that in fact boys should prove their potency through being sexually active and knowledgeable. This demand to be a ‘real man’ through establishing virility is central in the way boys’ sexual lives and experiences are shaped, as was shown in Chapter 4. That abstinence nevertheless remains an important reference point for male premarital sexuality is underlined by the fact that boys (and men) need to develop a sense of self-control and not completely loose themselves in sex at the expense of other areas in life. This importance of self-control in boys’ sexuality explains why boys support abstinence as a safe sex strategy, while at the same time being sexually active.

The meaning of a term like abstinence seems rather straightforward. The narratives
of Dakarois young people, however, reveal various ideas about what abstinence is. A first and broad way in which abstinence is understood, is in the sense of little or no interaction and contact between the two sexes. In that way, practising abstinence means that girls and boys do not spend much time with members of the opposite sex, do not have friends of the opposite sex, and do not search for nor have intimate or love relationships. Some girls argue that in order to safeguard their virginity they prefer to date no boyfriend at all. As such, they can avoid situations in which ‘one thing can lead to another’ and where they can be tempted to engage in sex. In a similar way, some boys who are worried about being too preoccupied with girls and sex, and who need to work on their ‘seriousness’ (for instance Malick), suggest that they should avoid girls all together and spend time with their male friends and relatives only, so that they will not be tempted to have sex. Few young people define abstinence in this strict sense of limited contact with the opposite sex. Even fewer practice this way of living: two – very religious - participants to this study indicated to practice abstinence in this strict sense (one is Aissatou, in Chapter 5). This broad view on abstinence, nevertheless, has some significance in society as it is an idealized image of a world where women and men are not tempted to misbehave. For many people, young and old, women and men, it is therefore a point of reference in instances of misconduct, such as promiscuity or out-of-wedlock pregnancies, which makes that solutions to such inappropriate behaviour are sought in a limitation of contacts between the two sexes.

In a second meaning, abstinence is defined in a more narrow sense: no penetrative sexual intercourse. Contacts and relationships are allowable, but the crucial point is that girls and boys do not have sexual intercourse with each other. This meaning corresponds with the medicalised notion of abstinence as it is propagated in prevention. At this point the traditional-religious norms coincide with the medicalised AIDS perspective. From the latter point of view, abstinence is safe, because when there is no sex, there can not be an infection with HIV or another STI, nor can there be a conception. The concomitance of the medical and traditional-religious perspectives probably explains the positive attitude that is generally found for this safe sex strategy. It suits both prescribed health behaviour and religious-traditional duties that are expected of unmarried people. The problem with the strategy of abstinence is hence not one of attitudes, but arises when the attention turns towards actual behaviour. That is where the third and fourth meaning of abstinence come in.

In the third understanding of abstinence that came forward in young people’s narratives, someone can also temporarily abstain. This understanding, which is mainly voiced by boys, is no longer about virginity, but about trying to control oneself. Avoiding sex as much as possible is a central part of this notion of self control. A boy who claims to abstain, however, can on exceptional occasions have sex. Although according to the second definition, this behaviour of rarely having sex would not be labelled as abstinence (from both the medical and traditional-religious perspective), this boy claims to abstain because he strives for that goal. Whether or not he succeeds, the wish to abstain is there. Moreover, although he engages very rarely in sex, he does refrain from sex at many other moments. This makes that abstinence is understood and defined in a temporary sense, because it is only at rare occasions he does not succeed in controlling himself. As a consequence, some boys claim to abstain even though they are not chaste. In these cases, the boy has lost his virginity by having sex, but now that he has the experience - and has established a fundament of his masculinity - he can decide to stop having sex. He practices abstinence in the sense that he does not have sex anymore. With respect to safe sex, this strategy of temporary abstinence is not safe, because, despite the effort to refrain, young people might still have sexual contacts. The question whether these sexual encounters, however rare they might be, are
protected needs to be addressed, as temporary abstinence in itself does not offer protection against STIs, HIV and unwanted pregnancies.

The fourth and final understanding of abstinence is related to what is considered sex. Chapter 5 showed how the definition of virginity centres on penetrative vaginal sex. As long as girls do not practice this type of sex, they can claim to be virgins and practice abstinence. But this understanding of abstinence does not exclude other sexual acts, such as oral or anal sex. This implies that girls and boys who claim to abstain, can actually engage in a variety of sexual acts. The risk of infection with HIV or STIs in especially anal sex is substantially higher than in vaginal penetrative sex, as I already indicated in the introductory Chapter. This means that practising this ‘type’ of partial abstinence can be dangerous in terms of HIV infection.

Taking these different meanings and interpretations of abstinence into account, a crucial question is to what extent people are protected when they say that they practice abstinence. What do girls and boys in Dakar mean when they claim to abstain? When they mean that they do not engage at all in sex, as in the first two meanings, there is no risk of conception nor of STI/HIV infection. But when people claim to practice abstinence while having had sex in the past (the temporary sense), or while engaging in sexual acts other than penetrative vaginal intercourse (the partial sense), this implies that they have been or are exposed to risks. In those latter cases, the term abstinence suggests safe sex, but in fact does not provide protection. ‘Temporary’ abstinence entails risks of unwanted pregnancies as well as STI/HIV infection. Conception is not a point of consideration with respect to oral or anal sex, but with respect to the practice of ‘partial’ abstinence the risks of HIV infection through anal sex have to be taken seriously.

Besides the multiple meanings (and subsequent risks) of abstinence, there is another problem with this safe sex strategy. Although it is highly preferred and brings traditional-religious perspectives together with medical views, many young people – both boys and girls – indicate that they have difficulties putting it in practice. Despite the fact that most indicate that they want to practice abstinence, many fail to do so and both girls and boys in contemporary Dakar engage in more or less intimate relationships prior to marriage. Abstinence is difficult for boys, in the context of a combination of factors which makes that sex is tempting for boys, which include the allegedly ‘provocative’ behaviour of girls, the peer pressure among boys to be sexually active, the impact of hegemonically defined masculinity in terms of potency and virility, and the sexual needs and desires that boys feel and seek to satisfy. For girls abstinence also poses problems, and the different reasons they have to engage in sex range from trying to safeguard a relation, a flirt poussé that gets out of hand, pressure from boys to sleep with them and, not to forget, the desire of girls themselves to have sex. Almost all boys and one in three girls engages in premarital sex, according to the surveys discussed in Chapter 3.

It is interesting to see how these deviances from the traditional-religious norm are accounted for by young people – and others for that matter. Although the religious norms and expectations are strict and straightforward, there is also room for manoeuvre in daily life. When boys discuss the fact that they did not manage to live up to the demand for premarital abstinence, they commonly argue that “we know that nobody is perfect, we are all incomplete, you know, the mistake is human (l’erreur est humaine)” (boy, 19, in-school, FGD 6). In a similar way, my Wolof teacher explained that “religion is one thing, but the human person is another” (personal conversation, 3 September 2004). Allah asks his followers to aim for perfection, and the prescriptions are expressions of the ideal and function as a guide. But in daily life, people also experience sensations and situations that make it difficult to realize the ideal. In those cases, one can ask Allah to forgive by praying,
because “he knows that people are weak”. Asking to be forgiven gives people peace on their minds about their misconduct. The acknowledgement of the imperfection of individuals and the possibility to ask for forgiveness in case of misconduct provides insight into the way that young people can reinforce a norm that they fail to live up to. The norm is by definition an ideal, and humans are understandably weak and imperfect. The failure to practice the norm of abstinence does not mean that it is not a worthwhile ideal to strive for. This makes it possible for the norm of abstinence to co-exist with the practice of premarital sex, even though the two are in contradiction with each other.

Summing up, the actual practice of the strategy of abstinence is hampered by, on the one hand, the different meanings given to the term and, on the other hand, the difficulties young people have to live up to the ideal. Taking these difficulties young people face with respect to practicing abstinence into account, the next question to address is how to make sexual contacts safe. Fidelity and condoms can do this and are central to the next two sections.

3 Fidelity, monogamy and multiple partnerships

Being faithful allows for having sex, but in order to be considered safe, this has to be with only one person. The safety of this strategy is however not fully guaranteed in the context of sexual relations of young people in Dakar. This – again – has to do with the multiple interpretations and meanings given to the notion of fidelity. For the majority of the young people in this study, fidelity means having an intimate relationship with one single person. This falls together with the medical view on fidelity as a safe sex strategy, in which being faithful means having sex with only one partner, who does not have other sexual partners. Some participants mixed up the term fidelity with abstinence. Fidelity is then understood as being faithful to yourself and your future marriage partner: consequently, it means that you cannot have sex with someone you are not married too. Because of this mixing up of the term fidelity with abstinence, being faithful carries a connotation of social acceptability with it.\(^88\) The preference young people express for fidelity can also be understood through its resonance with ideas about ‘real love’. As I explained in Chapter 4 and 5, exclusivity is one of the core elements of the notion of true love: the idea is that ‘real’ love can only exist in a monogamous relationship. Claims to practice fidelity hence not only respond to the need for safe sex, but also express the desire for exclusive love relationships.

Yet, being faithful does not necessarily mean being monogamous. The two previous chapters have shown that both boys and girls enter into multiple partnerships. In such cases there is, on the one hand, a serious love relationship with the ‘real’ girl/boyfriend, and on the other hand, one or more relationships in which other interests than love are more prominent. The meaning of fidelity becomes ambiguous in the distinction of diffe-

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\(^88\) It is important to note that the combination of premarital abstinence with fidelity to one’s marriage partners does not provide complete protection against infections with HIV or other STIs. When the marriage partner has (had) other sexual partners, prior to or during marriage, there is always a risk of infection during a faithful marriage if these sexual contacts have not been protected with condom use (see Bruce & Clark 2004, about HIV and early married adolescent girls). Sinding notes that “in Sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of newly HIV-positive women are contracting the virus within marriage from their husbands. […] These [monogamous] women had complied with the prevention messages they were given, and yet doing so they failed to protect them” (2005: 38).
rent kinds of relationships -‘serious’ in contrast to ‘for fun’. When defending the practice of multiple partnerships, both girls and boys argue that these other relationships do not mean that one is unfaithful, because that other partner is not seriously loved in the same way as the ‘real’ boy/girlfriend. In this line of reasoning, one can remain faithful to the seriously loved partner without having a monogamous relationship. This also comes forward from the survey data presented in table 6.1 above, where a distinction is made between having one partner and fidelity to one(s) partner(s). The discrepancy between being faithful and monogamy, in the sense of men separating their sexual adventures with other women from the feelings and meaning of the love relationship with their serious partner has also been noted elsewhere (Nencel 1996: 68-69; 2001: 60-61). In Dakar, this meaning of fidelity is however contested by both girls and boys. Although there is some room for creative manoeuvring with respect to the idea of fidelity in order to defend multiple partnerships, the ‘real’ girl/boyfriends often disagree with such interpretations. In most cases, both boys and girls do not accept that their partner engages in relationships with others, even when they are told that these relationships do not have the same value of serious and ‘real’ love. In fact, these other partners and relationships are most of the time consciously hidden to the ‘really loved’ partner.

This brings me to the safety of fidelity in the actual context of Dakar. Girls and boys in Dakar often have more than one single sexual partner because they either practice serial monogamy or have multiple partnerships. The Chapters 4 and 5 showed how multiple partnerships are not rare for boys nor girls. Moreover, girls and boys move from one intimate relationship into a next one if the former did not work out, for whatever reason. This means that fidelity – in the sense of limiting oneself to one sexual partner - is not easily put into practice. In principle, multiple partnerships and serial monogamy are not by definition unsafe, as long as partners are aware of each others sexual contacts and history, and as long as none of the partners is infected with HIV or an STI. The problem is however that these conditions to make fidelity safe are often lacking. In Dakar, an atmosphere of mistrust between the sexes – as is expressed in the way that both boys and girls complain about the opposite sex - makes it extremely difficult to openly discuss sexual histories between partners. The fact that young people should not engage in sex prior to marriage at all further adds to these difficulties to talk about past and present sexual partners and contacts. In addition, open communication about actual sexual contacts is difficult and unlikely when the desired exclusivity of relationships makes that both girls and boys are intolerant towards other partners. It is already a sensitive issue to talk about past relationships and partners, let alone about the current ones. In this respect, fidelity falls short as a safe sex strategy, because partners can pretend to be faithful to each other without being able to fully assess whether the relationship actually is monogamous. With this lack of knowledge on sexual contacts and histories, being faithful does not provide sufficient protection against HIV/STI infections.

Apart from this, a major problem with fidelity is that it might protect from STIs and HIV, if practiced under the right conditions, but that it never protects against unwanted pregnancies. The sexual contacts between faithful partners are without protection from condoms or other contraceptives, as a result of which they can lead to a pregnancy. Given young people’s worries about unwanted premarital pregnancies, this risk of falling pregnant is an important concern that needs to be considered when evaluating fidelity as a safe sex strategy.

In sum, questions of meaning affect the safety of fidelity as a strategy of protection, in the sense that being faithful can mean different things to different people. The translation into practice is also complicated, especially because of the difficulties to discuss
sexual histories and partners. The preference for fidelity as a safe sex strategy can partly be explained from the fact that it allows for the avoidance of speaking explicitly about sex and protection and for the forgoing of actually using condoms.

4 Condom use, ‘surprise’ and trust

Condom use is a safe sex strategy that provides protection from both unwanted pregnancies and infections with HIV/STIs in different kinds of sexual acts – vaginal penetration as well as others. Despite their medical safety, condoms are a contested issue in Dakar. From a traditional-religious point of view, they are considered unacceptable for young people, because the unmarried are not supposed to engage in sex, and are therefore not in need of condoms. In this perspective, condoms are problematized because, it is argued, they incite promiscuity. Consider the following discussion of a group of in-school boys:

- Condoms, I think that a lot of people think that condoms have advantageous effects. But in the world where we are today, it is the condoms that are pushing the youth at having sex. A youth who thinks about having sex without risking to make the girl pregnant, he will have sex. The person who cannot abstain, when he sees those condoms, he will use them in order to have sexual intercourse. I think that condoms are risky, the most risky and the most dangerous for men. Since everything can make mistakes, the machines that make condoms can make mistakes. [...] You can buy a condom and you can find a fault in its fabrication. Those are the risks with condoms.
- In fact, they encourage young people.
- Exactly, they encourage young people.
- No, it is not that they encourage young people. For me, it is for helping and assisting them. Because, the majority, they like to do that, have sexual intercourse. And to assist them, in order not to catch diseases by doing it, they have fabricated condoms, to help them. You should not, you should not judge other people according to yourself. For example, you, you are like that, but there are also others who like to have sex.
- But at that moment, those condoms.
- But if there were no condoms, they would also do it. And in that case, they would have diseases, like AIDS and those other. [...] So, it is to assist them. Those who fabricate condoms, they do it in order to help the youth, not with the goal of encouraging them.
- The best way, that is abstinence. But you know, this does not mean that when I manage to abstain, that another can also do it, abstinence. We are not all in the same religion. There are people who do it, and when I do it, I think about my religion. But there is another one who does it, maybe he is animist or he does not care about religion. For him, the best method to protect himself from pregnancies and the risks of diseases is with condoms. [...] I confirm also the guilt of the condoms, because the one who has the habit to have sex with condoms, the day that he is alone with a girl, when you know that man is not perfect, he searches his pockets and does not find a condom, maybe he has forgotten them. That day, will he be able to abstain? He will be forced to do it without a condom. Also, there is another problem that poses itself. It encourages the young, you know, because, the youth who says that he is not afraid of the consequences with respect to religion, he only has fears about those diseases, STIs, and making the girl pregnant. But when he sees a condom when he is having sex, he will not be faced with a pregnancy. This one, he will say, since these condoms are there, ah, in order to avoid STIs and pregnancies, I am going to use them, because that is the only thing he will do.
- For me, condoms do not push anybody at having sexual intercourse. It is your own will. [...] Men tend to have sex whether there is a condom or not. They have always liked it. That is why the condoms are not guilty. They are there rather to assist certain youth.

(boys, in-school, 18-20, FGD 12)
Some people in Dakar argue that if there were no condoms, young people would be less tempted to engage in premarital sex and would be more successful in practicing abstinence. Others disagree with this view and claim that it is not the condoms that make young people have premarital sex, but that they would engage in sex anyway, and that condoms allow them to protect themselves while doing it. The contested character of condoms and premarital sex makes that condoms are not easily used in practice. Dakarois young people bring forward a variety of reasons to explain for not using condoms. These concern on the one hand, negative attitudes towards condoms and a preference for sex without condoms. On the other hand, an series of explanations are found in the difficulties to translate an abstract positive attitude towards condom use into their actual practice. Both types of explanations are considered below.

Before getting to that, it is useful to know where young people can find condoms. They are commonly sold in for instance pharmacies or shops in most neighbourhoods, which implies that they are geographically accessible to young people. A package of three costs 150 franc CFA (23 eurocents), which is in itself not expensive. Yet, girls and boys are always short on money and the participants in this research regularly indicated that they can use 150 CFA for other things as well. Young people often feel ashamed to buy condoms. In Chapter 1, I already mentioned that judgemental attitudes towards unmarried girls and boys who are looking for information and services on sexual and reproductive health issues. This makes it especially difficult for girls to buy condoms themselves. Some boys make use of condoms that their brothers or friends keep. Others send their younger brothers to buy condoms or go to another neighbourhood where they cannot be so easily recognized.

Negative attitudes

With respect to the forgoing of condom use because of a preference for sex without condoms, three different issues are raised by young people. Firstly, doubts are raised about the reliability of the condoms. As one of the boys in the debate quoted above suggests, there is a risk that condoms are not properly fabricated, resulting in poor quality. During the group discussions, boys regularly shared examples of perforated condoms that leak semen or condoms that rupture during intercourse. In addition to those faults, boys also have bad experiences in the sense that the condom gets lost during the intercourse, or that the condom slides off the penis when it becomes less hard. Boys see these problems as disadvantages of condoms, and question their safety and effectiveness by pointing to these practical failures. Such doubts allow them to forgo condom use, as they argue that even with condoms sex can turn out to be unprotected.

Secondly, some young people express an explicit preference for sex without condoms. Especially boys, but not exclusively, indicate that they find sex without condoms more pleasurable. This preference for direct genital contact during sexual intercourse is captured in the expression ‘yap contre yap’. In Wolof yap means ‘flesh’, so the expression has to be read as ‘flesh against flesh’. Condoms are then perceived as reducing sexual pleasure. A similar preference for sex without condoms has been reported elsewhere (cf. Gage 1998: 160; Ankomah 1998: 310). With this resistance against condoms, some boys prefer to practice coitus interruptus, in which the penis is withdrawn from the vagina before ejaculation. Penda and Nafissatou are critical of this practice:

Penda: Coitus interruptus. That is not that easy. Will he be able to control himself, or not? You can not be sure about it.
Nafissatou: I have heard of guys who claim to do it, just to comfort [the girl]. But in the end, they do not withdraw.
Penda: And it is not even safe, because the semen can come out early.
(girls, 18 and 20, in-school and out-of-school, INT 33)

Not all boys are familiar with coitus interruptus, but some consider it to be a good option and do not seem weary about the low level of protection offered by this method (see note 2 of this chapter). The preference for yap contre yap is an explanatory factor for condom avoidance.

Thirdly, avoidance of condom use is defended by claiming that the risks of HIV/STI infections with specific partners are low. Boys, for instance, often explained that there is no need to use a condom, when they have confidence (confiance) in the girl. 'Having confidence' can mean that the boy thinks that this girl is faithful to him, and that therefore they do not need to use condoms. It can also mean that the boy 'knows' her, in which 'knowing' is a vague and imprecise term. It is usually applied to differentiate girls who live in for instance the same neighbourhood from girls that boys meet occasionally at a club or on a soirée. The idea is that the girls they 'know' carry fewer risks of STI/HIV infection with them, assuming that these girls have fewer sexual contacts. By contrast, with respect to the girls met at a club or soirée, he does not know whether she has multiple and casual sexual contacts or not. Without proof of the contrary, it is assumed that these 'other' girls have such contacts, because these girls are thought to be immoral and untrustworthy. It is argued that with this latter group of girls you better be careful and use condoms. For the former group, the girls they have confidence in, it is assumed that they behave properly, and consequently it is believed that these girls do not constitute a risk of STI/HIV infection. In the boys’ explanations, this perceived lower risk justifies the forgoing of condom use. The distinction boys make here in terms of 'knowing' or 'not knowing' a girl has parallels with the typology of ‘real’ girlfriend and ‘easy’ girls in the sense that boys ascribe certain behaviours to different types of girls and approach girls according to their categorization. However, the two typologies do not coincide, because the girl they ‘know’ is not by definition the ‘real’ girlfriend, although this might be possible. In fact, the girls that boys are talking here about could also be the so-called ‘easy’ girl.

There are a couple of issues in this line of reasoning that require consideration. To begin with, the perception of risks mainly concerns HIV and STIs, but ignores risks of conception. Forgoing condom use with a partner one ‘knows’ thus implies a risk of unwanted pregnancy. Furthermore, the argumentation of the boys is only concerned about their own risks of infection, but does not deal with the risk the boys might carry to infect the girl. Finally, with respect to having confidence, it is interesting to take into account the earlier mentioned point that partners rarely openly discuss sexual partners and histories. This makes that the 'knowing' is not so much based on information, but on reputation and image. All in all, these considerations expose the risks that young people are taking when they argue that they do not need condoms with specific partners.

**Difficulties in practice**

I now turn to the second group of explanations, that relates limited condom use not so much to negative attitudes, but to difficulties that young people face to translate positive attitudes towards the use of condoms into actual practice. A first problem in this respect is that both girls and boys do not know how to start talking about condom use. Many boys feel uncomfortable to talk about condom use with a girl: they cannot find the right words
to start discussing condom use and cannot find the right moment to raise the matter. Even though these boys might want to use condoms, they often do not know how to go about it when they are with a girl. Girls face similar problems, which often leads to an avoidance of speaking about condoms.

Related to this is the interpretation of condoms as a sign of distrust and lack of confidence. Some girls suggested that you cannot ask for a condom if you really have confidence in your partner. Given the above argumentation that condoms are only needed in sexual encounters with someone who is assumed to carry a risk of infection, asking for condoms implies doubts about the partner’s fidelity and exclusive ‘real’ love. Proposing or demanding condom use is then a violation of trust. Moreover, it can arouse suspicion on the part of the partner: if the partner is faithful and without infection, insistence on condom use can be interpreted as a sign that you yourself are not to be trusted. Both instances are undesirable in relationships (Gavin 2000; see also Ankomah 1998; Gage 1998; Bardem & Gobatto 1997; Spronk 2004). In Dakar, suspicion and violation of trust are counterproductive to building a serious relationships. This also counts for ‘other’ relationships, in which the existence of multiple partnerships is almost always downplayed. In combination with the difficulties to find the right words and timing, the issues of trust and suspicion play a role in the preference for fidelity that I discussed above.

A third factor that hampers translation into actual practice is the perception of sex as a ‘surprise’. Chapter 4 showed how sex becomes a ‘surprise’ in the controversy regarding premarital sexuality: it is not prepared, expected, or foreseen, but something that just happens. Most boys who explained why they had not used condoms during their sexual encounters referred to this notion of surprise. They did not have a condom present, because they were not expecting nor planning to have sex at that particular moment. The fact that sex ‘just happens’, makes it difficult to take precautions. A possible solution to this problem would be to always carry a condom with you, just in case the occasion to have sex arises, but neither the girl nor the boy is likely to do so all the time. Only one boy showed me he had a condom in his wallet. Another solution would be to go and get a condom when the sexual encounter presents itself, but this is rather unlikely. Boys often argue that they are afraid that when they go to look for a condom, this will interrupt the sex play and “spoil the appetite”. They are worried that by the time they come back, the atmosphere has changed, as a consequence of which they are no longer in the mood to have sex, or even worse, the girl might have lost her interest. The condom is then perceived as something that destroys the moment suprême. The contested character of premarital sex, in which sexual encounters become a surprise, thus adds to the avoidance of condoms.

The question related to bringing, proposing or using condoms needs some more detailed consideration, because these explanations for actual avoidance of condoms are linked to the constructions of female and male premarital sexuality. It is at this point that questions of meaning come into play, in the sense that the proposal to use condoms has rather different implications for the identities of girls and boys. This for instance becomes clear when considering who should be responsible for bringing and introducing condoms during sexual encounters. Some participants (both girls and boys) argue that it is the responsibility of the girl to take the initiative to talk about protection and condoms. She should bring a condom or claim one from her partner, because she should reflect on her behaviour and think clearly. Moreover, she will be most confronted with the consequences of a pregnancy. Another reason that is sometimes brought forward is that because girls provoke boys into having sex, they should also be responsible for the safety of those encounters.

Despite these arguments that put the responsibility in the girl’s hands, it is more
commonly thought that condoms are *un affaire des hommes*, a men’s business. Because they are the ones to actually wear them, boys are held responsible for bringing the condoms and making sure that they are used. In addition to that, it is generally thought that men are superior to women, and that they are hence more qualified to carry responsibilities and to look after women than the other way around. Moreover, both boys and girls sometimes argue that, as boys are ‘always asking for sex’, they should also prepare themselves properly. In addition, even though girls often face the consequence of a pregnancy, boys cannot withdraw from their responsibilities in these matters. The matter of carrying responsibility for condom use and protection thus turns out to be a gendered issue. In the constellation of gendered expectations of girls’ and boys’ sexualities, boys and men are supposed to be dominant in sexual relations and are consequently positioned as the ones to take the lead with regard to protection. None of the boys in this study ever encountered a girl who took the initiative to use condoms, and none of the girls indicated that she actually ever brought a condom (as the majority did not even acknowledge to have had sex).

It has to be noted that the question on responsibility cannot be answered in an unequivocal way. The claims that condoms are a concern for girls are countered by arguments that it is highly inappropriate for girls to carry a condom with them or to suggest its use to their partner. In the context of silenced female premarital sexuality where girls should stay away from sex, they should not be experienced and knowledgeable on sex, nor on contraception. It is inappropriate for them to display knowledge about sex and about protection, as this can raise questions about their virginity status and can imply misconduct on their behalf (see also Gage 1998; Ankomah 1998; Bardem & Gobatto 1997 for similar processes in other contexts). Whereas it could be argued that girls should carry a condom with them all the time, to be prepared ‘just in case’ they come to have sex, girls rarely do this. When an aunt, sister, father or mother would find a condom in the girl’s personal affairs, they would rapidly conclude that this girl is sexually active. The condom is then interpreted as a sign that the girl is looking for sex, which is considered highly inappropriate. Girls want to avoid such a conclusion by all means. As such, the condom, like other contraceptive methods, makes visible what girls prefer to keep secret. The fact that, in a context where girls have little privacy, contraceptives expose girls’ sexual knowledge and/or activity is also one of the reasons why unmarried girls are reluctant to use the contraceptive pill, in addition to the reasons mentioned in section 1 of this chapter (see also Hardon & Harries 2002; Gage 1998). To come back to condoms, not only relatives or friends might interpret the fact that a girl carries a condom with her in a negative sense, but boyfriends and sexual partners can also view it in an unfavourable way. Girls will want to avoid being considered and approached as an ‘easy’ girl.

Even though condom use is less inappropriate for boys than for girls, boys also have to be careful not to be seen as too much looking for sex. Whereas amongst boys, pressure is exercised to be sexually active, and this is also part of wider societal processes that value potency and virility in masculinity, I explained in chapter 4 that boys also have to be ‘serious’. Boys often avoid the open manifestation of their sexual interests and desires in relation to parents, relatives, teachers, or other authorities. That also means that although parents would find it less problematic to find condoms in a boy’s personal belongings, they

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89 A study noted that one of the reason for the impopularity of the contraceptive pill in South Africa was its “stigmatising visibility” (Hardon & Harries 2002: 68). Gage (1998) discusses, amongst others, how general low levels of contraceptive use among adolescents in developing countries, are related to erroneous beliefs about damaging effects on the one hand, and social disapproval and stigmatisation at clinics on the other.
would nevertheless question why he needs them. So, for boys, condoms also expose mat-

er that they rather keep quiet. In addition, in their contacts with girls, the open presence

of a condom would give the impression that the boy is too much focused on sex, which

disqualifies him as a sincere partner for her. Even though sex might be an important ele-

ment in the relationship, for both the boy and the girl, this is rarely openly displayed and

acknowledged. When boys are too interested in sex, a girl might withdraw from the

relationship, because it is not ‘serious’ enough. Condoms can thus be at odds with the

identity that boys seek to establish vis-à-vis a female partner.

Questions of meaning thus also affect the strategy of condom use, but not in the same

way as with abstinence or fidelity. Whereas for the latter interpretations concern the

meaning of the terms abstinence of fidelity, the definition of what condoms are and how

they are used is not so much subject to interpretation. Instead, processes of interpretation

play a role with respect to the implications of the use, proposal to use, or carrying around

of condoms for the person who does so. The association of condoms with misconduct or

being too knowledgeable about and interested in sex are one example of the effects of

meaning. The earlier discussed association of condoms with doubts about faithfulness and

subsequent issues of suspicion and violations of trust are another example. I now want to

address a final instance at which meanings affect condom use concerns the actual use of

condoms in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

When condoms are a men’s affair, it is of pivotal importance to understand how con-

doms fit in with hegemonic masculinity. Insecurity and inconvenience not only affects

boys with respect to starting to talk about condoms, but also affects the actual use. Some

boys indicated that they feel embarrassed to put the condom on during sex. They feel

uneasy when fumbling about with the condom and their penis, while the girl is waiting

and maybe watching what is going on. It is worthwhile to consider how condom use can

be a threat to masculinity. Men are expected to know how to go about sex: they have to be

experienced and in control. Clumsy fumbling around with a condom does not fit in this

image. Nor does asking the girl for assistance, as comes forward from Penda’s words:

Those guys, they do not inform themselves, because they feel ashamed. They will not ask

you how to use [a condom], how to put it on, things like that. They are insecure, you know.

You see, if the guy does not know how to do it, how to put it, things like that, he does not
dare to, he is not going to ask, to ask you. He will never ask the girl, you see.

(girl, 18, in-school, INT 33)

Although condoms provide medical safety and protection, they also expose boys to risks

with respect to the masculinity they have to establish. Forgoing condom use can be part of

an (unconscious) strategy to keep the image of being sexually knowledgeable and active

intact. This means that condom use is caught in a catch-22 situation where it is simultane-

ously a man’s business and a possible threat to masculinity.

Summarising the controversial issue of condom use, young people might not use

condoms because of negative attitudes towards them or because of difficulties to translate

an abstract positive attitude into actual practice. Forgoing condom use is justified by point-

ing to the limited reliability of condoms or by arguing that they are not needed in cases

where one ‘trusts’ a partner that one ‘knows’. A preference for sex without condoms (yap

contre yap) further adds to the avoidance of condoms. Young people also see advantages in

condom use. The failure to use condoms is then related to insecurities to propose condoms,

and the fact that condoms arouse suspicion and are a violation of trust. Moreover, when

sex is experienced as a ‘surprise’, most of the time no precautions are being taken. Boys do
not want to go out and get a condom, because they are worried that this will ruin the atmosphere and the girl will loose interest in sex. Neither girls nor boys carry a condom with them - just in case - albeit for different reasons. These essentially concern associations of condoms with misconduct and being too sexually knowledgeable or interested. Finally, although condoms are a man’s affair, their actual use might be hampered by the fact that clumsily fooling around with a condom runs against the image of a sexually experienced man who is in control of the sexual situation.

5 Match or mismatch: gendered sexualities and safe sex agency

Overlooking the ABC safe sex strategies discussed in the three foregoing sections, it can be concluded that young people, both girls and boys, generally agree that safe sex is important and that unmarried young people should be protected from HIV/STI infections and unwanted pregnancies. But this positive attitude towards safe sex is often not translated into actual practice. For each one of the three strategies, problems arise when it comes to actual behaviour in daily life. Abstinence is highly valued, but not easily practiced in a context where both girls and boys want to explore sex and where boys and girls experience various pressures to become sexually experienced. Attitudes towards fidelity are positive, but the safety of this strategy is compromised by the practice of serial monogamy and multiple partnerships and by the atmosphere of distrust that limits communication on sexual histories between partners. Condom use is contested and attitudes towards it vary from support and appreciation to critique and rejection. In addition, condom use is often avoided in practice for a variety of reasons.

This third part of the chapter seeks to come to an understanding of the discrepancy between the general positive though abstract attitudes towards safe sex and the limited actual practice of it. It seeks to relate the limited practice of safe sex to the gendered sexualities that young people construct and embody. It will follow two tracks in this. The first track seeks to answer the question how girls and boys, as gendered sexual subjects, come to be positioned to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use. Put differently, it analyses in what ways the constructions of premarital gendered heterosexuality match or mismatch with the agency that young people require to practice each of the three strategies. I will explore in what ways the strategies fit in or are at odds with the gendered sexual identities that girls and boys seek to establish. Both the attractiveness of each strategy and the various constraints that girls and boys face in their actual practice will be looked at. The analysis not only relates dominant constructions of young people’s gendered sexualities to abstinence, fidelity and condom use, but also explores in what ways sub-dominant dimensions of female and male premarital sexuality are in line or in conflict with the ABC strategies. The second track focuses on the degree of indecisiveness that young people seem to display in their safe sex behaviour. This indecisiveness is related to the conflicting and contradictory subjectivities that both girls and boys have to negotiate. These tensions are placed in the context of wider societal upheaval around premarital sexuality.

My argument in this third part of the chapter deals with the effects of the construction of sexual subjectivities. The particular constructions of female and male premarital sexuality position girls and boys in specific ways and as such allowing or preventing them to act in a certain way. As I explained in the introductory chapter, the concern is with how such discourses ascribe specific capacities to act to persons, more precisely what agency the creation of certain subject positions ascribes to individuals. I explore in what ways the gendered sexualities as they are constructed in contemporary Dakar have the capacity to
link up with or contrast to agency that is required to practice the ABC strategies. How do the cultural patterns in which female and male premarital sexualities are constructed create or constrain the practice of safe sex? It is important to clarify that in this third part of the chapter I will not be presenting new data or information. Rather the analysis builds on the material from the three foregoing sections and analyses it from a different perspective, that of the construction of the gendered sexuality of girls and boys. I take this perspective to come to an understanding of young people’s safe sex practices from their own life worlds. That implies that those life worlds – and not the ABC strategies – are taken as the starting point for my analysis of young people’s safe sex practices, or lack thereof. Obviously, regular references to the Chapters 3, 4 and 5 in which their intimate relationships and sexual lives have been discussed in detail will be made.

**Girls’ agency for safe sex**

To start with girls, in what ways do dominant and sub-dominant constructions of female premarital sexuality position girls with agency to practice abstinence, fidelity and/or condom use? The sexual identity of girls is constructed in relation to the dominant societal norm of female virginity. Chapter 3 showed that female virginity not only signifies the status of the girl, but also of her parents and family, her future husband, her future marriage, and society as a whole. In Chapter 5, I analysed how this norm to a large extent effectively silences female premarital sexuality. Girls cannot escape the demand for virginity, and almost always claim not to be sexually active. This has implications for the different safe sex strategies, in the sense that girls are not positioned as active sexual actors. The only agency that is ascribed to girls by this omnipresent virginity norm is the agency to abstain from sexual relationships, that is the agency to say ‘no’. This by definition implies that girls are not positioned to practice fidelity or condom use.

Although the strategy of fidelity does not fit in with the virginity norm, there is some room for manoeuvre because it does resonate with another norm of female sexuality: the one of the faithful woman. In traditional-religious perspectives, women’s fidelity to their husband is considered a prerequisite for the successful functioning of the marriage. In contemporary Dakar, the norm of the faithful woman has been reinforced by reference to the ideal of romantic love. It has also been transferred to premarital intimate relationships. Chapter 5 discussed how the practice of the *mbaxal* (multiple partnerships) is considered inappropriate and unacceptable for girls. The term *mbaran*, which is used for girls with multiple boyfriends, carries a negative connotation implying immorality and improper behaviour. By opting for fidelity, girls go beyond the virginity expectations, but still distinguish themselves from the unfaithful – and hence immoral - women in multi-partner- ships. As such, the construction of the faithful woman positions girls with some agency to practice fidelity.

Dominant ideas of female – premarital – sexuality are not compatible at all with the strategy of condom use. The fierce restrictions on female premarital sexuality make that girls cannot opt for condom use. Because girls are not constructed as sexually active beings, they are not positioned to be in need of using condoms. As a consequence, girls are not ascribed space to buy or carry a condom, to ask for condoms or to take the initiative to actually use condoms. Such actions would mark girls as ‘bad’ and immoral, which obviously is detrimental to the identity they seek to establish and the way they seek to be treated by their male partners. This implies that in the attempts to build and protect a respectable female identity, the dominant subjectivity of female premarital sexuality leaves girls with little or no space to look or prepare for protected sex.
The silencing of female premarital sexuality notwithstanding, the narratives of the girls have showed that girls also move beyond these restrictive norms: girls do engage in sex, experience (and respond to) female sexual desire, practice other types of sex than vaginal penetration, and engage in multiple partnerships. Although girls make a lot of effort to create and safeguard an image of a virgin and a-sexual girl, daily life shows that they also embody other subjectivities. Girls not only want to say ‘no’, but also seek pleasure and satisfaction of their needs in sex. Moreover, girls have multiple partners or engage in serial relationships. These sub-dominant female sexual subjectivities point out that girls have reasons not to practice abstinence or fidelity. Whereas the dominant notions of female sexuality in terms of virginity and faithfulness allow girls barely any agency to protect themselves when becoming sexually active, the sub-dominant subjectivities do in some way position girls as agents who can opt for, propose and negotiate condom use.

Yet, there is very little space for the articulation of the sub-dominant active female sexuality. Chapter 5 pointed to the struggle girls face to an active sexuality including female sexual desire and pleasure. This means that the potential of the sub-dominant female sexual subjectivities to ascribe girls with substantial agency to practice safe sex is constrained. The conclusion is then that the requirements to practice the safe sex ABC are antithetical to the female sexual subjectivities that the girls enact and embody. Put differently, the instances at which the agency to practice safe sex mismatches female premarital heterosexuality are more profound than the instances where the two match. That means that in the totality of dominant and sub-dominant gendered sexual identities, girls are not positioned as safe sex agents.

It is not only female sexual subjectivities that affect girls’ agency to practice safe sex, but also gender dynamics between girls and boys in relationships and aspects related to the gender position of girls. With respect to the latter, the limited access of girls to money as well as parental control over their whereabouts and the earlier mentioned judgemental attitudes towards the buying of condoms hamper their ability to buy condoms themselves. With respect to the former, the gender dynamics between girls and boys in intimate relationships make it difficult for girls to protect themselves. The Chapters 4 and 5 pointed to the male centred construction of premarital sexuality and to the dominant position that boys are ascribed vis-à-vis girls. A first effect of this is that girls are not positioned to know nor control whether their boyfriend has (had) sex with other girls or women. Secondly, when boys put girls under pressure to respond to their – male - sexual needs, and when girls engage in sex to safeguard a relationship (either for love and/or money), it will not be easy for girls to negotiate and insist on the use of condoms. When girls already have difficulties in saying ’no’ to the sexual wishes of their boyfriend, how can they insist on condom use in case the boyfriend prefers sex without condoms? Moreover, asking for condoms can jeopardize their relationship in the sense that it is experienced by the boyfriend as a violation of trust, implying his infidelity. These inequalities notwithstanding, the gender dynamics are multi-layered and thus the positions of both girls and boys are more ambiguous. In fact, girls can resist boys’ requests for sex, and girls do exercise power in their intimate relationships with boys. That in principle would suggest that there are entry points for girls to negotiate safe sex.

In fact, despite the idea that condoms are a man’s business, both girls and boys argue that girls can and should take the initiative for condom use and protection. They argue this on the basis that girls are the ones who have to ‘think about the consequences’. Interestingly, such a reworking of the restrictive virginity discourse can provide grounds for girls to protect themselves, in the sense that girls are ascribed control over sexuality. This control relates in the first place to their own sexuality and sexual desire, but in the
second place also to that of boys and men: by controlling themselves, girls also help boys and men to control their sexuality. This assumed control can give girls a basis on which they can act responsibly and ensure protection and safety. Although they cannot display an interest in contraceptives and condoms, this basis does in some way position them to put forward the need to avoid pregnancies and STI infections, and ‘think about the consequences’. In sum, that means that whereas girls are not ascribed much agency to practice fidelity or condom use, there is a potential to position girls to protect their sexual encounters.

Boys’ agency for safe sex
The virginity discourse in Dakar has proven far less powerful and influential on boys’ sexuality. In fact, the sexual desire and needs of boys are not silenced, but assumed and valued in the construction of male premarital sexuality that centres on proving potency and virility. With their sexual needs and desires constructed as uncontrollable, boys are actually expected to be sexually active. That implies that the dominant framing of male potency does not ascribe boys agency to practice abstinence. This makes the two other strategies of fidelity and condom use less incompatible with hegemonic male premarital sexuality – at least in comparison to female premarital sexuality. However, the strategy of being faithful cannot unproblematically be linked to the masculine norm of virility, because the ‘ever ready’ quality that is assumed in male sexuality does not match with monogamy. The uncontrollable ‘nature’ of male sexual desires hampers boys’ ability to limit themselves to one sexual partner: they cannot help it when they are being ‘provoked’. Whereas girls are in some way positioned to be a faithful woman, hegemonic masculinity does not position boys to practice fidelity. On the contrary, the male norm of potency values multiple partners of boys (‘a girl in every neighbourhood’). Boys underline the importance of being faithful in ‘real love’ relationships, and are also expected – by girls and boys alike – to live up to the ideal of exclusive love. But the idea of exclusivity is more often related to love than to sexual relationships, which makes the connection between fidelity and male sexuality ambiguous: whereas boys on the one hand should be faithful, they can on the other hand not have their sexuality be dictated by such a norm.

When hegemonic masculinity does not position boys to abstain, and in a different way does not position them to practice fidelity, condom use is the only ABC strategy that is left for them. The fact that condom use is generally considered to be a man’s affair in Dakar suggests that it is well compatible with dominant male sexuality. It fits in with broader norms of masculinity that position men and boys as active actors who can take responsibility for, for instance, work, income, household decisions and expenses, and also in relationships with women. This construction of masculinity combined with the potency norm in male sexuality ascribes boys agency to take the initiative in male-centred sexual encounters. Such a constitution in principle allows and enables boys to propose and use condoms. However, hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily constructed in such a way that it contributes to condom use by boys. In the typology which distinguishes between the ‘real’ girlfriend and the ‘easy’ girl, the latter category enables boys to enact potency and virility with few measures of control and restraint. The labelling of an ‘easy’ girl as a girl that does not respect herself places boys in a position that they do not need to respect her either. This allows them to forgo the responsibility to use protection during sex. In fact, when boys argue on when and why to use condoms in casual sexual relationships by distinguishing between girls they ‘know’ or do not ‘know’, they are predominantly concerned with their own risks (of becoming infected with HIV or an STI or of being
accused of impregnating a girl), rather than concerned about the risks (of HIV/STI infection or unwanted pregnancy) they potentially expose the girls to. So whereas boys are positioned as active sexual actors, hegemonic male sexuality does not put strong borders on their sexuality and thus not ascribe them agency to take responsibility and for instance use condoms.

There is however a second norm of male sexuality in which notions of control take a prominent place. Despite the centrality of potency and virility in the construction of male premarital sexuality, the virginity and self-control discourse remains an important reference point for boys’ masculinities. Boys are not required to remain virgins, but it is important for them to be serious and responsible in life and to avoid that their sexuality does not overshadow other parts of their life. This affects the agency of boys to practice the ABC strategies in various and sometimes contradictory ways. First of all, boys are ascribed agency to control themselves and to refrain from sex. More precisely, boys should at least have the intention to control themselves. The strategy of abstinence remains relevant and valuable to boys, because it allows them to live up to the masculinity ideal of being serious and responsible. Even though boys do not always practice abstinence, they might still claim to do so, in order to show their serious character. Secondly, boys are ascribed agency to take responsibility and think about the consequences of their sexual acts. This demand for responsibility positions them to practice both fidelity and condom use. Yet, these two effects of the self-control and virginity discourse contradict each other. Whereas it does encourage boys to take responsibility, the carrying of condoms is interpreted negatively in relation to that same discourse, in the sense that having a condom with you is easily interpreted as being looking for sex or being too pre-occupied with sex. This association makes boys reluctant to carry a condom with them ‘just in case’ the occasion presents itself. Paradoxically, the self-control discourse that could enable boys to take precautions also prevents them from doing so.

There is another factor that affects the agency of boys to practice condom use. Boys’ narratives of unprotected sex show that boys often do not feel ‘in control’ when it comes to safe sex. Insecurities of boys concern both doubts about whether they are ‘man enough’ and doubts about the desirability of hegemonic masculine behaviour, as I explained in Chapter 4. The experiences of sex as a ‘surprise’ and of girls’ allegedly provocative behaviour point to instances where boys do not feel in control of the sexual encounter. The limited control of boys over sexual encounters is illustrated by their worries about how going to get a condom can ‘spoil the appetite’ in the moment suprême. It is also the background against which the boys’ reluctance to discuss condoms and to actually put them on can be understood: they are uncomfortable and do not know how to go about it. It is clear that condom use can be a threat to the masculine identities of sexually experienced and knowledgeable that boys have to establish during sexual encounters. When boys do not master the skills to talk about and use condoms, they can end up looking rather clumsy and this can be experienced as unmanly and make them insecure. By forgoing condom use, boys avoid this danger. All this means that, despite their dominant position vis-à-vis girls, boys do not fully control when sex happens, nor how it takes place. Put differently, boys have less control over the use of condoms than is often assumed.

In sum, being constituted as active sexual actors, boys are in principle placed in a position from where they can practice safe sex, more specifically fidelity and condom use. In comparison with girls, boys are ascribed more agency to actively organise their sexual lives. However, at many instances, the different male sexual subjectivities that boys enact do not ascribe boys the agency to practice those two strategies. Moreover, the virginity norm remains influential. The combination of the desire for responsibility, of being positioned
as active sexual actors and of boys’ doubts about the desirability of hegemonic masculinity in terms of potency, might be a basis on which boys can develop a more decisive and conscious strategy to protect their sexual contacts. The contradictions between the male sexuality norms however lead to a mismatch with the safe sex agency of boys. As such, boys’ ability to protect themselves and their partners is hampered and boys are not unequivocally position as safe sex actors.

To conclude this section, considering the many points at which the requirements for safe sex practices are antithetical to the girls’ and boys’ performative repetitive acts and the negotiations of the various gendered sexual identities, it is no surprise that they often fail to practice safe sex. The gender and sexual identities that girls and boys are enacting ascribe them with little agency to practice the different safe sex strategies. This means that girls and boys - in gendered ways - are not positioned as safe sex agents. Actually, the only clear agency that is ascribed to especially girls, but to an important extent also to boys, is the agency to abstain and say ‘no’ to sex. This striving for abstinence, with all the symbolic weight that it carries, affects the agency girls and boys have to practice other forms of safe sex.

Yet, even though in many ways young people’s sexuality is not constructed in such a way that they are ascribed agency to protect themselves from infections with STIs and/or HIV or unwanted pregnancies, there are some elements that could contribute to developing agency for the practice of safe sex. Put differently, there are also instances where gendered sexualities match with the agency required for the practice of safe sex. For boys, I noted how their acknowledged sexual desires in combination with the demand to be ‘serious’ can provide a good basis for protecting oneself. Constituting themselves as ‘serious’, boys have space to ‘think about the consequences’ of their – sexual – acts and can come to take responsibility for sex, especially given that they are positioned as sexual actors and often find themselves in a dominant position vis-à-vis girls. Girls, on the other hand, are ascribed agency to control their sexuality, in the sense of abstinence. This agency of control could be useful, when it can be translated to other types of safe sex behaviour. This space could be further developed in a context where girls are in the process of appropriating sexual agency, in the sense of finding pleasure in sex and responding to female sexual desire. Such an acknowledgement of their sexual activity or sexual desires seems central to extending the capacity of control beyond abstinence. It is interesting to consider that the dominant position boys are taking with respect to girls and sex is not as straightforward as it might seem, and that boys often feel that they are not in control of what is happening. In this context, girls could take up more space. However, it is also possible that in their struggle to deal with contradicting masculinities, boys further restrict the space girls have to act out agency, as female agency could be experienced as a threat to their masculine identity.

**Contradictions, indecisiveness and societal tensions**

The limited practice of safe sex cannot only be understood by considering the mismatch between gendered sexualities and girls’ and boys’ safe sex agency. A crucial point that needs to be taken into account is that the dominant and subdominant female and male sexual subjectivities contradict each other. Girls and boys have to negotiate these tensions when they shape their intimate relationships and individual identities. This brings me to the second track of the analysis of the embeddedness of safe sex practice. The negotiation of these tensions and contradictions impacts on young people’s practice of safe sex in the
sense that it generates indecisiveness.

To start with boys, they have to negotiate the ideal of potency, which includes the quality to be ‘ever ready’ for sex, with the ‘real love’ exclusivity. They try to deal with the tension between these two images by claiming that they are not unfaithful as long as the ‘real’ girlfriend is the only one they love and the others are not serious. Fidelity in terms of sexual monogamy does not fit well into the male sexual identities that boys are enacting and negotiating. A second tension that requires negotiation is the one between the potent masculinity ideal and the norm of being ‘serious’, which is a – male - reworking of the virginity norm. It is against the background of this tension that boys come to claim to practice abstinence, while simultaneously engaging in sex (on an occasional basis). Although in principle the combination of the seriousness norm and the potency discourse could enable boys to practice safe sex, I already discussed that in practice the seriousness norm does ascribe much agency to boys to practice fidelity of condom use. This is aggravated by the fact that boys have difficulties to negotiate the contradicting masculine norms of potency and seriousness, as a result of which, they are often insecure and feel that they lack control over their own behaviour and the sexual encounters they find themselves in. This obviously impacts in a negative way on their capacity to practice any of the safe sex strategies. One consequence is that sex becomes a ‘surprise’, for which no precautions have been taken. Another is that boys are insecure about how to raise the matter of condom use and do not feel at ease to actually use condoms.

With respect to girls, the negotiations of sexual gender identities take a completely different shape, and as a result, so does the impact on safe sex practices. Girls are confronted with one major contradiction: the silencing of their sexuality in the virginity discourse and the sub-dominant but nevertheless undeniable presence of female sexual desire. The dominant discourse, which is also reinforced by girls themselves, denies their sexuality. This makes complete abstinence the only safe sex strategy that is socially acceptable for girls. However, girls have a variety of reasons to say ‘yes’ to sex. They negotiate the tension between their active sexuality and the silencing virginity discourse in two ways. Firstly, they escape the contradiction by engaging in sexual acts other than penetrative vaginal sex. A positive side effect of this avoidance of vaginal sex is protection against unwanted pregnancies. A negative side effect is that especially anal sex exposes girls to higher risks of HIV infections. Secondly, girls can to a limited extent negotiate the unacceptability of their active sexuality by embodying the image of the faithful and exclusive partner. This does not completely compensate for their sexual activity, but at least provides the exclusive relationships as a less unacceptable context in which they can enact their sexuality. That means that sexually active girls have to rely on fidelity as a safe sex strategy, even though this might not actually be safe, as they do not know nor control the number of partners of their boyfriend. Moreover, girls also might not limit themselves to one partner – as they might be engaged in serial monogamous relationships or multiple partnerships.

In neither of these two responses to deal with the tension, girls come to appropriate agency to introduce, claim or use condoms, because this requires their positioning as sexually active and active sexual actors, rather than passive and without desire. The negotiation process of the girls differs fundamentally from the one of the boys. Boys have to balance two explicit and strongly present norms, which both have societal weight and appreciation. This is not the case for girls: the denial and control of female premarital sexual desire makes its appropriation a struggle in itself. The struggle of girls hence not so much concerns the balancing of two norms, but the fight to find space to express their desire against the omnipresent virginity discourse. The creativity that is required to go beyond the virginity norm and to find space to enact female premarital sexuality – in
response to male and/or female sexual needs – could contribute to the practice of safe sex, and especially the proposal and practice of condom use and fidelity. But this does not often happen in reality, where girls rarely take the initiative to practice safe sex, nor are in a position to dictate their partners to do so. One could argue that the norm of virginity implies a capacity in girls to control their sexuality – as well as male sexuality – which can be an opening for girls to take responsibility with regard to the consequences of sex by pursuing protection in sexual encounters. But in practice, this norm is so powerful and strict, that it leaves no space to embody a female active premarital sexuality, and thus any other strategy than abstinence. The consequence is that when girls embody sub-dominant and deviant sexual subjectivities and engage in sex, they have little room to protect themselves.

As a result of these contradictions and tensions in gendered sexual subjectivities and positionings, young people in Dakar often display a degree of indecisiveness in their actual safe sex behaviour. They want to abstain, but do not always succeed. They want to protect their sexual encounters, but avoid condom use. And they argue that this is not a problem, because they claim to be faithful. Yet, they can have different partners and fail to discuss sexual histories. Despite the discourse on safety and control and despite the strong attitudes towards safe sex, it is not exceptional that sexual encounters between young people occur without protection. The point is that it is difficult for both girls and boys to completely opt for one strategy, because they go back and forth between the poles of their gendered sexuality. Girls and boys in some ways simultaneously want to be virgin and sexually active. They can not opt for one, without falling short on the other, because both identities are important. Because of the specific and contradictory implications of the gendered sexual subjectivities for young people’s positioning to practice each of the ABC strategies, the going back and forth between them also means that young people cannot opt for one of the safe sex strategies. That explains why they regularly end up having unprotected sex.

This negotiation does not take place in a vacuum, but firstly in the context of the dynamics between partners in intimate relationships, and secondly in the broader context of societal tensions. It is these contexts that make clear what is at stake for young people in negotiating their contradictory sexual subjectivities. To start with the dynamics in intimate relationships, girls and boys are creating their identities as a virgin, a-sexual girl and a potent, sexually active boy. They do this in a relationship that is – presumably - based on ‘real love’ rather than on other interests, such as money or sex. Girls and boys are hence appropriating the identity of the faithful partner. Considering the performative sexual and gender identities that young people enact in their intimate relationships, a specific dynamic unfolds between girls and boys. In this dynamic, boys take the initiative for sex and try to convince a girl to accept by using ‘sweet language’ in which they confess their love for the girl. She, in her turn, embodies the respectable girl, who says ‘no’ to sex. In this dynamic, asking for condom use or discussing fidelity are out of place. To begin with, they are experienced as being in strong contradiction with the exclusive love relationship that both partners are striving for. I discussed how the open communication over sexual histories – which is a prerequisite for the safety of being faithful - is at odds with this striving for ‘real love’, especially in the context of distrust between the sexes. Moreover, the violation of trust, that can arise out of suggesting condom use, conflicts with the serious, faithful and respectable identities that both boys and girls seek to establish. Condom use is further in conflict with the virgin ideal that girls are appropriating.

Secondly, the broader context of societal controversies around premarital sexuality, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and HIV infections adds further understanding to the indecisiveness in young people’s safe sex practice and the limited practice of safe sex that evolves
out of this. With adolescence becoming a new and 'modern' life stage - growing out of access to formal education, urbanization, and exposure to other cultures and values through for instance media and travelling – the traditionally and religiously highly valued practice of premarital abstinence becomes difficult to realize. Most unmarried, young people in Dakar seek intimate and more or less sexual relationships with the opposite sex. In today’s Dakarois society, a wide range of gendered sexual identities circulate, varying from traditional and religious norms of virginity to contemporary attractions of premarital intimate relationships and possible sexual encounters. In this context where society operates at different speeds, young people’s sexual gender identities are a focal point where these different speeds, and the tensions that exist between them, are played out. This impacts on the practice of safe sex.

In local discourses - in Dakar, but also elsewhere in Africa - modernized lifestyles and western practices are blamed for the spread of HIV and the occurrence of premarital pregnancies (see e.g. Dilger 2003; Gausset 2001). They associate AIDS, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and premarital sex with urban lifestyles, modern education, the breakdown of social control and moral codes, and prostitution. These factors are taken as causes of promiscuity and immoral behaviour and are therefore considered problematic. In this line of reasoning, the solution is not found in condom use, but in a restoration and promotion of traditional and religious values and practices. In contrast to this, one finds the medicalised perspective on safe sex, that is a driving force behind AIDS campaigns and sexual and reproductive health programmes. This medical perspective has not remained free from the tensions and contrasts of tradition and modernity, and has been criticized for its eurocentric character as I discussed in Chapter 2 (Packard & Epstein 1991; Patton 1997; Gausset 2001; Stillwaggon 2003; Arnfred 2004). With respect to young people, this has manifested itself in campaigns against the generally restrictive norms that limit the access of the unmarried to information and services, and the inequality between the sexes. In a broader sexual and reproductive health approach, early marriages and early pregnancies have been major concerns. In the context of Dakar, where such contradictions between what is perceived as ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’ are also constructed, the three safe sex strategies of abstinence, fidelity and condom use cannot be considered as neutral acts and attitudes, but rather as strategies that carry particular values and connotations with (see also Van Eerdewijk 2005). They resonate and link up with ideas about so-called ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, and with ideas about how these two are at odds with each other.

The embeddedness of the safe sex strategies in the societal tensions adds to understanding the indecisiveness that can be noted in young people’s safe sex behaviour. As a consequence of the controversies, young people can never do it right. Whatever strategy they opt for, they always fall short: when they use condoms, they do not live up to the traditional and religious ideal of virginity. When they abstain, they miss out on ‘modern’ life with premarital relations and possible sex. That makes it difficult to act upon a decision. I want to argue that as a result of this, young people – in their performative negotiations of multiple gendered sexualities - often do not arrive at explicitly choosing for and acting upon one of the three strategies. They do a little bit of everything, in order to negotiate the contradictory gendered sexual identities and societal controversies. They support the strategy of abstinence, but cannot (always) live up to it. They mention condoms as means of protection, but for a variety of reasons avoid to actually use them. They claim to be faithful, but can have multiple partners without informing each other. The strong and straightforward attitudes towards safe sex in general and the particular strategies can, in fact, be seen as performative acts in themselves. Both girls and boys appropriate the socially accepted and expected norm of safe sex and prevention. But the substantial unde-
cisiveness in their behaviour makes that they end up having unprotected sex, and as a consequence are exposed to unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STI infections.

6 Conclusion

The practice of abstinence, fidelity and condom use by young people in Dakar was central to this chapter. In the first part, a review of statistical survey information made me come to the conclusion that contraceptive use among young people is low, and that condom use, although it is rising, is far from universal in Senegal. It is not uncommon for young people in Dakar to have sex without protection. This is interesting because in my conversations with Dakarois girls and boys, they most of the time underlined the importance of preventing STI/HIV infections and especially unwanted pregnancies and expressed a positive attitude towards safe sex. Yet, this positive attitude is not often translated into actual practice of abstinence, fidelity or condom use.

The second part of the chapter drew attention to the fact that the terms of the safe sex ABC seem rather straightforward, but that different meanings of abstinence, fidelity and in a different way condom use are circulating. Abstinence can be interpreted as having no sex at all, as having no contacts with the opposite sex, as making an effort to control one’s sexuality (though not necessarily always succeeding), and as not engaging in penetrative vaginal sex. Obviously some of these meanings do not coincide with the medical implication of absence of sexual contact of whatever kind. The point of interest in terms of safe sex is that young people can still be having sex – in terms of temporarily or in terms of oral, anal or manual sex – without using additional protection. Multiple meanings to the term fidelity also affect its medical safety. Whereas being faithful on the one hand means limiting sexual contacts to one person, in another interpretation the fidelity is understood as loving one person, even though one might engage in sex with other, less serious partners. When practicing fidelity in the latter sense, or in case of serial monogamy, there is still a possibility of infection with HIV or other STIs. And of course, being faithful does not protect against unwanted pregnancies.

Meanings do not so much affect the definition of condom use: it means wearing a condom on the penis during sexual contact. Cultural meanings and gendered sexual significations, however, play a major role in understanding why condoms are often avoided in actual sexual encounters. Asking for condoms or proposing their use just like carrying a condom with you ‘just in case’ are for instance loaded with connotations of acceptable and unacceptable sexualities for girls and boys. Condoms are interpreted as signs of sexual knowledge, experience or desire that are inappropriate for girls as well as boys, though in different ways. They also arouse suspicion about fidelity and one’s sexual history. In addition, the use of condoms heavily depends on how girls and boys interpret the risk of infection they run with partners they think they have confidence in because they ‘know’ as opposed to partners they do not ‘know’.

In the third part, I analysed the discrepancy between the strong positive attitudes towards safe sex and the limited actual practice by looking at how the construction of gendered sexualities affects young people’s agency to practice the ABC strategies. It became clear that the various gender identities that girls and boys enact in their intimate relationships and sexual encounters are in many ways antithetical to the strategies of condom use, fidelity and abstinence. As a result of this mismatch, girls and boys are ascribed little agency to practice safe sex. Dominant female premarital sexuality build around virginity is only compatible with abstinence of penetrative vaginal sex. Other safe sex strategies
cannot be matched to female sexual subjectivities, except for the connection between fidelity and the ideal of exclusive love and faithfulness. Gender dynamics which place girls in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis boys also are detrimental to the possibilities for girls to practice condom use or fidelity. With respect to boys, dominant sexual masculinity in terms of potency and being sexually experienced goes against the practice of abstinence of all sexual contacts. The ‘ever ready’ quality of male sexuality is however also at odds with the desire for exclusivity of love – and sex – relationships. Condoms are generally understood as ‘a man’s business’, and the acknowledgement of male active sexuality in principle provides the possibility to use condoms. However, boys insecurities and experienced lack of control over sexual encounters can make condoms a threat to masculinity. The discrepancy between the positive attitudes and the limited actual practice of safe sex by young people cannot only be understood from the mismatch between the gendered sexualities and safe sex agency, but also from the contradictions and tensions that girls and boys have to negotiate. The conflicting gendered sexual subjectivities make it difficult for young people to explicitly choose for and act upon one of the three safe sex strategies. The conflict between the contradictory subjectivities gains weight in the context of the societal tensions that surround premarital pregnancies, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and HIV infections and adds to the indecisiveness in young people’s safe sex behaviour. Without coming to an explicit choice and practice, young people end up having unprotected sex, and as a consequence are exposed to unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STI infections.

Despite these limitations, the constructions of female and male sexuality at some points do match with the agency to practice safe sex and this can be useful for further efforts to promote safer sex among young people in Dakar. Moreover, whereas the contradictions and tensions so far predominantly make it more difficult for young people to explicitly opt for a safe sex strategy, they can potentially contribute to opening up more space from where both girls and boys could come to terms with their gendered sexual identities and act to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STI infection.
This thesis has discussed in detail the intimate lives and sexual relationships of Dakarois girls and boys in relation to their safe sex practices, or lack thereof. Since the early 1990s, the sexual and reproductive health of young people has received increasing attention, both worldwide and in Senegal. In order to prevent unwanted teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV, advocates have argued for greater access for young, unmarried people to information and sexual and reproductive health services, as this will enable them to make informed choices about their sexual lives and to protect themselves. The safe sex ABC – Abstinence, Being faithful and Condom use - has been a widespread approach to protecting young people’s sexual and reproductive health. This thesis provides an alternative perspective on safe sex by looking at the way that the practice of safe sex by unmarried girls and boys in Dakar is embedded in the construction of their gendered sexualities. The thesis has revealed that processes of giving meaning and interpretation affect safe sex practices. This occurs through, on the one hand, the multiple meanings given to the core concepts of the ABC strategies and, on the other hand, the fact that the specific constructions of female and male premarital sexuality in Dakar do not unequivocally ascribe to young people the agency to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use.

In both policy and research, safe sex behaviour has often been approached from a medical and behavioural point of view, which considers it to be the result of rational decision-making based on knowledge. This assumption lies behind much of the quantitative research that deals with behavioural occurrences and individual determinants of (un)safe sex. Whereas such Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Beliefs (KAPB) surveys tell us when, how much or how often people have sex or use contraception, they can only to a limited extent provide insights into why people act in specific ways and what sex, sexuality and safe sex mean to them (Kippax & Crawford 1993; Paiva 1995; Parker 1995; Brummelhuis & Herdt 1995; MacPhail & Campbell 2001). By taking these questions on meaning and interpretation as its entry point, this thesis aims to outline an alternative picture of sexuality and safe sex behaviour, one in which safe sex is neither considered a medical nor an individual matter. Such an approach enables one to see how young people themselves look at sexuality, intimate relationships and safe sex, which is important since their voice is often underrepresented in debates that concern their lives.

In Senegal, statistical sources suggest that young people are sexually active prior to marriage, but that they rarely use contraceptives and only use condoms on a limited scale. It is often difficult to understand why people do not practice safe sex, even when they have access to the information and the means to do so. However, people might actually have ‘good’ reasons for not practicing safe sex. In order to understand these reasons, one needs
to go beyond a medical and individualistic behavioural approach to safe sex behaviour. This
thesis does so by approaching young people’s safe sex practices as they are embedded
in the construction of their gendered premarital heterosexuality. The sexual culture and
the intimate lives of Dakarois people in their late teens and early twenties are therefore
taken as the starting point of the analysis. It is only with an understanding of their
experiences of, and perspectives on, intimate relationships, love, premarital sex, and so on,
that their decisions about practicing or not practicing abstinence, fidelity or condom use
can be understood. Safe sex practices, or the lack thereof, are then not just the outcome of
individual rational decisions, but also result from the construction and negotiation of
meanings in the domain of sexuality.

The approach to safe sex followed here builds on the social constructionist per-
spective. Sexuality and gender are understood as two separate, yet intersecting systems
doing and gender do not speak for themselves, but are given meaning
and in fact only exist in the social arena. As such, they entail categorization and
normalization and have material consequences. I understand sexuality and gender as
performative, in the sense that the embodiment and enactment of discourses on gendered
sexuality enable individuals to become subjects in the social order (De Lauretis 1987; Butler
1990a, 1990b; Villarreal 1997; Weedon 1997; Mills 1997). Since discourses are productive
forces that both constrain and create modes of subjectivity, they ascribe specific forms
of agency – that is the capacity to act - to individuals. The concern in this thesis has been
how these discourses on female and male premarital heterosexuality in Dakar position
unmarried girls and boys with agency to practice abstinence, fidelity and condom use.

With this social constructionist approach to gendered sexuality, the current study
critically distances itself from the influential, yet flawed African permissiveness thesis
which was proposed by the Caldwells (1989) as a key explanation for the pattern of high
HIV prevalence rates in the region, unfairly labelled ‘African AIDS’ (Packard & Epstein
1991; Patton 1997). While the Caldwells can be credited for drawing attention to the social
dimension of AIDS in a medically dominated field of research and policies (see also
RAWOO 2002), their analysis of what they called ‘African sexuality’ has been subject to
fierce critiques of methodological, empirical and theoretical natures (Ahlberg 1994;
Stillwaggon 2003; Arnfred 2004a and others). These criticisms, that exposed the Caldwell
thesis as ethnocentric since it supported a way of thinking in terms of a radically different
‘African sexuality’, have not prevented that much research on AIDS took shape into the
already mentioned behavioural paradigm. Ideas about culture came to play a particular role
in this, and fighting AIDS easily translated into eradicating ‘harmful traditional practices’
and ‘cultural barriers’ (Schoepf 1995; Gausset 2001). This thesis has provided an alternative
perspective on the social and cultural in relation to AIDS and safe sex by giving a central
role to contextualised meanings and interpretations. In contrast to the generalising
and accusative perception of culture in the hegemonic AIDS discourse, I see culture as the
complex of norms, symbols, meanings and practices that shape people’s behaviour.
Culture then encompasses both the so-called ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ elements of
life and, as such, is dynamic and subject to change. This implies that culture can be both
an obstacle to, and a source for, the practice of safe sex. That is, specific constructions
of gendered sexuality can both ascribe and withhold the agency to practice safe sex to
individuals.

This study is based on 14 months of fieldwork in Dakar in 2000 and 2001 and a short
field trip in 2004. Data were gathered through a variety of research methods that included
participant observation and using key informants, the analysis of secondary statistical
data, a review of relevant literature, and finally ‘talking about sex’ with young people themselves. This ‘talking about sex’ entailed both informal conversations and more formal interview settings. A total of 47 girls and boys, whose ages ranged from 16 to 23, participated in 22 focus group discussions. Twenty-eight of these young people were also interviewed individually, and one girl was interviewed a second time during the 2004 fieldtrip. In addition, a father and a mother of teenage children were interviewed, as were two unmarried mothers. All the 47 young participants were unmarried, as the prime concern of this study was to gain insights into the intimate and sexual lives of those that are commonly not supposed to be sexually active because they are not married. The study included both in-school and out-of-school youth, and included young people living in popular neighbourhoods of Dakar as well as its suburbs. The fieldwork conversations between me, the research assistants and the participants were analysed in a qualitative way, with a focus on revealing cultural patterns that organize and shape the sexual and intimate lives of young people. As such, this study aimed for analytical rather than statistical generalizability. This means that I have not been concerned with coming to statements about the perspectives, attitudes or behaviour of specific numbers of girls or boys, but with unravelling how expressions of young people point to cultural patterns and processes of meaning.

In the introduction, the central question of this thesis was formulated as: how does the construction of the gendered sexuality of young, unmarried people in Dakar (Senegal) shape their safe sex practices? This question was divided into two parts. The first part - covering the Chapters 3, 4 and 5 - investigated premarital sexuality, the specific position of unmarried girls and boys, and the way in which young people look at and shape their sexual and intimate lives. The second part looked at Dakarois young people’s safe sex practices and connected these to their gendered sexuality in Chapter 6. Now, this concluding chapter will follow the same logic, with the first section returning to the first part of the research question, and the second section dealing with the findings from Chapter 6. The third section of this concluding chapter seeks to translate the empirical and theoretical insights into policy implications.

1 Female and male premarital heterosexuality

Chapter 3 clarified the in-between position of adolescents and young people, with particular attention to where and how sexuality fits into this. Being neither children nor adults, it is commonly argued that adolescents adopt an in-between position and move along a continuum in which they become increasingly independent and responsible. Whereas they are still dependent on their parents for housing, food, and clothing, as well as for conseils and guidance, adolescents and young people make more decisions about, and take more responsibility for, their own lives. With the diminishing influence of parents and relatives, peers becomes important reference points for young people. Generation gaps and conflicts come into being, and these typically concern the choice of a marriage partner and the acceptability and desirability of premarital relationships and sex. An important point is that, given the sexual division of labour and responsibilities, and the different positions that girls and boys are expected to take up in their future lives, the development into adulthood is highly gendered. Since for girls being married is virtually the only acceptable position in which one is a 'good woman', the education of girls focuses on preparing them to care for their families and to safeguard their virginity. The objective of boys is to 'succeed in life', and this gives schooling, employment and earning an income
greater priority than marriage as such. The in-between positions of girls and boys hence differ substantially: the independence of boys is stressed and stimulated more explicitly than that of girls, who never become completely independent as they are taught to accept the authority of male relatives.

Given that young people are by definition unmarried, I analyzed how their in-between position is defined in sexual terms. In Senegal, adulthood is commonly defined in terms of being married, with marriage being a regulatory institution in the sense that it restricts sex to marriage. Premarital sexuality is considered unacceptable as both husbands and wives are expected to enter marriage as virgins. While this social norm dictates that young people should not engage in sex, the rise in the age of marriage has created a life stage in which young people are often physically mature enough to want and to have sex. The virginity norm, however, continues to be an important reference point in the construction of premarital sexuality. Chapter 3 exposed the genderedness of the virginity norm. From the religious point of view, virginity is desired from both the future husband and wife. In the reality of everyday life in Dakar, however, the virginity norm is considered extremely important for girls, but far less powerful for boys. This already becomes clear if one considers the practices and expectations of the wedding night, where the bride and groom enact and embody idealized female and male sexual subjectivities. The bride has to loose blood as a result of the first penetration of her hymen, and this is considered proof of her virginity. The hymen, blood and virginity are not only symbols of the reputation of the bride and her family, they also give status to the marriage and even society as a whole. The groom does not have to prove his virginity, but rather the opposite: his sexual potency and virility. Moreover, he has to show that he can conquer his bride and, as such, that he can dominate her. Since there is a lot at stake in the bride’s virginity, it continues to be an important reference point in the construction of premarital sexuality, despite the general doubts that are voiced in contemporary Dakar society about the virgin status of most brides. So, do unmarried girls and boys live up to the ideal of abstinence until marriage? My analysis of the existing statistical surveys has shown that they do not: almost all men in Dakar indicate to be sexually active prior to marriage, and one in three Dakarois women acknowledge engagement in premarital sex. These claims are supported by the fact that one in ten first births are conceived prior to marriage. These figures raise questions concerning the sexual and intimate lives of these girls and boys. How is female and male premarital sexuality in Dakar constructed?

The intimate lives of Dakarois girls and boys

The intimate lives and the sexual relationships of boys were central to Chapter 4. The focus group discussions and individual interviews confirmed that virtually all boys have intimate relationships with girls, sometimes with different girls at the same time, and have had sexual intercourse. Their sex accounts, in which the boys narrated their sexual experiences, showed that the demand to abstain from sex does not directly apply to them. In fact, it was important for boys to engage in sex with women and girls in order to establish their manhood. Boys indicated that they were curious to gain sexual experience, and that they felt like ‘a real man’ (góor) the first time they had sex. Not engaging in heterosexual activities arouses suspicions of impotency and homosexuality, which are both understood as a threat to being a ‘real man’. Chapter 3 revealed how the hegemonic construction of male premarital heterosexuality centres on the need to satisfy sexual desires, which are considered to be normal and ‘natural’. Male sexual needs are experienced as uncontrollable: it is argued that men and boys can be so excited that they can no
longer control themselves. Moreover, through the notion of ‘seizing the occasion’, male sexuality is constructed in terms of being ‘ever ready’ to engage in sex. This hegemonic construction of male (premarital) sexuality positions boys as dominant in relation to girls. Boys, for instance, take the initiative over relationships and sex, and persuade girls through sweet language or more forceful means. In some cases, pressure is exercised on girls to engage in sex with a group of boys. In many relationships, the boys are older and more educated than their female partners, and both girls and boys argue that it is normal and better if the girl is not ahead of the boy. The dominant male position is also reflected in the fact that sexual contacts focus on the satisfaction of male sexual desires. In this hegemonic understanding of boys’ sexuality, they are positioned as sexual actors with agency, who respond to their sexual needs and desires, and who are in control of girls and the relationships.

An important insight is that this hegemonic male sexuality is not the whole story to boys' sexual and intimate lives. I found that boys are less in control than is often assumed, and that they experience insecurities and embarrassments in relation to girls and sex. Boys’ lack of control was seen in the experience of sex as a ‘surprise’. Moreover, boys also lacked agency in relation to provocative behaviour by girls, which pushes them into reaction in order to prove their manhood. Some insecurities do not question hegemonic masculinity, but concern doubts of boys as to whether they can live up to the ideal of potent manhood. In other instances, boys actually do question whether they want to or should be goor, and these insecurities point to a second norm in male premarital sexuality: boys have to be ‘serious’, meaning that they have to take responsibility for their lives. They have to work hard at school or in their jobs, and do their best to earn money and meet their financial and other responsibilities within their families, and this should not be overshadowed by an excessive interest in girls and sex. The boys’ articulation of the notions of ‘surprise’ and provocation in order to account for socially undesirable sexual events – such as sex with the ‘real’ girlfriend or unprotected sex – points to the limits on male sexuality: boys should not be too focused on sex and girls. As such, this second normative reference point concerning seriousness is a reworking of the virginity norm.

Chapter 4 thus revealed how boys performatively enact two contradictory norms of male sexuality: they have to be sexually experienced and active while simultaneously controlling and limiting their sexuality. Moreover, it was exposed how boys face difficulties in negotiating these two demands, and this feeds into their insecurities and embarrassments. I argued that an important way in which boys can balance the contradictory male sexualities is by distinguishing two types of girls: the ‘real girlfriend’ and the ‘easy girl’. The relationship with their ‘real girlfriend’, who should have a good character, is ideally based on exclusive love, and this does not leave space for sex. This allows boys to embody ‘serious’ masculinity and self-control. They enact their potent and virile male sexuality by engaging in multiple partnerships, in particular with what are labelled ‘easy girls’. These girls are, allegedly, without character and only have material interests (and therefore these relationships are said not to involve love). As an ‘easy’ girl is playing around and does not respect herself, it is argued that boys do not need to respect her virginity and can engage in sex with this type of girls. This typology of girls is employed (and as such reproduced) by boys, but its constitution is not limited to boys: it is produced by society at large - which is male dominated and is concerned with female virginity – but also reproduced by women and girls themselves.

Chapter 5 found that girls face a similar yet completely different struggle in balancing contradictory normative sexual reference points. The norm of premarital abstinence is omnipresent for girls. Girls will always claim to be a virgin and always underline the
importance of female virginity. Whereas matters of love and money stand out in the girls’ narratives about their intimate relationships with boys, they keep quiet about sex. Girls often talk about love and boyfriends in idealized terms, focusing on strong reciprocal feelings, exclusivity and the possibilities for future marriage. An ideal boyfriend should be caring and attentive but not interested in sex. The definition of love as being incompatible with material interests means that the presence of money or gifts is easily interpreted as a sign of an exchange for sex: you do not get something for nothing. I, however, emphasized that, in practice, the link between love, money and sex is far more ambiguous: money and gifts are also understood as an expression of a boyfriend’s love and care. In reality, all girls receive money and presents from their boyfriends.

In contrast to the boys, the girls hardly spoke of their sexual experiences. This silence did not match with the statistical survey information that one in three women have sex prior to marriage, nor with the number of teenage pregnancies conceived before (or outside) marriage. Nor did it match with the way girls would talk about boys and boyfriends, dress, dance, and share their seductive techniques. Combined with the sex accounts of boys, who frequently mentioned sex with girls (even though these have to be interpreted with care), this discrepancy became a fascinating puzzle: are unmarried girls in Dakar sexually active or not? And if they are, when and why? Taking a hypothetical approach, in which girls were asked to explain the sexual activities of a girl like them, highlighted the wish to safeguard a relationship with a boyfriend as an important reason for girls to engage in sex. The loss of a boyfriend can entail both the loss of a loving partner and the loss of material gains from the relationship, although girls are far less explicit about the latter. Decisions about sex are connected to love in two ways: firstly, in the sense that girls will only engage in sex when they are confident that the boyfriend truly loves them and, secondly, in that girls can prove their love for a boyfriend by having sex with him. It turns out that love, money and sex form an interconnected whole through which girls (and boys) give meaning to their relationships, to their own identity and, in the end, to their sexual activity. In response to an initiative by a boy, a girl can establish herself as a girl with character by saying ‘no’ and so preserving herself. It is, however, clear that girls are not always in a position to actually say ‘no’ to the sweet language or force that boys employ. The matter of force and consent becomes especially pertinent in situations where groups of boys seek to have sex with a single girl.

It was striking that the reasons the girls gave for sexual activity remained negative, seeing it as unacceptable. This provides a picture in which girls engage in sex because they are ‘weak’ (when they cannot resist), ‘materialist’ (when they are afraid to lose material gains), or ‘easy’ or ‘loose’ (when they do not care to say ‘no’ and show character). Chapter 5 exposed that the girls’ narratives leave hardly any space for positive aspects of sex: they do not speak of sexual desires or sexual pleasure. However, by reading between the lines of what is being said, listening to the few girls that did speak about their sexual experiences, by looking at the way girls talk about boyfriends and seductive techniques, and by taking into account the way they dress and dance, I showed that sex is (or can be) something desirable and pleasurable for girls. The unintentionality expressed by the notion of pas expres points to the enjoyable aspects of sex that make girls say ‘yes’. In a similar way, the use of the term flirt poussé highlights that sex is tempting and that this is a reason for female sexual activity. One girl explicitly defined sex in terms of pleasure, and two other girls underlined the sexual desires of girls as a reason for engaging in sex. An important finding of this chapter is that sexual desires and curiosities can be satisfied in creative ways: in fact, as long as girls do not engage in penetrative vaginal sex, they can call themselves virgins. Other sexual activities, such as oral, manual or anal sex, are not seen as anti-
tactical to virginity, and this means that virgins can actually be sexually active. By redefining the meanings of virginity and sex, girls are able to bridge the gap between abstinence and engaging in sex.

As such, Chapter 5 provided an insight into how the intimate lives of Dakarois girls are marked by their struggle for space in which to express their sexual desires. In the context of the denial and silencing of female premarital sexuality, girls first have to establish their identity and reputation, and only then can they express their sexual desires. If they say ‘yes’ right away, they become ‘easy’ girls who do not need to be treated with respect. This means that girls walk a thin line and are constantly negotiating the tension between their sexual desires and interests and their social reputation and status. This thesis has revealed that girls are both sexually active and active sexual agents. An important finding is that girls do have agency to shape their intimate and sexual relationships with boys in accordance with their own needs and desires. These desires can be both to abstain (say ‘no’) and to engage in sex (say ‘yes’). With respect to the former, girls are ascribed the capacity not to engage in sex. With respect to the latter, desires for female pleasure and satisfaction do exist, and girls do find room for manoeuvre to act. Moreover, by being seductive and sexy, and by making boys ‘work’ and invest in them, girls have the agency to pursue their own interests in their intimate relationships. In some ways, then, girls have more control than society attributes to them and that much of the literature acknowledges. However, the point remains that female sexuality is expressed in a context of male-dominated and male-centred heterosexuality.

A key insight of Chapter 5 is that whereas boys negotiate contradictory masculinities by employing a typology of girls, this option is not to the same extent available for girls. It was found that girls do distinguish between different types of boys in two ways. Firstly, they differentiate between the truly loving and responsible ideal boyfriend, and the one who ‘spends his time drinking tea’. Secondly, they distinguish between the ‘real’ boyfriend and other or additional partners. The second typology mirrors the typology boys construct of girls. The first one, however, resists the boys’ thinking in terms of ‘real’ girlfriend versus ‘easy’ girl, because it connects, rather than splits, money and love. Moreover, the seriousness that girls seek reinforces the second norm of male sexuality, and is supported by that societal discourse. Yet, the impact of the way girls classify different types of boyfriends on boys is much less than the impact of the boys’ typology - and especially the element of the ‘easy’ girl who does not need to be respected - on girls. This again shows that society as a whole has a larger vested interest in controlling the sexuality of girls than that of boys.

Chapters 4 and 5 brought to light another critical issue: the use, by both girls and boys, of pornographic materials. Such materials include pornographic movies, books, magazines as well as Internet websites, and most of these seem to originate from Western countries. Young people watch such movies and read such books either individually or in company: groups of boys watch films together, a couple watches a movie, girls share a magazine or book and talk about the contents with each other. This pornographic material should be considered because it responds to a curiosity among young people about sex and sexuality, and seems to be one of the few explicit sources of information on how one can have sex. Pornographic material for instance had shown some girls how to satisfy their partner (and themselves) without vaginal penetration, and thus how to safeguard their keep their hymen and virginity intact. The porn movies and books thus meet the need of young people, girls and boys alike, to learn more about how to have sex. The quality of pornographic movies, books and websites, in terms of providing correct, gender-sensitive information that enables young people to make informed decisions about
their sexuality can be questioned, and deserves further investigation. Future research could shed more light on the kind of pornographic material that circulates, and the way in which and the reasons why it is used by Dakarois youth.

**Gender, love and exchange**

The profound genderedness of adolescence and premarital sexuality justifies the decision to study gender in relation to both girls and boys. The genderedness of the lives and experiences of boys and men often goes without question, in the sense that the specificity of maleness and manhood is not considered. When men are addressed, it is often in the sense of how masculinity – negatively - affects girls and women, and how it allows boys and men to exercise control over them. This thesis has approached men as gendered subjects by highlighting the masculinities and male sexualities that boys enact. An important conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that boys, despite the fact that they are ascribed a dominant position vis-à-vis girls in the male-centred construction of sexuality, do not fully control when sex happens, nor how it takes place. This puts the general assumption in much of the literature on gender and condom use – and sexual and reproductive health in general - that boys are in a position to decide upon condoms, in a different light. A crucial step in coming to this insight was the analytical move beyond hegemonic masculinity. This thesis found that boys not only shape their male sexual identities and behaviour in relation to the hegemonic construction of potency and virility, but also relate to the second norm of seriousness and self-control. The insecurities, embarrassments and shame that boys experience, even when they conform to hegemonic masculinity, point to the ambiguousness in the constitution of masculinity. These acknowledgements point to a need for a multidimensional perspective that can highlight both the multiple masculinities that boys enact as well as the tensions that arise between them. In analysing the lives of Dakarois heterosexual boys in this way, this thesis has brought to light the fact that conflicts and tensions surrounding hegemonic masculinity not only concern ‘deviant’, or non-normative, masculinities and men - for instance homosexual men - but also characterize the constitution of male identities of boys who would be considered as part of the ‘norm’. By highlighting the multiple ways in which boys shape their sexual identities and lives, this thesis has exposed the heterogeneity to be found among boys.

The multidimensional perspective on gender has not only proven fruitful in its application to boys, but was also of value with respect to girls. While this thesis confirmed the general gender inequalities that are unfavourable to girls, it also showed that girls are not passive nor without agency or sexual desires. The exploration of the sub-dominant, yet present, female sexualities visualized girls as sexual agents with agency. The conclusion is that gender and sexual identities cannot be reduced to one position or one norm, but that their performative character makes them dynamic and multi-constituted. The value of seeing that boys are simultaneously both dominant and not in control, and that while girls are sub-dominant they also have agency, is that neither girls nor boys are reduced to homogeneous categories. As such, a multidimensional perspective allows for a more subtle analysis of the power dynamics between girls and boys.

To come back to the Caldwells’ view (Caldwell et al. 1989), this thesis emphasizes the criticisms of their African permissiveness thesis: that is, the sexuality of young people in Dakar does know restrictions and is regulated by moral codes. Moreover, the way premarital sexuality is controlled and constructed is subject to processes of change. The current thesis does not present a picture of ‘African sexuality’, or more precisely the
sexuality of Dakarois young people, as ‘a special case’ that is radically different from the west. There are both parallels and differences between the experiences of Dakarois and western young people. This suggests that the Caldwells approach of analysing ‘African sexuality’ in contrast to, and as different from, what they call Eurasia is questionable. The value of the current study is that it has attempted to take an emic approach by analysing the construction of gendered sexuality in terms of the meanings it has to the subjects involved.

It is this emic approach that leads me to call for a more nuanced consideration of the existence and meaning of love and exchange in young people’s relationships. This thesis has shown that a notion of romantic love does arise from the narratives on the intimate relationships of both girls and boys. The love discourse marks a generation difference with their parents. It underlines the importance of desire and of feelings of connection as well as of individual choice of a partner in premarital and ultimately marital relationships. These have come to co-exist with the familial control and social responsibility that were central to the way marriages were arranged by the wider family in the past. Moreover, whereas the notion of romantic love is understood as being incompatible with material interests, this study has also highlighted that love and money - or exchange - are not mutually exclusive in the actual relationships of young people. As such, this thesis has established that a classification of relationships in terms of either love or exchange does not do justice to the variety of relationships that Dakarois girls and boys are involved in. I have argued that the denial of this diversity - in both the local context of Dakar and in scientific literature and policy documents - is more a reflection of how the love discourse obscures understanding of the embeddedness of the exchange element, than of the reality of young people’s relationships in which love and money (and sex) are part of an interconnected whole.

The multidimensionality of both masculinity and femininity, the emic approach to sexuality, and the interconnectedness of money and love all point to the value of considering how young people themselves see and interpret these phenomena. The strength of qualitative research, as used in this thesis, is that it sheds light on the meanings of practices and phenomena. In doing so, it becomes clear that there are always multiple meanings and interpretations. Such a multiplicity of meanings can arise from different contexts, for example virginity is understood in religious contexts to mean no sexual contact, whereas in the context of girls’ actual intimate lives it might be interpreted in the more restricted sense of no penetrative vaginal sex. Meanings for the same practice or phenomena may differ for different people, but individuals can also express different meanings according to the specific circumstances they find themselves in. That is, depending on the context, the same girl can adopt either of the two meanings of virginity. This multiplicity, that comes to the fore when investigating emic perspectives on practices, reveals the complexity of the power dynamics between girls and boys. The value of this thesis is that it offers an alternative analysis of young people’s intimate and sexual relationships. Rather than confirming the common view of young girls as victims in transactional relationships in which boys occupy the dominant position, this study has focused attention on the complexities of young people’s intimate and sexual relationships in which money, love and sex are part of an interconnected whole and in which both girls and boys simultaneously exercise agency and lack control. These complex power dynamics are of value in trying to meaningfully understand young people’s practice of safe sex. Moreover, the multiplicity of meanings also plays a crucial role in understanding why, and how, girls and boys practice, or fail to practice, safe sex.
2 The ABC of unsafe sex

The core interest of this thesis, safe sex practices, were central to Chapter 6. The first part of that chapter showed how knowledge about contraception and HIV/AIDS has reached a large proportion of the Senegalese population including young people. However, misconceptions about, for instance, conception and modes of HIV transmission exist, and knowledge is often incomplete or incorrect. Contraceptive methods are not commonly used, especially among young people, with only between one and six percent of young Senegalese women having ever used a modern method. In Dakar, systematic condom use in so-called ‘casual relationships’ is reported by 24% of the young women and 60% of young men in the 15-24 age group. Condom use has been rising since AIDS entered the country, especially in non-marital relationships, but it is clearly far from universal. In surveys, women mention having only one partner and fidelity as safe sex strategies, and men mention condom use and fidelity. My fieldwork suggests that out-of-wedlock pregnancies are a larger concern for most young people than HIV/AIDS, as the former is more visible and prominent in their environments than the latter. In this respect it is important to note that although abortion is illegal, it is an option that young people evaluate in the event of an unwanted pregnancy, and young people are aware of various ways to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. The narratives collected about their intimate lives also confirm that unsafe sex is not uncommon among young people. This thesis sought an explanation for this limited practice of safe sex in two directions. Firstly, I looked at the attitudes of young people towards the three strategies of the safe sex ABC. Secondly, I analysed how the construction of premarital gendered sexuality, as discussed in the Chapter 3 to 5, positions Dakarois girls and boys with the agency to practice abstinence, being faithful or condom use.

Meanings of ABC strategies

Abstinence is always mentioned as the first option to protect against HIV infection and unwanted pregnancies. Whereas abstinence might seem a rather straightforward term, the narratives of the girls and boys point to four different meanings of the term. Firstly, it means limited or no contact with the opposite sex. Secondly, in mainstream medical and prevention discourses abstinence means not engaging in sex. Thirdly, boys in Dakar sometimes understand abstinence in a temporal sense, where one aims for abstinence, but might occasionally engage in sex. Fourthly, Dakarois girls pointed out that the meaning of abstinence relates to what is understood as sex: when sex means only penetrative vaginal sex, it is possible to engage in oral, manual or anal sex and thus practice ‘partial’ abstinence. These different interpretations of the term abstinence highlight the importance of considering questions of meaning in relation to sex and safe sex. A crucial question with respect to abstinence is what people actually mean when they claim to practice abstinence and, more pertinently, what do people do when they practice abstinence. Chapter 6 showed that using the latter two meanings, young people can still engage in sex. This sex can occur very rarely and unintendedly (in the case of ‘temporary abstinence’) or the sexual contacts can entail oral, manual or anal sex (in the case of ‘partial’ abstinence). An important conclusion then is that while the claim to practice abstinence suggests safe sex, sexual encounters can take still place and expose girls and boys to risks of unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections if they are not accompanied by additional protective actions. Special consideration should be given to the higher risks of HIV infection associated with anal sex, something which Dakarois young people do not seem to be informed about or aware
of. It is, however, not only the multiple meanings of the term abstinence that hamper safe practice, a crucial point is also the difficulties of actually behaving according to desired ideals. In contrast to the apparently very positive attitudes towards abstinence, girls as well as boys do engage in sex prior to marriage for a variety of reasons.

Chapter 6 showed that safety based on fidelity, the second strategy, is also affected by both multiple meanings and difficulties in translating it into practice. Being faithful is generally understood from both a medical and cultural point of view as having sex with a single partner. Its resonance with the exclusivity element in the notion of ‘real love’ makes fidelity an attractive strategy for young people in contemporary Dakar. References to love, however, give rise to creative interpretations: when defending multiple partnerships, both girls and boys argue that these ‘other’ relationships are not a sign of infidelity, as the ‘other’ partners are not as seriously loved as the ‘real’ boy/girlfriend. Despite its frequent expression, this interpretation of fidelity is contested, and partners generally do not accept their boy/girlfriend’s involvement with other partners. Nevertheless, being faithful does not necessarily imply monogamy, and consequently does not necessarily imply protection against sexual and reproductive health risks. Another factor is that the actual practice of fidelity becomes problematic in a context where girls and boys in Dakar are often engaged in either multiple partnerships at the same time or serial monogamy. The health risks of having more than one partner need to be separated in terms of unwanted pregnancies on the one hand and HIV/STI infection on the other. With respect to the latter, having multiple partners is not by definition unsafe, as long as none of the partners are infected with HIV or an STI. In order to be able to assess this likelihood, partners need to discuss their sexual contacts and histories. Communication about these issues – and especially current sexual contacts - is however difficult in the Dakarois context where mistrust between the sexes is combined with the ideal of exclusive ‘real love’ and intolerance towards other partners. With respect to the risk of unwanted pregnancies, a major drawback of fidelity is that it does nothing to protect against conception, as it permits sex without the use of contraceptives or condoms.

For both abstinence and fidelity this thesis found that these seemingly straightforward terms are open to interpretation and can carry different and multiple meanings in the lives of Dakarois young people. The importance of this insight is that young people’s claims to practice either abstinence or fidelity do not necessarily guarantee protection from sexual and reproductive health risks. Chapter 6 revealed that the strategy of condom use, the third strategy considered, is also affected by questions of meaning, albeit in a different way. Interpretations do not so much affect the definition of what condoms are or how they can be used, but concern the implications of their use, proposal to use, or the carrying around of condoms. Dakarois young people have mixed feelings about condoms. Whereas condoms are sometimes contested and considered as inappropriate for young people, it is also argued that condoms can offer protection against HIV/STIs and unwanted pregnancies. The actual practice of condom use is also affected by doubts about their reliability and a preference for sex without condoms. Moreover, experiencing sexual encounters as a ‘surprise’ means that, most of the time, no precautions are taken. When neither girls nor boys carry a condom with them, the intimate moment suprême would have to be interrupted by one of the partners in order to leave and get a condom. Most boys are reluctant to do so, because they are worried that such an interruption might make the girl lose interest.

I showed how meanings come to affect condom use in three ways. Firstly, condoms link with ideas about appropriate identities of female and male sexuality. Condoms are generally understood as a man’s business, because men are the ones who have to act
responsibly, because men generally take the initiative in sexual matters, because men take up a dominant position in relation to women/girls, and because men actually wear the condom. It is commonly considered inappropriate for girls to buy a condom, carry one or bring one to a sexual relationship. Condoms reveal what girls prefer to keep secret, that is their knowledge about and experience of sex. Worse, they can be seen as a sign that a girl is sexually active, or even looking for sex. For boys as well, condoms can, even though they are a man’s business, manifest their sexuality in a too open way towards parents, relatives, and even peers or the girls they are courting. Condoms suggest that a boy is too pre-occupied with sex, and hence not serious. Such associations hamper both girls and boys in taking precautions by buying or proposing condoms.

A second way in which meanings play a role is in the sense that the - proposal of - condom use can easily be understood as a sign of distrust or lack of confidence. Asking to use a condom violates trust when it is interpreted as putting the partner’s fidelity and exclusive love in question. Alternatively, it can make a partner suspicious that you have not been faithful and therefore require protection. The forgoing of condom use is hence justified through matters of trust and confidence. Especially boys regularly argue that condoms are not needed when one ‘knows’ a partner: this line of reasoning is based on the assumption that a girl they ‘know’ does not have multiple or casual sexual contacts and can thus be ‘trusted’ not to pass on HIV or STIs. Thirdly, meanings affect the actual use of condoms. Both girls and boys find it hard to find the right timing and words to start talking about condoms. The technicalities of how to properly put on a condom are not so much a problem, but especially boys are worried about the embarrassment and discomfort they feel when they are busy putting on a condom. Despite the fact that condoms are a man’s business, they can work as a threat to masculinity when boys, contrary to the expectations that they are sexually knowledgeable and experienced, are clumsy in using a condom. Condom use is thus problematic for both girls and boys. Considering the various meanings and interpretations adds to an understanding, firstly of why Dakarouis girls and boys have positive attitudes towards the ABC strategies and, secondly of why they often fail to actually practice them.

Agency to practice safe sex

The third part of Chapter 6 analysed practice of the three safe sex strategies from the perspective of the life worlds of unmarried girls and boys by exploring how their practice is linked to young people’s performative gendered sexualities. This analysis looked at how girls and boys, as gendered sexual subjects, come to be positioned as agents for the various safe sex strategies. In what ways do the gendered sexual subjectivities - enacted and embodied by young people - match or mismatch with the agency that is required for the practice of abstinence, fidelity or condom use? I sought an answer to this question by looking at both dominant and sub-dominant constructions of female and male premarital sexuality.

With the sexual identities of girls constructed in relation to a powerful dominant norm of virginity, it was found that girls are foremost ascribed the agency to abstain from sexual intercourse. Since girls are not positioned to enact an active sexuality and say ‘yes’ to sex, they are not ascribed agency to practice fidelity or condom use. There is some room for manoeuvre with respect to fidelity in the sense that girls can constitute themselves in a positive way as a faithful partner. Since being faithful is considered as better than engaging in multiple sexual relationships, girls have some space where they can claim an acceptable position for their sexuality. The strategy of condom use, however, is com-
pletely incompatible with the dominant female subjectivities of the virgin and/or faithful woman, which means that girls are not ascribed agency to protect themselves through condom use.

The silencing of female premarital sexuality notwithstanding, the narratives of the girls interviewed have provided insights into how girls go beyond these restrictive norms: they do engage in sex, experience - and respond to - female sexual desire, practice other types of sex than penetrative vaginal sex, and they engage in multiple relationships. The enactment of these sub-dominant female subjectivities highlights that it is difficult for girls to practice abstinence or fidelity. Put differently, girls are not unambiguously positioned to either abstain or be faithful, and this creates room for manoeuvre to be sexually active or have multiple partners. The sub-dominant female sexualities do provide an opening for girls to use condoms in the sense that they can be positioned as active sexual agents who can opt for, propose and negotiate condom use. Yet, both the engagement of girls in sexual activity and their appropriation of sexual desire are highly precarious undertakings. Since the repercussions of deviance from the image of the respectable girl are rapid and fierce, the space that girls have to negotiate safe sex is very limited. With respect to girls, I therefore concluded that, in the overall picture of both dominant and sub-dominant female sexual subjectivities, there is a substantial mismatch between the agency required for safe sex practices and the specific constructions of female premarital heterosexuality in Dakar. The limited agency that is ascribed to Dakarois girls as a result of this mismatch is further constrained by the gender dynamics of relationships in which boys take up a dominant position. Even though girls do exercise agency in their intimate relationships with boys, it is difficult for them to control their boyfriend’s fidelity and to propose and negotiate the use of condoms.

Chapter 6 revealed how boys are positioned rather differently as safe sex agents. Their sexual desires and needs are not silenced but, on the contrary, assumed and valued in hegemonic masculinity. The central elements of potency and virility make male sexuality incompatible with the strategy of abstinence. Moreover, the quality of being ‘ever ready’ and of ‘naturally uncontrollable’ male sexuality does not fit well with faithfulness and limiting oneself to a single partner. Hegemonic male sexuality thus does not position boys to abstain, or to remain faithful. This leaves the strategy of condom use as an important alternative. The dominant position men take up, or are expected to take up, in relation to women and girls, in combination with the initiative that boys and men are expected to take in sexual matters, means that condoms are easily understood to be a man’s affair. Yet, hegemonic masculinity does not fully capture boys’ life worlds and sexual experiences, and boys are not as in control as is often assumed. With sex being experienced a ‘surprise’ and with boys being ‘provoked’ into sex, boys are not positioned as safe sex agents, and are consequently often unprepared when they do have sex. Moreover, condoms can pose a threat to masculinity because, for inexperienced boys, condom use might run against the image of the knowledgeable and sexually experienced man that they wish to establish.

Although less profound than with girls, I also concluded that for boys there is a mismatch between male sexual subjectivities and the agency required for the practice of safe sex. The acknowledgement of their sexual desires and activities means that boys are, in principle, ascribed more agency to protect themselves. Moreover, the second norm of male sexuality, that of seriousness, in some ways positions boys as safe sex agents, as they are called to think about the consequences of their – sexual – acts. This combination of acknowledging male sexual desire and the norm of seriousness provides a basis for boys to exercise agency in safe sex, at least in comparison to girls. However, the demand for seriousness predominantly positions boys so that they should abstain, and it is ques-
tionable to what extent it allows boys to practice fidelity or condom use. Overall, there is therefore not a match between male sexual subjectivities and safe sex agency.

A principal finding of this thesis is thus that the specific gendered sexual identities that Dakarois girls and boys seek to establish are antithetical to the agency that they require to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use. This means that, also through the constitution of gendered sexual subjectivities, issues of meaning and interpretation play a central role in young people’s safe sex practices, or lack thereof. This mismatch between their specific gendered sexualities and their agency to practice safe sex explains why the generally positive, but abstract, attitudes of young people towards protection against unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STIs are not consistently translated into the actual practice of safe sex. In Chapter 6 I also brought to light another factor that contributes to understanding the unprotected nature of many of the sexual encounters of young people: the degree of indecisiveness in young people’s sexuality and safe sex practices.

This indecisiveness comes about in a context where both girls and boys have to negotiate contradictory sexual gender identities. Girls negotiate the tension between virginity and female sexual desire and pleasure - and other interests such as love and material support -, and boys balance potency and virility with responsible seriousness. Whereas, in many ways, these subjectivities contradict each other, girls and boys seek to balance the two and embody elements of both. However, because a full embodiment of one position automatically excludes enactment of the other, young people often go back and forth between the two poles of their gendered sexuality: girls embody virginity and simultaneously seek space to express their sexual desires. In their sexual activity, they have to be careful not to become too ‘loose’, as this is harmful to their reputation. Boys embody virility and potency, and at the same time have to remain serious and control themselves, but without being so responsible that their masculine identity becomes subjected to doubts. I pointed out that the continuous movements between, and negotiation of, contradictory gendered sexualities accounts for the indecisiveness that young people display in their safe sex practices. Young people, both girls and boys, often do not explicitly opt for one of the three safe sex strategies, but do a little bit of everything. They value abstinence, but cannot always live up to this ideal. They value fidelity, but do not stick to a single partner. They see the advantages of condoms, but fail to use them. So, despite their strong attitudes in favour of protection against unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STIs in general, and their positive abstract evaluations of each of the three safe sex strategies, they end up having unprotected sex in practice. In addition to the above mentioned constrained way in which they are positioned by gendered sexualities as safe sex agents, I have understood the lack of safe sex practices to be the result of indecisiveness in a context of highly contradictory gendered sexualities that they enact.

There is much at stake for young people in the performative enactment and embodiment of these female and male sexualities. It is at this point that the impact of the theoretical understanding of gendered sexuality as performative makes itself felt: it is through the embodiment of dominant and sub-dominant subjectivities that girls and boys establish themselves as subjects, and their relationships as respectable. This impacts on safe sex in the sense that the proposal and discussion of condom use as well as the discussion of sexual histories and contacts, are out of place and counterproductive when young people embody the identities of virgin girls and potent boys in their intimate – and presumably ‘exclusive’ - ‘love’ relationships. However, these same identities and relationships make the practice of abstinence difficult, and therefore require precisely the agency to discuss condom use and/or sexual partners.

Young people not only seek to establish themselves as gendered and sexual subjects,
but also as religious people. Through adhering to religious norms and prescriptions, people express the desire to live according to Allah’s guidelines and establish themselves as good Muslims. This impacts on safe sex in the sense that the desire to live according to such rules and norms is, in fact, more important than actual behaviour: it is generally understood that humans are imperfect, and can therefore be forgiven (pardonné) for misconduct if they ask for it. This religious concept gives weight to the enactment and embodiment of dominant sexuality in terms of abstinence and seriousness. When young people claim to practice abstinence, this may or may not describe their actual behaviour, since it is foremost an expression of their wish to live according to Allah’s ideals and, as such, an expression of being a good Muslim. This impacts on safe sex practices in the sense that striving towards abstinence makes talking about actual behaviour, rather than ideal conduct, difficult. This makes thinking about, and discussing, sex and protection against sexual and reproductive health risks a delicate and complicated matter.

A final point that Chapter 6 drew attention to was the societal tensions that surround premarital sexuality, in particular the tensions that arise between so-called ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in the contemporary process of societal change. Adolescence, and being young and in-between, is a new life stage in society and is changing the position of unmarried youth and the relationship with parents. An involvement in premarital relationships, the individual choice of a partner (prior to, or for, marriage), the growing importance of ‘love’ in these matters, and engagement in premarital sex have a prominent place in the conflict between generations. Abstinence has come to be labelled as ‘tradition’, and premarital relationships and sex are associated with ‘modernity’. I have argued that this means that the construction of premarital sexual identities is not only meaningful in itself, it also becomes loaded with connotations of modernity and tradition. This gives another dimension to their construction, one that actually gives more weight to what is at stake: whether girls and boys are in and how they act in intimate relationships and sexual contacts not only signifies their sexual and gender identity, it also positions them on the tradition-modernity axis. In this created tension and interplay, the three strategies of abstinence, being faithful and condom use are no longer neutral acts, but carry particular connotations. Abstinence is then perceived as being at odds with ‘modern’ young identities that include premarital relationships. Fidelity fits with both ‘modern’ notions of romantic love and ‘traditional’ ideals about faithfulness in marriage. Condoms are associated with ‘modern’ medicine and western lifestyles, and are considered antithetical to ‘tradition’. The point is not so much whether these strategies are actually traditional or modern, but that they are labelled as such. The consequence of this labelling, and of the contradiction that is perceived and created between traditional and modern practices, makes it more difficult for young people to negotiate and balance the contradictory gendered sexualities, and as such adds to their indecisiveness.

To conclude, this thesis has revealed the many ways in which meanings and interpretations impact on the practice of safe sex. Firstly, I highlighted how the practice and reliability of the ABC strategies are affected by the fact that they are open to interpretation. Secondly, I found that the specific female and male gendered premarital heterossexualities, as they are constructed in the Dakar context, do not ascribe much agency to girls and boys to practice safe sex. Thirdly, the tensions that both girls and boys in Dakar experience in establishing their identities and shaping their behaviour generate a degree of indecisiveness in young people’s behaviour regarding safe sex. This is aggravated by a context in which the ABC strategies, as well as the gendered sexual identities of girls and boys, are interpreted as being either ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’. This complex set of meanings and interpretations of premarital sexuality and safe sex in Dakar has been advanced as a
plausible explanation for the limited protection of young people’s sexual encounters.

Using the perspective of gendered sexualities and indecisiveness in my analysis has not only generated insights into unsafe sex, it also points to possibilities for promoting safe sex. In my findings and analysis, a considerable mismatch between gendered sexualities and safe sex agency was prominent. There are, however, also instances where the two elements match. Discourses on seriousness and control do ascribe boys and girls the agency to think about consequences and to take responsibility. The struggle for a space in which girls could enact an active sexuality could, in principle, ascribe girls the agency to decisively act to protect their own sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, whereas my findings suggest that the tensions between the contradictory gendered sexualities undermine young people’s agency to practice safe sex, the opposite could in principle also be argued. That is, these contradictions are part of the continuous process of social change, and the multiple female and male sexual subjectivities - and the dynamics that unfold between them - could also create openings and room for manoeuvre where both girls and boys could creatively rework norms and identities. In such transformation processes, both girls and boys could potentially acquire more agency to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use. The growing individualisation that characterizes the younger generations in cities such as Dakar can strengthen these developments. In other words, processes of interpretation and giving meaning also provide entry points for the promotion of safe sex.

**Beyond the medical and the individual: culture and negotiation**

This thesis has shown how meanings and interpretations impact on the practice of safe sex. The limited practice of safe sex by young unmarried people in Dakar has been understood from its embeddedness in performative gendered sexualities. The value of this thesis lies in the fact that it tells a different story about safe and unsafe sex. One that has made clear that young people’s levels of knowledge of reproductive health and AIDS or their access to services and condoms - factors that are commonly argued about from a behavioural, medical perspective - are only part of the story behind unsafe sex. Even though I am not the first to tell such a story, the message remains highly relevant given the narrow-mindedness of the hegemonic AIDS discourse. The story of female and male sexual subjectivities that is told in this thesis makes clear that relationships and sex carry multiple meanings. Dakarois girls and boys are looking for love and/or companionship, find or give support in material and non-material ways, and many look for opportunities to have or explore sex. There is much at stake for young people in their intimate and sexual lives: they performatively establish their identities as youth, as religious people and as gendered sexual subjects, and through these give meaning to their relationships. It is through such performative processes of becoming subjects in the social order that specific agency to practice the strategies of the safe sex ABC is ascribed to, or withheld from, girls and boys. The ABC in the title of this thesis – *The ABC of unsafe sex* – points to these discursive processes of meaning and subjectivity as explanations for the limited practice of safe sex. The thesis has shown that the practice of safe sex comes about in the sexual relationships and intimate contacts of young people in a way that concerns much more than medical safety, even though girls and boys are aware of the health risks. I will not draw conclusions as to whether these socio-cultural factors are more, or less, important than the medical ones for understanding the degree to which sexual encounters by young people are protected against unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STIs, because this was not part of the study design. I can however safely conclude that one has to go beyond the medical story in order to understand unsafe sexual activities.
The analysis of the embeddedness of safe sex practices in the construction of
gendered sexualities is also crucial to an understanding of how safe sex practices are not
just a matter for the individual. Young people’s constructions of female and male sexual
identities do not come about in a vacuum, they are part and parcel of the simultaneous
reproduction and transformation of cultural patterns of subjectivities. The qualitative
investigation in this thesis has proven useful because it has shown that the agency that girls
and boys have (or lack) to practice safe sex is the result of the way they have come to
be positioned by these discourses. This implies that safe sex behaviour, or the lack thereof,
is not simply a matter of individual rational decision-making. Rather, the acts of individ-
uals are embedded in their constitution as subjects, that is in the construction of their
identities: the particular ways in which Dakarois girls and boys establish themselves as
youth, as religious people and as gendered sexual subjects are, to a large extent, determined
by the subjectivities and discourses that are available to them in the specific context of
Dakar. The use of condoms or the practice of abstinence or fidelity are hence not merely
an outcome of an individual’s rational decision-making process, but rather constituted in
the cultural patterns that young people reproduce and transform. By emphasizing this, the
analysis pursued in this thesis has generated an understanding of safe sex practices
as something that is beyond individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour, which are central
in KAPB studies. The title The ABC of unsafe sex underlines this by pointing to the impor-
tance of discourse and language in understanding safe sex practices.

In short, the qualitative approach in this thesis has brought to light the impact of
multiple and ambiguous processes of interpretation. It has made clear that phenomena
such as love, sex, exchange, abstinence, fidelity and condom use carry multiple meanings
which can vary according to the context in which they occur and to the people who are
involved. This means that safe sex is just as much a matter of negotiating identities
and meanings as of knowledge and access to services. Several points of negotiation can be
identified, and each of the ABC strategies can be approached as a point of negotiation.
First of all, young people have to balance the contradictory demands of virginity and
seriousness, and sexual desire and curiosity. The better they are able to negotiate these
contradictions, the better they will be able to make explicit decisions on how to protect
themselves. Secondly, the strategy of fidelity concerns negotiation in the sense of asking
about the sexual partners of a boy/girlfriend and discussing one’s own sexual histories.
Thirdly, the struggle young people face with respect to the negative associations of
condom use requires them to negotiate contradictions in sexuality and gender and also
modernity/tradition tensions. It is of pivotal importance to recognize that for each of
the three strategies, the points of negotiation are embedded in, and hence involve, the
negotiation of gendered sexual identities. Since such negotiations of the meanings of sex
and safe sex concern resistance to, and reproduction of, cultural patterns, they concern
society as a whole. This implies that culture is not so much a barrier to the promotion of
safe sex, but rather a resource to build on. On the basis of the acknowledgement of the
crucial role played by culture - that is processes of interpretation and the construction of
subjectivities - I suggest the reconceptualisation of the promotion of safe sex in terms of
negotiation in the next section on policy implications.

3 Policy implications

The acknowledgement that safe sex behaviour is not just a medical matter implies that
prevention interventions should not isolate the health aspects from the social and cultu-
ral processes of meaning and interpretation that affect sexuality. On the contrary, interventions and policy should explicitly deal with young people’s gendered sexual identities and the multiple meanings attached to sex and relationships. Moreover, in doing so, it should be acknowledged that safe sex practices go beyond the individual. Given the existence of multiple meanings, and the mismatch between gendered sexualities and safe sex agency, as highlighted in this thesis, negotiation is central in advancing the practice of any of the three ABC strategies. I have already highlighted that gendered sexual subjectivities can provide creative entry points for the promotion of safe sex and the behavioural change that is often called for in campaigns against HIV/AIDS and unwanted teenage pregnancies. These cultural gendered sexual identities can be mobilized to promote the positioning of young people as safe sex agents.

I see two entry points for incorporating issues of negotiation. One is assisting young people in negotiating their own identities, relationships and choices. Life-skill programmes can take up these matters by aiming to enable young people to think about and act upon their lives, their futures, their expectations from relationships and partners, sexual and reproductive health risks and possible prevention strategies. From the perspective of this study, such life-skill programmes should focus on enabling young people to develop a decisive strategy for protection. Creating a match between gendered sexualities and the agency for safe sex is central to realizing such an objective. With respect to the safe sex ABC, this thesis has uncovered several points of negotiation where life-skill programmes could assist young people in: dealing with the wish to abstain and the desire to be sexually active, talking about sexual histories and contacts when one opts for fidelity, or negotiating condom use with a partner. However, in order for young people to come to a decisive safe sex strategy, interest for their negotiations should be much broader and concern their expectations of love, exchange, sex and relationships. This means that the negotiations have to also involve how their need to protect their health has to be, or can be, balanced with their needs for love, sex, intimacy as well as their other interests. The profoundly gendered character of sexuality and safe sex practices that was brought forward by this thesis emphasizes the pivotal importance of gender in such life-skill interventions.

Given that the construction of gendered sexualities, and hence the practice of safe sex, is not an individual matter, the second point of entry is to put identities to work in public campaigns for the general public. One could, for instance, think of a public campaign with the slogan ‘Real men know how to use a condom’, or ‘Girls that care about condoms deserve respect’. These sorts of messages can come to affect the associations and interpretations that young people – and also adults – have in relation to specific ABC strategies. It also needs to be considered how the tendency to speak in terms of ideals and guidelines can be confronted with the requirement to deal with actual behaviour. Prevention campaigns can not only disseminate information, they can also actively involve the construction of the meaning of sex, sexuality, and safe sex practices. As such, they can - and do - contribute to the positioning of girls and boys as safe sex agents. Their audience need not only be young people themselves, but can also include adults, parents, teachers, religious and community leaders and decision-making authorities. While such campaigns cannot redefine terms and meanings by themselves, they can at least contribute to a debate and dialogue on interpretations and, as such, open up space for creativity and the transformation of meanings.

Both these two entry points provide opportunities to engage with processes of interpretation and, as such, allow one to build on culture, rather than go against it. It is crucial that policymakers, decision-making authorities and staff working in institutions that deal with young people’s reproductive health are aware of the relevance of issues
of negotiation and meaning. Moreover, commitment on the part of these leaders and decision-makers is needed in order for interventions addressing such issues to work. Community and religious leaders therefore also need to be involved. Awareness and commitment requires decision-makers, leaders and policymakers to be informed of the perspectives and the needs of young people, as well as the factors that constrain safe sex practices. This thesis hopes it has contributed to this.

I will end this thesis with a specific recommendation for the Senegalese context. The introductory Chapter discussed how low HIV infection rates have given Senegal the label of a ‘success country’ in the fight against AIDS. I raised the question as to whether the current prevention campaigns will be sufficient to keep HIV infection rates at a low level. The findings of this study underscore the urgency of this question. In line with other studies (Lagarde, Pison & Enel 1996; Pison, Lagarde & Enel 1996; Barnett & Whiteside 2002), this thesis has highlighted that young people’s sexual encounters are not always fully protected. The limited survey information available suggests that young people are sexually active, but that they do not use contraceptives or condoms on a universal basis. The conclusion from the qualitative analysis of my data also points out that the gendered sexualities and interpretations of the ABC strategies are not unequivocally favourable to the practice of safe sex. Put more bluntly, young people’s intimate relationships do involve risky behaviour and expose girls and boys to both unwanted pregnancies and HIV/STIs. I therefore argue that the difficulties found in abstaining and safely practicing fidelity, as well as the avoidance of condom use, require the attention of Senegalese policymakers, especially given the fact that sexuality and condoms have proven to be difficult issues to address as they are experienced as ‘taboo’ subjects (Population Council 2003). I would however urge policymakers and staff from organisations working in this field to find the courage to deal with these sensitive issues of sexuality and condom use. Another pressing issue that needs to be taken up is the unsafe practice of anal sex. Moreover, the shortcomings of the strategy of fidelity to prevent unwanted pregnancies need to be taken seriously in the current context where out-of-wedlock pregnancies constitute a larger problem to young people than HIV infections.

Looking at young people’s sexual behaviour, it seems to boil down to either no sex or unprotected sex. They abstain, or try to at least temporarily, but when they do have sex, it often takes place without protection. In the religious-traditional point of view that places great value on virginity, no distinction is made between protected and unprotected sex, as both fall into the category of unacceptable behaviour for unmarried, young people. From the health point of view, however, there is a difference between the two. The challenge for policies and in designing interventions, in Dakar and elsewhere, is to enable girls and boys, when they fail to practice abstinence, to engage in protected rather than unprotected sex. Apart from enhancing young people’s access to information on reproductive health, contraception and HIV/AIDS, I suggest that due attention be given to the processes of negotiation.
Glossary
- List of Wolof and French terms

**Wolof**

*alali farata*  
mariage payment: given by the groom and his kin to the bride, but not to her family (also known as Islamic *sadâq*; is neither bridewealth nor dowry)

*bàjjan*  
paternal aunt

*begu baay*  
marriage payment: *chèvre du père*, which literally means father’s goat; gift (money) from suitor to bride’s father during *takk* (religious marriage)

*bin-bin*  
chain of beans/pearls worn by women around the hips (is considered sexy and seductive)

*bëroon kër*  
household head

*bëf faale*  
never mind, don’t worry (term difficult to translate; in French *laisse faire, t’occupe pas, or t’en fais pas*)

*doxan*  
having sex

*doxaanante*  
refers to homosexuality (literally: having sex with yourself)

*eggale*  
final stage of the marriage process during which the wife joins the conjugal home

*garmi*  
nobles in caste system (among e.g. Wolof, Pular)

*ger*  
civilians, or non-casted in the caste system (among e.g. Wolof, Pular)

*goor*  
(1) man, (2) manly, masculine

*goorgoorlou*  
personality in popular satiric cartoon (literally: getting by, managing in unfavourable circumstances)

*goorgijjeen*  
homosexual (literally: man-woman, or a man who is a woman)

*gni*  
singers, performers; belonging to caste of *ñeño*

*jam*  
slaves in the caste system (among e.g. Wolof, Pular)

*jëqaq*  
unmarried girl in puberty

*jëballe*  
wedding night

*jeek*  
married woman

*jigee*  
woman

*mag*  
(1) big, large, (2) man (initiated and adult), (3) older brother

*mag gu jëkk*  
zie *ndàq far*

*mbar*  
initiation ceremony for boys

*mbaran*  
girl having multiple boyfriends [pejorative]

*mbaxal*  
practice of multiple partnerships (term only used for girls.)

*mbërenti*  
mariage payment: *prix de la virginité*; money given by the husband to the bride’s relatives when she has been found a virgin during the wedding night (*jëballe*)

*ndampaay*  
mariage payment: ‘price of the massage’; money given for the physical care that female relatives provide to the bride after the *jëballe* (wedding night).
ndàq far
marriage payment: cadeaux de fiançailles; gift from suitor that signify the engagement of the couple (money and jewellery)
jéaganal
marriage payment: ‘gift of the head pillow’; money given after the jéballe (wedding night) when the bride has been found a virgin.
ñeño
craftsmen in the caste system (among e.g. Wolof, Pular)
njaganal
marriage payment: ‘gift of the head pillow’; money given after the jéballe (wedding night) when the bride has been found a virgin.
njegemaar
young girl in age 8 to 15 years (not yet mature, not menstruating)
nuyóó
marriage payment: cadeaux des salutations; gifts from the suitor in first stage of the marriage process, given to the girl and her mother (1-2 kilos of colanuts and a small sum of money)
rey
‘easy’ girl
rey jeggi
expression used by boys for sex with ‘easy’ girls (literally ‘kill a sheep’; it literally refers to the cutting of a sheep’s throat, after which the man is said to step over the dead body and continue his way)
síbaar
dance event for women
samp lal
marriage payment: ‘posing of the bed’; small amount of money paid by the husband to female relatives of the bride in the ceremony preceeding the jéballe (wedding night)
takk
religious marriage at the mosque
tíji gaal
marriage ceremony preceeding the jéballe (wedding night): a suitcase filled with clothes, cosmetics and other gifts, is given by the husband and distributed between the bride, female relatives and friends after the groom has paid the ‘prix de l’ouverture de la valise’.
waajtaay
marriage payment: a sum of money given by the husband from which the wife can equip her kitchen en household
waxambaane
young boy (not initiated, not adult)
xala
form of black magic designed to prevent men from having an erection
yap
flesh
yap contre yap
flesh against flesh (expression used for sex without a condom)

French

affaire
matter, affair
affaire des hommes
a men’s affair, men’s business
aimer
love
aimer par interêt
love out of interest (material)
ami
friend
ami d’enfance
childhood friend
apprenti
apprentice
avoir des mauvaises fréquentations
keep bad company
bac (le)
zie baccalauréat
baccalauréat
final exam and diploma of secondary school
bonne
domestic servant
cars rapides
mini-bus (transportation)
cars Ndiaga Ndiaye
small bus (transportation)
centre Ado
centre where adolescents can get reproductive health services and information
Centre Social
informal training centre
chef de la famille
household head
conseil
advice
dépense quotidienne
daily expenses (costs of living)
dot
literally: dowry; but in Senegal(ese literature) commonly used to refer to alali farata.
droit (à)
right (to)
erreur  mistake
faiblesse weakness
faire du mal harm, hurt, do wrong
faire l’amour make love (have sex)
faire l’amour avec limite make love within limits (have sex without penetration)
fiancé fiancé
fille girl (unmarried)
flirt poussé the tempting acts that start with flirting and kissing, but can evolve into petting and carressing, and which can get ‘out of hand’, meaning lead to vaginal penetration
fonder un foyer set up a home, a family life
garçon boy (unmarried)
humain human
jeune youth
jeune homme young man (married)
jeune femme young woman (married)
lutte fight
lutte traditionnelle traditional wrestling
marabout marabout; religious and spiritual leader
moment suprême ultimate moment
monnaie change (money)
pagne wrap-around skirt
pardonner forgive
pas expres not intentional, not deliberate
Patte d’Oie roundabout that directs the highway out of Dakar
petites manières little manners: indirect ways in which girls express their interest in a boy
plaisir pleasure
pouvoir power
provoquer provoke
pudeur modesty; restraint
quartiers populaires popular neighbourhoods
soirée party in the evening
talibé disciple from a marabout
tariqa Muslim brotherhood
tromper deceive
vivre sénégalaisement expression for ‘getting by in circumstances of poverty’, ‘making ends meet’
This Annex provides information about the focus group discussions and individual interviews conducted for this research. The Annex is divided into two parts, starting with a list of focus group discussions (FGDs) and in the second part describing the individual interviews (INT). Within each part, the FGDs or interviews are organised according to the location where they have been collected (Lycée Blaise Diagne, Lycée Limamoulaye, Restaurant des Filles Unies, Centre Social Parcelles Assainnies, Fann Hock).

The details provided for the focus group discussions are:
- the sexe and age of the participants
- the sequence of that session (first, second or third FGD with that group) and number of participants
- location and date of the FGD
- characterisation research group: (1) in or out-of-school youth, and (2) place of residence (Dakar or the suburbs)
- language spoken during FGD (French or Wolof)
- references to individual interviews that concern participants of the FGD

With respect to the individual interviews information is provided on:
- pseudonym for the interviewee, in case their expressions have been quoted in this thesis (these are not the real names). When no pseudonym is given, the interviewee has not been quoted directly.
- sexe and age of interviewee
- date when the interview has been conducted
- characterisation research group: (1) in or out-of-school youth, and (2) place of residence (Dakar or the suburbs)
- religion and ethnic background of the interviewee (when known)
- language spoken during interview (French or Wolof)
- reference to the FGDs in which this interviewee has participated.
Focus Group Discussions

Lycee Blaise Diagne

FGD 1  girls (17-19 years)
  first FGD, 3 participants
  Lycée Blaise Diagne, 29-11-2000
  research group: in-school – Dakar
  language: French
  individual participants interviewed in: INT 1, INT 2, INT 3

FGD 2  girls (17-19 years)
  second FGD, 5 participants
  Lycée Blaise Diagne, 6-12-2000
  research group: in-school – Dakar
  language: French
  individual participants interviewed in: INT 1, INT 2, INT 3

FGD 3  girls (17-19 years)
  third FGD, 5 participants
  Lycée Blaise Diagne, 13-12-2000
  research group: in-school – Dakar
  language: French
  individual participants interviewed in: INT 1, INT 2, INT 3

FGD 4  boys (19-22 years)
  first FGD, 6 participants
  Lycée Blaise Diagne, 28-11-2000
  research group: in-school – Dakar
  language: French
  individual participants interviewed in: INT 4, INT 5, INT 6

FGD 5  boys (19-22 years)
  second FGD, 6 participants
  Lycée Blaise Diagne, 5-12-2000
  research group: in-school – Dakar
  language: French
  individual participants interviewed in: INT 4, INT 5, INT 6, INT 7

FGD 6  boys (19-22 years)
  third FGD, 5 participants
  Lycée Blaise Diagne, 12-12-2000
  research group: in-school – Dakar
  language: French
  individual participants interviewed in: INT 4, INT 5, INT 6, INT 7
FGD 7  girls and boys (17-22 years)
        fourth FGD (first mixed session), 11 participants (5 girls and 6 boys)
        Lycée Blaise Diagne, 19-12-2000
        research group: in-school – Dakar
        language: French
        individual participants interviewed in: INT 1, INT 2, INT 3, INT 4, INT 5, INT 6, INT 7

Lycee Seydira Limamouaye

FGD 8  girls (18-20 years)
        first FGD, 9 participants
        Lycée Limamoulaye, 19-1-2001
        research group: in-school – suburbs
        language: French
        individual participants interviewed in: INT 8, INT 9, INT 10, INT 11

FGD 9  girls (18-20 years)
        second FGD, 5 participants
        Lycée Limamoulaye, 26-1-2001
        research group: in-school – suburbs
        language: French
        individual participants interviewed in: INT 8, INT 9, INT 10, INT 11

FGD 10 girls (18-20 years)
        third FGD, 5 participants
        Lycée Limamoulaye, 2-2-2001
        research group: in-school – suburbs
        Language: French
        individual participants interviewed in: INT 8, INT 9, INT 10, INT 11

FGD 11 boys (18-20 years)
        first FGD, 12 participants
        Lycée Limamoulaye, 13-1-2001
        research group: in-school – suburbs
        language: French
        individual participants interviewed in: INT 12, INT 13, INT 14

FGD 12 boys (18-20 years)
        second and third FGD (organised at the same day, morning and afternoon), 11 participants
        Lycée Limamoulaye, February 2001
        research group: in-school – Dakar
        language: French
        individual participants interviewed in: INT 12, INT 13, INT 14
FGD 13  girls and boys (18-20 years)
fourth FGD (first mixed session), 17 participants (9 girls and 8 boys)
Lycée Limamoulaye, 24-2-2001
research group: in-school – suburbs
language: French
individual participants interviewed in: INT 8, INT 9, INT 10, INT 11, INT 12,
INT 13, INT 14

Restaurant des Filles Unies

FGD 14  girls (16-21 years)
first FGD, 5 participants
Restaurant des Filles Unies, 21-6-2001
research group: out-of-school – Dakar
language: Wolof
individual participants interviewed in: INT 15, INT 16, INT 17

FGD 15  girls (16-18 years)
second FGD, 4 participants
Restaurant des Filles Unies, 28-6-2001
research group: out-of-school – Dakar
language: Wolof
individual participants interviewed in: INT 15, INT 16, INT 17

Centre Social Parcelles Aissainies

FGD 16  girls (16-23 years)
first FGD, 6 participants
Centre Social Parcelles Aissainies, 10-7-2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
language: Wolof
individual participants interviewed in: INT 18, INT 19, INT 20, INT 21,
INT 22, INT 23

FGD 17  girls (16-23 years)
second FGD, 6 participants
Centre Social Parcelles Aissainies, July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
language: Wolof
individual participants interviewed in: INT 18, INT 19, INT 20, INT 21,
INT 22, INT 23
**Fann Hock**

**FGD 18** boys (19-21 years)  
first FGD, 5 participants  
Fann Hock, 20-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
language: Wolof  
individual participants interviewed in: INT 24, INT 25, INT 26, INT 27, INT 28

**FGD 19** boys (19-21 years)  
second FGD, 5 participants  
Fann Hock, 21-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
language: Wolof  
individual participants interviewed in: INT 24, INT 25, INT 26, INT 27, INT 28

**FGD 20** boys (19-21 years)  
third FGD, 5 participants  
Fann Hock, 22-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
language: Wolof  
individual participants interviewed in: INT 24, INT 25, INT 26, INT 27, INT 28

**Individual Interviews**

**Lycee Blaise Diagne**

**INT 1** pseudonym: Mariem  
girl (18 years)  
8-3-2001  
research group: in-school – Dakar  
muslim, Toucouleur  
participated in FGD: 1, 2, 3, 7. See also INT 32.

**INT 2** pseudonym: Ramata  
girl (17 years)  
8-3-2001  
research group: in-school – Dakar  
muslim, Wolof  
participated in FGD: 1, 2, 3, 7

**INT 3** pseudonym: Aissatou  
girl (19 years)  
2-3-2001  
research group: in-school – Dakar  
muslim  
participated in FGD: 1, 2, 3, 7
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INT</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>FGD Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>(21 years)</td>
<td>7-2-2001</td>
<td>Muslim, Wolof</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - Dakar</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>(19 years)</td>
<td>7-2-2001</td>
<td>Muslim, Peul</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - Dakar</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>(22 years)</td>
<td>27-3-2001</td>
<td>Muslim, Peul</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - Dakar</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>(20 years)</td>
<td>28-3-2001</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - Dakar</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 4, 5, 6, 7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Lycee Seydara Limamoulaye**

<table>
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<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>FGD Participation</th>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>(19 years)</td>
<td>9-5-2001</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - suburbs</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 8, 9, 10, 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>(20 years)</td>
<td>4-5-2001</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - suburbs</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 8, 9, 10, 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>(19 years)</td>
<td>25-4-2001</td>
<td>Muslim, Wolof</td>
<td>Research group: in-school - suburbs</td>
<td>Participated in FGD: 8, 9, 10, 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INT 11  girl (18 years)
         9-5-2001
         research group: in-school – suburbs
         christian
         participated in FGD: 8, 9, 10, 13

INT 12  boy (19 years)
         2-5-2001
         research group: in-school – suburbs
         muslim, Halpeular
         participated in FGD: 11, 12, 13

INT 13  pseudonym: Pape
         boy (20 years)
         23-5-2001
         research group: in-school – suburbs
         muslim, Halpeular
         participated in FGD: 11, 12, 13

INT 14  boy (18 years)
         4-5-2001
         research group: in-school – suburbs
         muslim
         participated in FGD: 11, 12, 13

Restaurant des Filles Unies

INT 15  pseudonym: Seynabou
         girl (18 years)
         10-7-2001
         research group: out-of-school – Dakar
         muslim
         participated in FGD: 14, 15

INT 16  pseudonym: Mame
         girl (18 years)
         8-7-2001
         research group: out-of-school – Dakar
         muslim
         participated in FGD: 14, 15

INT 17  pseudonym: Kiné
         girl (18 years)
         31-7-2001
         research group: out-of-school – Dakar
         muslim
         participated in FGD: 14, 15
Centre Social Parcelles Aissainies

**INT 18** pseudonym: Sophia
girl (20 years)
July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
muslim
participated in FGD: 16, 17

**INT 19** girl (17 years)
July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
muslim
participated in FGD: 16, 17

**INT 20** pseudonym: Aminata
young woman in marriage process (17 years)
July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
muslim
participated in FGD: 16, 17

**INT 21** girl (20 years)
July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
muslim
participated in FGD: 16, 17

**INT 22** girl (16 years)
July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
muslim
participated in FGD: 16, 17

**INT 23** pseudonym: Koumba
girl (23 years)
July 2001
research group: out-of-school – suburbs
muslim
participated in FGD: 16, 17
**Fann Hock**

**INT 24** pseudonym: Babacar  
boy (19 years)  
23-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
muslim, Wolof  
participated in FGD: 18, 19, 20

**INT 25** pseudonym: Moussa  
boy (21 years)  
24-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
muslim, Wolof  
participated in FGD: 18, 19, 20

**INT 26** pseudonym: Omar  
boy (20 years)  
24-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
muslim, Wolof  
participated in FGD: 18, 19, 20

**INT 27** pseudonym: Mamadou  
boy (20 years)  
23-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
muslim, Wolof  
participated in FGD: 18, 19, 20

**INT 28** pseudonym: Sadio  
boy (21 years)  
(brother of Khady, INT 29; son of mother in INT 31)  
24-8-2001  
research group: out-of-school – Dakar  
muslim, Wolof  
participated in FGD: 18, 19, 20

**Additional Individual Interviews**

**INT 29** pseudonym: Khady  
divorced mother of three children; first one born prior to marriage  
(approximately 25 years) (sister of Sadio, INT 28; daughter of mother in INT 31)  
September 2001  
research group: unmarried teenage mothers  
muslim  
 Did not participate in FGDs.
**INT 30**
father
22-6-2001
muslim
Did not participate in FGDs.

**INT 31**
mother of Sadio (INT 28) and Khady (INT 29)
29-6-2001
muslim
Did not participate in FGDs.

**INT 32**
Pseudonym: Mariem
girl (18 years)
7-9-2004
research group: in-school – Dakar
muslim, Toucouleur
participated in FGD: 1, 2, 3, 7. See also INT 1

**INT 33**
Pseudonyms: Nafissatou and Penda
N is unmarried mother (20 years) and P is girl (18 years)
9-9-2004
Research group: unmarried teenage mothers (N is out-of-school, P is in-school)
Muslim
Did not participate in FGDs.
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—— (1998b). Youth health and development: discussion paper for the review and appraisal of action taken to implement the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Geneva: WHO.


Onder de titel The ABC of unsafe sex staan in dit proefschrift de intieme levens en seksuele relaties van ongetrouwde meiden en jongens in Dakar (Senegal) centraal, en in het bijzonder hun gedrag aangaande veilige seks. De reproductieve en seksuele gezondheid van jongeren heeft tot de jaren negentig weinig aandacht gekregen, omdat ongetrouwde meiden en jongens niet geacht werden seksueel actief te zijn, en dus ook geen behoefte zouden hebben aan informatie en voorbehoedsmiddelen. Vooral sinds de Internationale Conferentie over Bevolking en Ontwikkeling in 1994 in Cairo wordt gepleit voor het verstrekken van informatie, voorlichting en voorbehoedsmiddelen aan jongeren om hen in staat te stellen hun reproductieve en seksuele rechten uit te oefenen en zich te beschermen tegen ongewenste zwangerschappen en infecties met hiv of andere seksueel overdraagbare aandoeningen (soa’s). Het safe sex ABC, gericht op Abstinence (onthouding), Being faithful (trouw) en Condom use (condoomgebruik), is een bekende en veelgebruikte strategie ter bescherming van de reproductieve en seksuele gezondheid van jongeren. Veel onderzoek en beleid benadert veilig vrijen gedrag vanuit een medisch en gedragswetenschappelijk oogpunt, waarbij het beschouwd wordt als het resultaat van een rationeel besluitvormingsproces (Kippax & Crawford 1993; Paiva 1995; Parker 1995; Brummelhuis & Herdt 1995; MacPhail & Campbell 2001). Dit proefschrift laat zien dat veilig vrijen noch een puur medische noch een individuele aangelegenheid is. De centrale vraag luidt: hoe vormt de constructie van de gendered sexualiteit van ongetrouwde jongeren in Dakar (Senegal) hun praktijken van veilig vrijen? Het proefschrift beantwoordt deze vraag in twee stappen. Eerst is gekeken naar seksualiteit voor het huwelijk in Dakar, de specifieke posities van ongetrouwde meiden en jongens als ongetrouwde jongeren innemen, en naar hoe zij hun seksuele en intieme levens zien en vormgeven (hoofdstuk 3, 4 en 5). Vervolgens richtte de blik zich op praktijken van veilig vrijen, en werden deze in verband gebracht met gender en sexualiteit (hoofdstuk 6).

Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dat processen van betekenisgeving en interpretatie op twee manieren een rol spelen in praktijken van veilig vrijen. Ten eerste worden de verschillende betekenisnissen aan de kernconcepten van de ABC strategie toegeschreven. Ten tweede, de specifieke constructies in Dakar van vrouwelijke en mannelijke voorhuwelijkse seksue-
aliteit schrijven jongeren niet ondubbelzinnig agency toe om zich te onthouden, trouw te zijn, of condooms te gebruiken. Dit onderzoek laat zien hoe het al dan niet veilig vieren van jongeren in Dakar begrepen kan worden vanuit de manier waarop deze jongeren hun seksualiteit en intieme levens vormgeven. Het is niet altijd eenvoudig voor te stellen waarom mensen onveilig vieren terwijl ze de kennis en de middelen hebben om zich te beschermen. Dit proefschrift maakt echter inzichtelijk dat seksueel gedrag niet enkel gebaseerd is op gezondheidsoverwegingen en laat zien dat mensen zogezegd ‘goede’ redenen kunnen hebben om zich niet te beschermen. Door te kijken naar de ervaringen en visies van ongetrouwde meiden en jongens op intieme relaties, liefde, en seks (voor het huwelijk) wordt duidelijk dat praktijken van (on)veilig vieren geen rationele beslissingen zijn, maar tot stand komen in de specifieke en contextueel gebonden constructies van en onderhandelingen over betekenis van seksualiteit en gender.


Dit onderzoek is gebaseerd op 14 maanden veldwerk in Dakar in 2000 en 2001, alsmede een kort veldbezoek in 2004. Het betreft ongetrouwde jongeren in de leeftijd van 16 tot 23 jaar, die in Dakar wonen. De helft was schoolgaand, en de andere helft had al op relatief jonge leeftijd school verlaten. De jongeren woonden zowel in de volkswijken in Dakar als in de uitgebreide voorsteden Pikine en Guédiawaye. Data werden verzameld via een verscheidenheid aan methoden, variërend van participerende observatie, gesprekken met sleutelinformanten, analyse van secundaire statistische gegevens, literatuuronderzoek, tot het ‘praten over seks’ met verschillende groepen jongeren in Dakar. Dit laatste betrof zowel focusgroep discussies als individuele interviews. In totaal participeerden 47 meiden en jongens in 22 focusgroep discussies, en werden 28 van hen ook individueel geïnterviewd. Daarnaast werden twee ongehuwde moeders geïnterviewd en hebben interviews plaatsgevonden met een vader en een moeder met kinderen in de tienerleeftijd. Het materiaal is op kwalitatieve wijze geanalyseerd, waarbij de aandacht uitging naar het ontrafelen van culturele patronen die de seksuele en intieme levens van jongeren in Dakar vormgeven.

Hoe zien de intieme en seksuele levens van ongetrouwde jongeren in Dakar er nu uit?

De verhalen van jongens over hun intieme levens laten zien dat de noodzaak om tot het huwelijk maagd te blijven inderdaad niet direct op hen van toepassing is (hoofdstuk 4). Integendeel, het is voor jongens juist belangrijk om seks met het andere geslacht te hebben om zo hun mannelijkheid te tonen, en verdenkingen over impotentie en homoseksualiteit, die beide als een bedreiging voor mannelijkheid worden gezien, de wereld te helpen. De hegemoniale constructie van mannelijke voorhuwelijksleven draait om de bevrediging van seksuele verlangens, die als normaal, ‘natuurlijk’ en oncontroleerbaar worden gezien. Jongens worden hiermee in een dominante positie terechtgezien. Maar hegemoniale mannelijke seksualiteit is niet het hele verhaal. Jongens ervaren ook onzekerheden en hebben vaak minder controle en agency in seksuele relaties met meiden dan doorgaans wordt gesuggereerd. Een tweede norm van mannelijkheid komt naar voren in de verhalen van jongens: ze moeten ‘serieuze’ zaken, dat wil zeggen verantwoordelijkheid nemen voor hun leven. Dit betreft zaken als school en inkomen, maar impliceert ook dat jongens niet te veel met meiden en seks bezig moeten zijn. Het belang van serieushheid kan gezien worden als een bewerking van de maagdelijkheidsnorm.

Het blijkt voor jongens niet eenvoudig te zijn om deze twee tegenstrijdige normen van mannelijke seksualiteit met elkaar in balans te brengen. Tegen deze achtergrond kon het gebruik door jongens van een typologie van meisjes begrepen worden. Jongens onderscheiden enerzijds de ‘echte vriendin’ en anderzijds ‘makkelijke meisjes’ (easy girls, filles faciles). De relatie met de eerste draait om ‘echte’ liefde en jongens claimen geen seks te hebben met hun ‘echte vriendin’. Seksuele relaties hebben ze met zogenaamde ‘makkelijke meisjes’, die zichzelf niet zouden respecteren en daarom, zo wordt geredeneerd, ook niet gerespecteerd hoeven te worden. Met deze typologie van meisjes, die maatschappelijk en cultureel wordt gedragen, hebben jongens een uitweg waardoor ze er min of meer in slagen de twee tegenstrijdige normen van mannelijke seksualiteit te belichamen.

Meiden ervaren in hun intieme levens ook tegenstrijdige normen, maar de spanningen die daarmee gepaard gaan zien er heel anders uit (hoofdstuk 5). In de alomtegenwoordigheid van de maagdelijkheidsnorm claimen meiden bijna altijd maagd te zijn. Ze praten veel makkelijker over liefde, en desnoods over geld in relaties, dan over hun seksuele
ervaringen. Alhoewel liefde en geld of materiële belangen idealiter op gespannen voet met elkaar staan, blijkt dat in de praktijk van de relaties van meiden en jongens in Dakar deze elkaar niet uitsluiten. Integendeel, cadeaus en financiële steun zijn een belangrijke uiting van liefde. Bovendien kunnen ze niet zonder meer ingewisseld worden voor seks. Liefde, geld en seks zijn dus onderdeel van een samenhangend geheel waarin aan de intieme relaties van jongeren in Dakar betekenis wordt gegeven. Deze bevindingen geven aanleiding tot nuancering van het begrip van intieme relaties van jongeren in 'Afrika'.

De gangbare tegenstelling tussen liefdesrelaties en sex-exchange relaties (in zowel wetenschappelijke literatuur, beleidsdocumenten en de lokale context van Dakar) doet geen recht aan de diversiteit in intieme relaties en aan de mate waarin materiële steun en giften ingebed zijn in relaties waarin liefde een rol speelt. Meiden spraken niet of nauwelijks expliciet over hun seksuele ervaringen. Als ze het over andere meiden hadden, konden ze wel redenen noemen voor seksuele activiteit voor het huwelijk; angst, geld, liefde, druk, losbandigheid, gebrek aan karakter. De maagdelijkheidsnorm genereert dus een stilte en zwijgen rondom vrouwelijke voorhuwelijkse seksualiteit. Er is weinig ruimte in de verhalen van meiden over hun intieme levens voor de mogelijk positieve aspecten van seks en voor vrouwelijk verlangen en agency van meiden. Dit is intrigerend wanneer bijvoorbeeld de manier van kleden, dansen en praten in ogenschouw wordt genomen, waaruit de potentieel plezierige aspecten van seks voor meiden wel degelijk naar voren lijken te komen. Enkele meiden benoemen expliciet seksueel plezier en bevrediging als motieven om seks te hebben. Ook meiden moeten dus in de uitdrukking van hun seksualiteit balanceren tussen twee tegenstrijdige normen: maagdelijkheid enerzijds en vrouwelijk verlangen en seksueel plezier anderzijds. De interviews laten zien dat seksuele behoeften op verschillende manieren bevredigd kunnen worden en dat maagdelijkheid op verschillende manieren gedefinieerd kan zijn: zo lang er geen sprake is van vaginale penetratie, kunnen meiden zichzelf maagd noemen. Dat betekent dat een maagd wel degelijk orale, manuele, anale of andersoortige seks kan hebben. Meiden lossen de spanning tussen tegenstrijdige normen dus op door de betekenis van maagdelijkheid en seks te herdefiniëren.

Alhoewel de seksuele, en daarmee sociale, reputatie van meiden altijd onder druk staat, en jongens een dominante positie tegenover hen innemen, is het onjuist aan te nemen dat meiden in Dakar geen agency uitoefenen. Ze zijn wel degelijk in staat om hun relaties in meer of mindere mate vorm te geven volgens hun eigen belangen en verlangens. In dat opzicht hebben meiden meer agency in en controle over seksuele zaken dan in de Senegalese samenleving of de wetenschappelijke literatuur doorgaans erkend wordt. Dat neemt niet weg dat vrouwelijke seksualiteit wordt uitgedrukt binnen een op mannen gerichte heteroseksualiteit. Tekenend hierbij is dat meiden geen gebruik kunnen maken van een maatschappelijk en cultureel gedragen typologie van jongens om de spanning tussen tegenstrijdige vrouwelijke seksualiteitsnormen op te lossen. Meiden maken wel degelijk onderscheid tussen verschillende typen jongens, en bevestigen daarmee de norm van serieusheid voor mannelijke seksualiteit. Het punt is echter dat die typologie minder impact heeft dan de typologie van ‘echte vriendin’ en ‘makkelijke meid’.

Uit de hoofdstukken 3, 4 en 5 van dit proefschrift spreekt het belang van een genderanalyse van de (intieme) levens van ongetrouwde jongeren, waarbij niet alleen vrouwelijkheid, maar ook mannelijkheid wordt bevraagd. Het bleek daarbij van belang om niet alleen naar dominante constructies van gender en seksualiteit te kijken, maar ook naar subdominante. Het ontrafelen van deze gelaagdheid draagt bij aan het inzichtelijk maken van de spanningen waarmee zowel meiden als jongens zich in hun gender- en seksuele
identiteiten geconfronteerd zien. Een dergelijke multidimensionale analyse leidt tot een nuancering in het inzicht in specifieke, contextueel gebonden genderverhoudingen: enerzijds moet erkend worden dat jongens, ondanks hun dominante positie, geen volledige controle hebben over seks en relaties met meiden, en anderzijds is het van belang te zien dat meiden binnen de op mannen gerichte heteroseksualiteit wel degelijk seksuele actoren zijn die agency hebben. Zowel meiden en jongens hebben dus wel én geen controle in seksuele aangelegenheden. Een vaak onopgemerkt detail hierbij is dat zowel meiden als jongens in Dakar gebruikmaken van verschillende vormen van pornografisch materiaal om aan hun seksuele nieuwsgierigheid tegemoet te komen; het gaat daarbij om pornofilms,-boekjes of websites.

Een analyse van statistische data uit surveys laat zien dat kennis over anticonceptie en over hiv/aids een groot deel van de Senegalese bevolking bereikt heeft, maar dat deze kennis niet altijd diepgaand of zonder misvattingen is. Voorbehoedsmiddelen worden niet vaak gebruikt, en met name jongeren melden een laag gebruik. Uitzondering hierop is condoomgebruik, dat sinds de komst van aids toegenomen is, maar onder jongeren nog lang niet algemeen gangbaar is. Trouw en het zich beperken tot één partner blijkt een vaak genoemde strategie voor zowel jonge vrouwen als mannen. Het is van belang te beseffen dat buitenhuwelijks zwangerschappen voor veel meiden en jongens in Dakar een grotere zorg zijn dan besmetting met hiv of een andere soa. Dit kan begrepen worden tegen de achtergrond van de lage hiv infectiegraad, die Senegal de bijnaam ‘succesland’ in de strijd tegen aids heeft opgeleverd. De consequenties van een ongewenste zwangerschap zijn meer zichtbaar en voelbaar in de levens van Dakarois jongeren dan de risico’s van een besmetting met hiv. Hoe kan de onbeschermde seks, die kennelijk geen uitzondering is voor ongetrouwde meiden en jongens in Dakar, begrepen worden (hoofdstuk 6)?

Dit proefschrift zoekt een eerste mogelijke verklaring in de betekenissen van de drie strategieën van het safe sex ABC. Alhoewel alledrie de strategieën binnen beleidsmatige kaders een eenduidige betekenis lijken te hebben, wijst de praktijk van de levens van jongeren in Dakar anders uit. Onthouding (Abstinence) kent vier betekenissen: (1) geen contact met de andere sekse, (2) geen seksuele contacten (zonder een gedetailleerde specificatie van seks), (3) tijdelijke onthouding, of (4) gedeeltelijke onthouding. Bij de derde betekenis is het streven naar onthouding belangrijk, maar kan het voorkomen dat er per ongeluk en bij uitzondering wel seksuele gemeenschap plaatsvindt. In het vierde geval vindt er geen vaginale seks plaats, maar zijn andere vormen van seks (zoals anal of oraal) wel mogelijk. Met deze meerdere betekenissen van de term onthouding dringt de vraag zich op wat meiden en jongens nu precies bedoelen als ze zeggen zich te onthouden? Wat doen ze nu precies wel en wat niet? Dergelijk vragen zijn met name van belang gezien de hogere risico’s van besmetting met hiv bij anale seks.

Ook bij praktijken met betrekking tot de strategie van trouw (Being faithful) spelen betekenissen een rol. Trouw impliceert niet direct monogamie, en geeft daarmee dus niet direct bescherming tegen hiv infectie. Het moet eveneens onderstreept worden dat trouw overigens geen bescherming biedt tegen de grootste zorg van Dakarois jongeren op het gebied van reproductieve gezondheid, namelijk ongewenste zwangerschappen. Betekenissen spelen ook een rol in de zin dat de vereiste communicatie over mogelijke seksuele partners (in het heden en in het verleden) vaak uitermate moeizaam verloopt in de context van een atmosfeer van ‘wantrouwen’ tussen de seksen, gecombineerd met ideeëns over exclusieve liefde en intolerantie tegen andere partners. Voor zowel onthouding (strategie A) als trouw (strategie B) blijkt dus dat deze termen in het dagelijkse en intieme leven van jongeren in Dakar open staan voor interpretatie, verschillende betekenissen
kunnen dragen en daarmee niet een specifiek seksueel gedrag aanduiden. Als jongeren claimen dat zich te onthouden of trouw te zijn, wil dat dus niet per se zeggen dat ze beschermd zijn tegen hiv-infecties of ongewenste zwangerschappen.


Dit proefschrift wijst vervolgens op een tweede manier waarop processen van betekenis- geving een rol spelen in onbeschermde seks. De aandacht gaat hierbij uit naar de manier waarop meiden en jongens in Dakar door en in hun performatieve gender- en seksuele identiteiten gepositioneerd worden om te handelen naar ieder van de drie ABC-strategieën. Het gaat daarbij om de vraag op welke manieren de specifieke gender en seksuele subjectiviteiten – die door jongeren in Dakar belichaamd worden – overeenkomen of op gespannen voet staan met de agency die nodig is voor onthouding, trouw of condoomgebruik. Voor zowel meiden als jongen wordt duidelijk dat de (tegenstrijdige) vrouwelijke en mannelijke seksualiteiten niet eenvoudig verenigbaar zijn met de agency voor de ABC-strategieën.

Het stilzwijgen en ontkennen van vrouwelijke voorhuwelijkse seksualiteit geeft meiden weinig ruimte om ‘ja’ tegen seks te zeggen en zich bezig te houden met beschermering tegen ongewenste zwangerschappen en hiv infecties. Onthouding lijkt in dat opzicht de enige acceptabele optie, maar die is niet altijd realistisch. Meiden in Dakar wordt dus in de dominerende constructie van vrouwelijke seksualiteit geen agency toegeschreven om condooms te gebruiken of te communiceren over monogamie. Zij bevochten in de performatieve belichaming van sub-dominante vrouwelijke seksualiteit geen agency toegeschreven om condooms te gebruiken of te communiceren over monogamie. Zij bevochten in de performatieve belichaming van sub-dominante vrouwelijke seksualiteit echter wel degelijk ruimte om bijvoorbeeld condoomgebruik voor te stellen. De meiden balanceren hierbij echter op een dunne lijn; de ernstige repercussies die enig afwijken van de maagdelijkheidsnorm voor hen heeft, maakt dat ze maar in zeer beperkte mate over agency beschikken om zich te beschermen. Daar komt nog bij dat ze zich in een ondergeschikte positieve bevinden ten opzichte van jongens, waarin ze, ondanks hun agency, weinig controle hebben over mogelijke andere relaties van hun partner en niet eenvoudig over condooms kunnen onderhandelen.

De constructies van mannelijke seksualiteit schrijven jongens op een andere manier agency toe voor veilige seks. Uitgaande van hun ‘natuurlijke’ mannelijke seksuele behoeftes worden jongens niet gepositioneerd om zich te onthouden of trouw te zijn. Condoomgebruik lijkt daarmee het enige alternatief, zeker ook omdat condooms als een
‘mannenzaak’ gezien en ervaren worden. Echter, het gebrek aan controle dat jongens in hun seksuele en intieme relaties met meiden ervaren, maakt dat zij de agency missen om daadwerkelijk condooms te gebruiken. Jongens zijn vaak niet voorbereid op seks, die als ‘verrassing’ ervaren wordt. Bovendien kunnen condooms een bedreiging voor hun mannelijkheid zijn als jongens niet voldoende ervaring hebben om ze kundig te gebruiken. Uiteindelijk is er daarom ook bij jongens in Dakar sprake van een zekere onverenigbaarheid van de constructies van mannelijke voorhuwelijkse seksualiteit en agency om veilig te vrijen.

Er kan dus voor zowel meiden als jongens in Dakar geconcludeerd worden dat de specifieke (en tegenstrijdige) gender- en seksuele identiteiten die zij belichamen niet eenvoudig verenigbaar zijn met de agency die ze nodig hebben om zich dan wel te onthouden, trouw te zijn of condooms te gebruiken. Om het voorkomen van onbeschermd seks te kunnen begrijpen, is het van belang de rol van betekenisgeving en interpretatie te onderkennen. Juist door dergelijke processen van betekenisgeving wordt de abstracte, positieve houding van jongeren ten opzichte van het belang van veilig vrijen – een positieve houding waarin voorlichting zeker een rol heeft gespeeld – in de praktijk van hun intieme leven vaak niet in daadwerkelijk gedrag vertaald.


Hier ligt dan ook het belang van het begrijpen van gender en seksualiteit als performative: meiden en jongens worden subjecten door de belichaming van dominante en subdominante subjectiviteiten, die aan hen specifieke handelingsbemoeiheden toeschrijven. Het gaat bij subjectiviteit niet enkel om gender en seksualiteit, maar bijvoorbeeld ook om jezelf ervaren en manifesteren als religieus persoon. De maatschappelijke discussie over ervaren of gecreëerde tegenstellingen tussen moderniteit en traditie hebben ten slotte ook hun impact op de gendered seksualiteit en de praktijken omtrent veilig vrijen van jongeren. Met adolescentie en jong-zijn als nieuwe sociale categorie zijn voorhuwelijkse relaties en seks, partnerkeuze en het belang van liefde onderwerp geworden van generatieconflicten. Hierin wordt onthouding vaak geassocieerd met ‘traditie’ en voorhuwelijkse relaties en seks met ‘moderniteit’. Dergelijke maatschappelijke spannin-

Door in te gaan op de manier waarop praktijken van veilig vrijen zijn ingebed in de constructie van gender en seksualiteit - en dus in de praktijken en meervoudige betekenis- sen van onder andere intieme relaties, seks, liefde, onthouding, trouw-zijn en condoomgebruik - heeft dit proefschrift laten zien dat beschermde of onbeschermde seks niet enkel een medische kwestie is. Door gender en seksualiteit als performative te benaderen wordt ook inzichtelijk dat praktijken van veilig vrijen geen individuele aangelegenheid zijn, maar deel uitmaken van de reproductie en transformatie van culturele patronen. Met deze kwalitatieve benadering onderscheidt dit onderzoek zich van gangbaar kwantitatief en gedragswetenschappelijk onderzoek, en vertelt een ander partial verhaal, een andere onvolledige waarheid. De titel *The ABC of unsafe sex* wijst op het belang dat dit proefschrift hecht aan inzicht in betekenisgeving en vertogen met betrekking tot praktijken van veilig vrijen. Veilig vrijen wordt dan niet alleen een kwestie van toegang tot kennis en diensten, maar ook en vooral een zaak van constructie van en onderhandeling over identiteiten. Interventies kunnen op twee niveau’s ingrijpen op de dergelijke onderhandelings-processen rondom identiteiten: op individueel en maatschappelijk niveau (hoofdstuk 7).
Cette thèse a examiné avec minutie les vies intimes et les rapports sexuels des filles et garçons dakarois par rapport à leurs pratiques sexuelles sans risque. Depuis le début des années 1990, la santé sexuelle et reproductrice des jeunes fait l’objet de plus en plus attention dans le monde et au Sénégal. Afin d’éviter des grossesses non désirées et des infections transmissibles sexuellement, particulièrement le VIH, les défenseurs plaident en faveur d’un meilleur accès à l’information et aux services de santé sexuelle et reproductrice pour les jeunes non mariés. Cela leur permettrait de faire des choix informés dans leurs vies sexuelles et de se protéger. L’« ABC » (en anglais) de la sexualité sans risque : abstinence (Abstinence), fidélité (Being faithful) et port du préservatif (Condom use), est une approche très répandue pour protéger la santé sexuelle et reproductrice des jeunes. Cette thèse apporte une approche différente de la sexualité sans risque en explorant comment sa pratique par les filles et les garçons à Dakar est gravée dans la construction de leur sexualité génrée. Cette thèse a révélé que les pratiques sexuelles sans risque sont influencées par les processus de construction du sens et de l’interprétation. Cela se produit d’un côté à travers les multiples significations des concepts-clé des stratégies « ABC » et de l’autre à travers le fait que les constructions spécifiques de la sexualité préconjugale féminine et masculine à Dakar ne permettent pas aux jeunes de pratiquer l’abstinence, la fidélité ou le port du préservatif.

Dans le domaine de la politique et de la recherche, le comportement sexuel sans risque a souvent été abordé d’un point de vue médical ou behavioriste, qui considérait ce comportement comme le résultat d’une prise de décision rationnelle d’après les connaissances. Cette hypothèse est à la base de beaucoup de travaux de recherches quantitatives sur les fréquences behavioristes et les déterminants individuels de la sexualité sans risque (ou à risque). Les études KAPB (Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, Beliefs - savoir, attitudes, pratiques et croyances) révèlent quand, combien ou à quelle fréquence les gens ont des rapports sexuels ou utilisent la contraception. Pourtant elles ne donnent qu’une idée incomplète des motivations spécifiques des personnes et de la signification qu’ont pour eux les rapports sexuels, la sexualité et la sexualité sans risque (Kippax & Crawford 1993 ; Paiva 1995 ; Parker 1995 ; Brummelhuis & Herdt 1995 ; MacPhail & Campbell 2001). En prenant ces questions de sens et signification comme point de départ, cette thèse a pour objectif d’esquisser une autre image de la sexualité et du comportement sexuel sans risque dans lequel la sexualité sans risque n’est pas considérée comme une question médicale ou individuelle. Une telle approche permet de voir comment les jeunes eux-mêmes perçoivent la sexualité, les relations intimes et la sexualité sans risque, ce qui est important puisque leurs voix ne sont pas souvent représentées dans les débats relatifs à leur vies.

Au Sénégal, les données statistiques indiquent que les jeunes sont sexuellement act-
ifs avant le mariage, mais qu’ils n’utilisent que rarement les contraceptifs et les préservatifs. Il est souvent difficile de comprendre pourquoi les gens ne pratiquent pas la sexualité sans risques, même lorsqu’ils ont l’accès aux informations et aux moyens nécessaires. Cependant, les gens pourraient en fait avoir de « bonnes raisons » de ne pas pratiquer la sexualité sans risque. Afin de comprendre ces raisons, il faut aller au delà d’une approche behavioriste médicale et individualiste simpliste du comportement sexuel sans risque. Cette thèse le fait en abordant les pratiques sexuelles sans risque des jeunes comme étant ancrées dans la construction de leur hétérosexualité pré marié genrée. Le point de départ de cette analyse est ainsi la culture sexuelle et les vies intimes de jeunes dakarois âgés d’une vingtième d’années. Ce n’est qu’après avoir compris leurs expériences et leurs point de vues sur les relations intimes, l’Amour, la sexualité prémaritale et cetera que l’on peut comprendre les décisions sur la pratique ou non pratique de l’abstinence, de la fidélité ou du port du préservatif. Les pratiques ou non pratiques de la sexualité sans risque ne sont ainsi pas le résultat de décisions rationnelles individuelles, mais interviennent dans la construction et la négociation de significations dans le domaine de la sexualité.

L’approche de la sexualité sans risque poursuivie ici s’appuie sur la perspective sociale constructionniste. La sexualité et le genre sont considérés comme étant deux systèmes de différence séparés mais s’entrecoupant à la fois (Hastrup 1978 ; Jansen 1987 ; Crenshaw 1997 ; Rubin 1999 ; Vance 1999). Les aspects biologiques de la sexualité et du genre ne parlent pas d’eux-mêmes, au contraire on leur donne une signification et en fait ils n’existent que dans le social. En tant que tels, ils supposent une catégorisation et normalisation et ont des conséquences matérielles. La démarche de cette thèse a concerné la façon dont le discours de sexualité genrée permet aux personnes de devenir des sujets dans l’ordre social (De Lauretis 1987 ; Butler 1990a, 1990b ; Villarreal 1997 ; Weedon 1997 ; Mills 1997). La sexualité genrée est une double construction culturelle, aussi bien du genre que de la sexualité. Parce que les discours sont des forces productrices qui limitent et créent en même temps des modes de subjectivité, ils attribuent des formes spécifiques d’agency, c’est-à-dire la capacité d’agir, aux personnes. L’inquiétude de cette thèse a concerné la façon dont les discours sur l’hétérosexualité pré-maritale féminine et masculine à Dakar positionnent les filles et garçons non mariés avec de l’agency pour pratiquer l’abstinence, la fidélité et le port du préservatif.

significations et interprétations replacées dans leurs contextes. Par contraste avec la perception généralisante et accusatrice de la culture dans le discours hégémonique sur le sida, je considère la culture comme étant le complexe des normes, symboles, significations, et pratiques qui façonnent le comportement des gens. La culture englobé alors ce qu’on appelle les éléments « traditionnels » et « modernes » de la vie, elle est dynamique et susceptible de changer. Ainsi, la culture peut constituer à la fois un obstacle et une source pour la pratique de la sexualité sans risque, c’est-à-dire que les constructions spécifiques de la sexualité genrée peuvent à la fois attribuer et enlever de l’agency (capacité d’agir) aux personnes pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque.

Cette étude est basée sur 14 mois de travail sur le terrain à Dakar en 2000 et 2001 ainsi qu’un cours voyage en 2004. Les données ont été recueillies grâce à une variété de méthodes de recherche allant de l’observation des participants et des informateurs essentiels, à l’analyse de données statistiques secondaires, un examen de documents pertinents, et pour finir « parler de la sexualité » avec les jeunes eux-mêmes. Ce « parler de la sexualité » comporte à la fois des conversations informelles et des entretiens plus formels. Un total de 47 filles et garçons, âgés de 16 à 23 ans, a participé à 22 discussions de groupe. Vingt-huit de ces jeunes ont été interviewés individuellement, et une fille a été interviewée une deuxième fois lors du voyage en 2004. De plus, un père et mère de jeunes adolescents ont été interviewés, ainsi que deux mères non mariées. Tous les 47 jeunes participants ne sont pas mariés, compte tenu que l’intérêt premier de cette étude est de mieux comprendre les vies intimes et sexuelles de ceux qui ne sont généralement pas supposés être sexuellement actifs parce qu’ils ne sont pas (encore) mariés. L’étude a inclus des jeunes scolarisés et non scolarisés, et pris en compte des jeunes vivant dans les quartiers populaires de Dakar ainsi que dans les banlieues. Les conversations sur le terrain, entre moi, les assistants de recherche et les participants ont été analysées de manière qualitative, afin de révéler les tendances culturelles qui organisent et façonnent les vies intimes et sexuelles des jeunes.

Dans ce sens, cette étude avait pour but une généralisabilité analytique plutôt que statistique. Cela veut dire que je n’ai pas essayé d’aborder les perspectives, attitudes ou comportements d’un nombre spécifique de filles et garçons, mais d’éclaircir la façon dont les expressions des jeunes témoignent de tendances culturelles et processus de signification.

Dans l’introduction, la question centrale de cette thèse a été formulée ainsi : Comment la construction de la sexualité genrée des jeunes non mariés à Dakar (Sénégal) façonne-t-elle leur pratique de la sexualité sans risque ? La question a été divisée en deux parties. La première partie, qui couvre les Chapitres 3, 4 et 5, a examiné la sexualité prémariée, la position particulière des filles et garçons non mariés, et la façon dont les jeunes considèrent et façonnent leurs vies intimes et sexuelles. La seconde partie a examiné les pratiques sexuelles sans risque des jeunes dakarois et les a rattachées à leur sexualité genrée. Cela a été accompli dans le Chapitre 6. Ce Chapitre de conclusion suivra la même logique dans les sections 1 et 2. La troisième section a pour but de traduire les perspectives empiriques et théoriques en implications pour des politiques.

1 Hétérosexualité prémariée féminine et masculine

Le Chapitre 3 a clarifié la position intermédiaire des jeunes et des adolescents, en se focalisant sur la place de la sexualité. Beaucoup maintiennent que les adolescents, parce qu’ils ne sont ni enfants ni adultes, ont une position intermédiaire et évoluent tout en devenant plus indépendants et responsables. Qu’ils soient toujours dépendants de leurs parents pour le logement, la nourriture, l’habillement ainsi que les conseils, les jeunes et les
adolescents prennent aussi plus de décisions et de responsabilités dans leur vie. Etant donné que l'influence des parents et proches va en diminuant, l'importance des pairs comme points de repère pour les jeunes va en grandissant. Les fossés entre générations ou les conflits entrent en compte, ces derniers concernent en général le choix du futur marié ou de la future mariée ainsi que l'acceptation ou le désir de rapports sexuels et d'une relation prémaritale. Une des idées importantes est que compte tenu de la division sexuelle du travail et des responsabilités, et des différentes positions que filles et garçons sont censés prendre dans leur vie future, le développement dans l'âge adulte est fortement généré. Parce que pour ainsi dire pour être une « femme bien », une fille doit être mariée, l'éducation qu'elles reçoivent les prépare principalement à s'occuper de leur famille et à sauvegarder leur virginité. L'objectif des garçons est de réussir dans la vie, par conséquent, l'école, le travail et le salaire sont plus une priorité que le mariage. Par conséquent, les positions intermédiaires des filles et des garçons diffèrent considérablement : l'indépendance des garçons est accentuée et encouragée plus explicitement que celle des filles, qui ne deviennent jamais complètement indépendantes, parce qu'on leur apprend à accepter l'autorité des hommes de la famille.

Etant donné que les jeunes sont par définition non mariés, j'ai analysé comment leur position intermédiaire est définie en termes sexuels. Au Sénégal, l'âge adulte est généralement défini par le fait d'être marié, le mariage étant une institution de réglementation dans le sens où elle limite les rapports sexuels au mariage. La sexualité prémaritale est considérée inacceptable parce que femme et mari sont censés être vierges lorsqu'ils se marient. Alors que la norme sociale veut que les jeunes n'aient pas de relations sexuelles, l'âge croissant du mariage a créé un stade de la vie où les jeunes sont souvent assez mûrs sur le plan physique pour vouloir et avoir des relations sexuelles. La norme de virginité, pourtant, continue d'être un important point de repère pour la construction de la sexualité prémaritale. Le Chapitre 3 a révélé que la norme de virginité était liée au genre. D'un point de vue religieux, la virginité est voulue par les futurs femmes et maris. Dans la réalité de la vie de tous les jours à Dakar, pourtant, la norme de virginité est considérée comme extrêmement importante pour les filles, et beaucoup moins pour les garçons. Cela devient clair lorsqu'on examine les pratiques et les attentes de la nuit de noces, durant laquelle les jeunes mariés jouent et incarnent des rôles sexuels idéalisés de femme et d'homme. La jeune mariée doit perdre du sang lorsque son hymen est pénétré pour la première fois, ceci étant considéré comme la preuve de sa virginité. L'hymen, le sang et la virginité sont non seulement des symboles de la réputation de la mariée et de sa famille, mais aussi du statut du mariage et même de la société en général. Le jeune marié n’a pas besoin de prouver sa virginité, bien au contraire : sa puissance sexuelle et sa virilité. De plus, il doit montrer qu’il peut conquérir sa femme et aussi qu'il peut la dominer. Parce que la virginité de la future femme est un enjeu important, elle continue d’être un important point de repère pour la construction de la sexualité prémaritale, malgré les doutes répandus, à Dakar, sur le véritable statut de vierges de la plupart des futures mariées. Pourtant, les filles et garçons non mariés sont-ils fidèles à l'idéal d'abstinence avant le mariage ? Mon analyse des études statistiques existantes montre que non : la presque totalité des hommes de Dakar indique être sexuellement actifs avant le mariage, et une dakaroise sur trois reconnaît avoir eu des rapports sexuels prémaritaux. Ces tendances sont confirmées par le fait que un premier enfant sur dix est conçu avant le mariage. Ces chiffres appellent des questions sur la réalité des vies intimes et sexuelles de ces garçons et filles, et sur la façon dont leur sexualité est construite.
Les vies intimes des garçons et filles dakarois

Les vies intimes et relations sexuelles des garçons ont été le thème principal du Chapitre 4. Les discussions de groupe et les interviews individuelles ont confirmé que presque tous les garçons ont des relations intimes avec des filles, parfois avec des filles différentes en même temps, et ils ont déjà eu des relations sexuelles. Les récits des expériences sexuelles des garçons ont montré que l’exigence d’abstinence sexuelle ne s’applique pas directement à eux. En fait, il est important pour les garçons d’avoir des relations sexuelles avec des femmes et des filles afin d’établir leur virilité. Les garçons indiquent qu’ils sont curieux d’acquérir de l’expérience sexuelle, et qu’ils se sentent comme un vrai homme (gōor) lors de leur première expérience sexuelle. Ne pas avoir de relations hétérosexuelles suscite des soupçons d’impotence et d’homosexualité, qui sont considérés comme une menace pour devenir un vrai homme. Le Chapitre 3 a révélé comment la construction hégémonique de l’hétérosexualité prémaritale masculine est centrée autour du besoin de satisfaction de désirs sexuels, qui sont considérés comme normaux et naturels. Les besoins sexuels masculins sont ressentis comme incontrôlables : certains disent que les hommes et les garçons peuvent être tellement excités qu’ils ne peuvent plus se contrôler. De plus, à travers la notion de saisir l’occasion, la sexualité masculine se construit en termes d’être toujours prêt à avoir des rapports sexuels. Cette construction hégémonique de la sexualité (prémariandle masculine place les garçons en situation dominante par rapport aux filles. Par exemple, les garçons prennent l’initiative des relations et des relations sexuelles, et persuadent les filles avec des mots doux et des moyens plus pressants. Dans certains cas, les filles font l’objet de pressions pour avoir des relations sexuelles avec un groupe de garçons. Dans beaucoup de relations, les garçons sont plus âgés et plus éduqués que leurs partenaires féminines, et à la fois les filles et les garçons maintiennent qu’il est normal et préférable que la fille ne soit pas plus éduquée que le garçon. La position dominante masculine se reflète aussi dans le fait que les contacts sexuels sont focalisés sur la satisfaction des désirs sexuels masculins. Dans cette compréhension hégémonique de la sexualité des garçons, ils sont positionnés comme des acteurs sexuels avec de l’agency, qui répondent à leurs désirs et besoins sexuels, et qui contrôlent les filles et les relations.

Une des découvertes importantes a été que la sexualité masculine hégémonique n’est qu’un des aspects des vies intimes et sexuelles des garçons. J’ai fait remarqué que les garçons maîtrisent moins la situation qu’on ne le pense souvent et qu’ils ressentent de l’insécurité et de la gêne avec les filles et dans leurs relations sexuelles. Le manque de maîtrise des garçons s’est révélé lors d’un rapport sexuel surprise. De plus, les garçons manquaient aussi d’agency face au comportement provocateur des filles, qui les poussent à réagir pour prouver leur virilité. Certaines insécurités ne remettent pas en question la masculinité hégémonique, mais révèlent les doutes des garçons quant à leur capacité à se montrer à la hauteur de l’idéal de virilité. Dans d’autres cas, les garçons s’interrogent en fait s’ils veulent ou devraient être gōor et ces insécurités indiquent une seconde norme de sexualité masculine prémaritale : les garçons doivent être sérieux, c’est-à-dire qu’ils doivent assumer la responsabilité de leur vie. Ils doivent travailler dur à l’école et dans leur profession, et faire de leur mieux pour gagner de l’argent et assumer leurs responsabilités financières dans leur famille, et ce ne doit pas être éclipsé par un intérêt trop important pour les filles et le sexe. Chez les garçons, l’explication de la notion de surprise et de provocation pour expliquer des événements sexuels sociaux indésirables, tels qu’un rapport sexuel avec la vrai petite amie ou le rapport sexuel sans protection, révèle les limites de la sexualité masculine : les garçons ne devraient pas trop se focaliser sur le sexe et les filles. En tant que tel, ce second point de repère normatif de sérieux est un remaniement de la norme de virginité.
Le Chapitre 4 a ainsi révélé que les garçons accomplissent deux normes contradictoires de la sexualité masculine : ils doivent être expérimentés sexuellement et actifs et en même temps contrôler et limiter leur sexualité. En outre, il a été révélé que les garçons font face à des difficultés pour négocier les deux, et cela augmente leurs insécurités et leur embarras. J’ai indiqué qu’une manière importante pour les garçons d’équilibrer les sexualités masculines contradictoires est de distinguer deux types de filles : la « vraie petite amie » et la « fille facile ». La relation avec leur « vraie petite amie », qui doit être vertueuse, est basée idéalement sur l’amour exclusif, et cela ne laisse que peu de place aux rapports sexuels. Cela permet aux garçons d’incarner la masculinité « sérieuse » et la maîtrise de soi. Ils expriment leur sexualité masculine puissante et virilité en ayant de multiples partenaires, en particulier celles appelées « filles faciles ». Ces filles sont, soi-disant, sans vertu et n’ont que des intérêts matériels (alors on dit que ces relations ne sont pas des relations amoureuses). Comme les filles « faciles » s’amusent et ne se respectent pas, on dit que les garçons n’ont pas besoin de respecter la virginité de ces filles et qu’ils peuvent avoir des rapports sexuels avec ce genre de filles. Cette typologie des filles est employée (et ainsi reproduite) par les garçons, mais sa constitution n’est pas limitée aux garçons : en fait, elle est produite par la société entière, qui est évidemment dominée par les hommes et préoccupée par la virginité des femmes, et reproduite aussi par les femmes et les filles elles-mêmes.

Le Chapitre 5 a révélé que les filles font face à des difficultés similaires et pourtant complètement différentes pour équilibrer des points de repères sexuels normatifs contradictoires. La norme d’abstinence prémaritale est omniprésente pour les filles. Les filles déclarent toujours être vierges et soulignent toujours l’importance de la virginité (des femmes). Alors que l’amour et l’argent ressortent le plus dans le récit des filles sur leurs relations intimes avec les garçons, elles ne parlent pas de sexe. Les filles parlent souvent d’amour et des petits amis en paroles idéalisées, se focalisant sur les sentiments profonds réciproques, l’exclusivité et les possibilités d’un futur mariage. Le petit ami idéal doit être attentionné et attentif, et ne pas s’intéresser au sexe. La définition de l’amour, incompatible avec les intérêts matériels, fait que la présence d’argent ou de cadeaux peut être facilement interprétée comme un signe d’échange contre un rapport sexuel. On ne reçoit rien contre rien. Néanmoins, j’ai attiré l’attention sur le fait que dans la réalité, le lien entre amour, argent et sexe est beaucoup plus ambigu : l’argent et les cadeaux sont aussi considérés comme l’expression de l’amour et de l’attention du petit ami. En fait, toutes les filles reçoivent de l’argent et des cadeaux de leur(s) petit(s) ami(s).

Contrairement aux garçons, les filles n’ont que très peu parlé de leurs expériences sexuelles. Ce silence ne correspondait pas aux statistiques qu’une femme sur trois avait eu des rapports sexuels avant le mariage, et au nombre de grossesses chez les adolescentes, grossesses conçues avant le mariage (ou en dehors). Cela ne correspondait pas non plus à la façon dont les filles parlaient des garçons ou de leur petit ami, s’habillaient, dansaient et partageaient des techniques de séduction. Combiné avec les récits sexuels des garçons qui mentionnaient fréquemment les rapports sexuels avec les filles (même si ces récits doivent être interprétés avec prudence), cet écart est devenu un puzzle fascinant : les filles non mariées de Dakar sont-elles sexuellement actives ? Si oui, quand et pourquoi ? L’histoire hypothétique, dans laquelle on a demandé à des filles d’expliquer l’activité sexuelle d’une fille comme elles, a montré que leur souhait de sauvegarder leur relation avec leur petit ami était une raison importante pour qu’elles aient des rapports sexuels. La peur de perdre le petit ami peut entraîner la perte du partenaire amoureux ainsi que celle d’avantages matériels provenant de la relation, bien que les filles parlent beaucoup moins de cette dernière. Les décisions sur le sexe sont liées à l’amour de deux façons : premièrem...
le sens où les filles n’acceptent d’avoir des rapports sexuels que si elles sont sûres que leur petit ami les aime vraiment, et deuxièmement, les filles peuvent prouver leur amour pour leur petit ami en ayant des rapports sexuels avec lui. Il s’avère que l’amour, l’argent et le sexe forment un tout interconnecté dans lequel les filles (et les garçons) donnent une signification à leurs relations, leur propre identité et pour finir, leur activité sexuelle. En réponse à l’initiative des garçons, les filles peuvent se faire une réputation de fille vertueuse en disant « non » et en se préservant. Il reste néanmoins clair que les filles ne sont pas toujours en position de dire « non » aux mots doux ou à la contrainte que les garçons emploient. La contrainte et le consentement deviennent particulièrement pertinents dans des situations où des groupes de garçons cherchent à avoir des rapports sexuels avec une seule fille.

Il était frappant de voir que les raisons que les filles ont avancées pour leur activité sexuelle restent négatives et inacceptables. Cela donne l’image où les filles ont des rapports sexuels parce qu’elles sont « faibles » (lorsqu’elles ne peuvent pas résister), « matérielistes » (lorsqu’elles ont peur de perdre des avantages matériels), ou « faciles » (lorsqu’elles ne cherchent pas à dire « non » ou à se montrer vertueuses). Le Chapitre 5 a révélé qu’en fait, les récits des filles ne laissent pour ainsi dire aucune place pour les aspects positifs du sexe : elles ne parlent pas de désirs sexuels ou de plaisir sexuel. Cependant, en lisant entre les lignes de ce qui est dit, en écoutant le peu de filles qui ont parlé de leur expériences sexuelles, et en regardant la façon dont les filles parlent des petits amis et des techniques de séduction, et en prenant en compte par exemple la façon dont elles se habillent ou danse, j’ai montré qu’il existe quelque chose de désirable et agréable pour les filles. Le « pas exprès » renvoie aux aspects agréables du sexe qui font dire « oui » aux filles. De la même manière, l’utilisation du mot « flirt poussé » met l’accent sur le fait que le sexe est une raison pour avoir des rapports sexuels. Une fille a défini explicitement le sexe en termes de plaisir, et deux autres filles ont souligné que les désirs sexuels des filles étaient la raison pour laquelle elles avaient des rapports sexuels. Selon une découverte importante de ce chapitre, les curiosités et les désirs sexuels peuvent être satisfaits de manière créative : en fait, tant que les filles n’ont pas de relations sexuelles vaginales avec pénétration, elles peuvent se considérer comme vierges. D’autres activités sexuelles, comme les rapports sexuels oraux, manuels ou anaux, ne sont pas considérés comme antithétique à la virginité, suggérant ainsi que les vierges peuvent en fait être sexuellement actives. En redéfinissant les significations de la virginité et des rapports sexuels, les filles sont ainsi capables de combler le fossé entre abstinence et rapport sexuel.

Ainsi le Chapitre 5 a permis de mieux comprendre comment les vies intimes des filles dakaroises sont marquées par leur lutte pour pouvoir exprimer leur désir sexuel. Dans le contexte de la sexualité prémaritale féminine rejetée et réduite au silence, les filles doivent d’abord établir leur identité et leur réputation, avant de pouvoir exprimer leur désir sexuel. Si les filles disent « oui » tout de suite, elles deviennent des filles « faciles » qui n’ont pas besoin d’être traitées avec respect. Cela veut dire que les filles marchent sur la corde raide et négocient constamment la tension entre leur désir sexuel et leurs intérêts d’un côté, leur réputation et statut social de l’autre. Cette thèse a révélé que les filles sont à la fois actives sexuellement et aussi des agents sexuels actifs. J’ai aussi découvert que les filles ont l’agency pour façonner leurs relations intimes et sexuelles avec les garçons suivant leurs propres besoins et désirs. Leurs désirs peuvent être à la fois de s’abstenir (dire « non ») et d’avoir des rapports sexuels (dire « oui »). Dans le premier cas, les filles ont la capacité de ne pas avoir de rapports sexuels. Dans le deuxième cas, le désir de plaisir et de satisfaction féminine existe, et les filles trouvent un espace de manœuvre pour agir. De plus, en étant sexy et séduisantes, et en obligeant les garçons à les “mériter” et à investir dans elles, les filles
ont l’*agency* de poursuivre leurs propres intérêts dans leurs relations intimes. D’une certaine façon, ainsi, les filles ont plus de contrôle que la société ne leur en attribue, et que les études ne le reconnaissent. Cependant, ce qui est important, c’est que la sexualité des femmes est exprimée dans un contexte d’hétérosexualité centrée autour et dominée par les hommes.

Une des découvertes importantes du Chapitre 5 a été que, alors que les garçons négocient des masculinités contradictoires en employant une typologie de filles, cette option n’est pas disponible dans la même mesure pour les filles. Il a été révélé que les filles différencient entre les types de garçons de deux façons. Tout d’abord, elles font la différence entre le petit ami idéal responsable et vraiment affectueux et celui qui « passe son temps à boire du thé ». Ensuite, elles font la différence entre le « vrai » petit ami et d’autres partenaires. La seconde typologie est identique à celle que les garçons construisent des filles. La première, toutefois, s’oppose à celle des garçons qui pensent en termes de « vrai » petite amie par rapport à la fille « facile », parce que cette typologie associe argent et amour au lieu de les séparer. De plus, le sérieux que les filles recherchent renforce la seconde norme de la sexualité masculine, d’autre part ce sérieux est renforcé par le discours de la société. Néanmoins, l’impact de la façon dont les filles classent les différents types de petits amis sur les garçons est bien moindre que l’impact de la typologie des garçons, particulièrement l’élément de la fille « facile » qui n’a pas besoin d’être respectée, sur les filles. Cela démontre encore que la société entière a un intérêt particulier à contrôler la sexualité des filles plutôt que celle des garçons.

Les Chapitres 4 et 5 ont mis en lumière un autre problème crucial : l’utilisation par les filles et les garçons de matériel pornographique comme par exemple des films, livres, magazines ainsi que des sites Web ; la plupart d’entre eux semblent venir des pays occidentaux. Les jeunes regardent ces films et lisent ces livres soit seuls soit en groupe. Des groupes de garçons regardent des films ensemble, un couple regarde un film ou des filles partagent un magazine ou un livre et en parlent ensemble. Le matériel pornographique doit être pris en considération parce que il répond à une curiosité pour le sexe et la sexualité chez les jeunes, et semble être une des rares sources d’information explicites sur la sexualité. Le matériel pornographique a montré à certaines filles par exemple comment satisfaire leur partenaire (ou elles-mêmes) sans pénétration vaginale, et ainsi comment garder leur hymen et leur virginité intacte. Les films et livres pornographiques répondent ainsi au besoin des jeunes, filles comme garçons, d’information sur les rapports sexuels. La qualité des films, livres, et sites Web pornographiques, en termes de fournir des informations correctes, tenant compte de la spécificité des sexes, et permettant aux jeunes de prendre des décisions informées sur leur sexualité, peut être mise en doute, et tout au moins doit être étudié d’avantage. Des recherches ultérieures pourraient exalter de plus près quel genre de matériel pornographique circule ainsi que les raisons pour lesquelles et la façon dont il est utilisé par les jeunes dakarois.

**Genre sexuel, amour et échange**

La forte association du genre sexuel avec l’adolescence et la sexualité prémaritale explique la décision d’étudier le genre en rapport avec les filles et les garçons. Le caractère genré des vies et expériences de garçons et d’hommes n’est souvent pas contestée dans le sens où la spécificité de la masculinité et de la virilité n’est pas prise en compte. Quand on parle des hommes, c’est souvent dans la façon où la masculinité a un impact (négatif) sur les filles et les femmes et permet aux garçons et aux hommes de les contrôler. Cette thèse a abordé les hommes en tant que personnes genrées en soulignant les masculinités et sexualités mascu-
lines que les garçons expriment. De cette analyse, on peut tirer la conclusion importante que les garçons, malgré le fait qu’on leur impute une position dominante vis-à-vis des filles dans la construction de la sexualité centrée sur l’homme, ne contrôlent pas complètement le quand et le comment des rapports sexuels. Cela apporte une nouvelle perspective à l’hypothèse répandue dans nombre de documents sur le genre et le port du préservatif (ou la santé reproductrice et sexuelle en général) que les garçons sont en mesure de prendre des décisions sur le port du préservatif. Une démarche analytique au delà de la masculinité hégémonique a été l’étape cruciale qui a permis d’arriver à cette découverte. Cette thèse a révélé que les garçons non seulement façonnent leur comportement et identité sexuels masculins en rapport avec la construction hégémonique de la virilité mais qu’ils s’associent aussi à la seconde norme de sérieux et de contrôle de soi. Les insécurités, la gêne et la honte dont ces garçons font l’expérience, même quand ils se conforment à la masculinité hégémonique, met en évidence l’ambiguïté de la constitution de la masculinité. Ces découvertes soulignent le besoin d’une approche multi dimensionnelle qui peut souligner les multiples masculinités que les garçons expriment ainsi que les tensions qui se produisent entre elles. En analysant les vies des garçons hétérosexuels dakarois de cette façon, cette thèse a révélé que les conflits et tensions autour de la masculinité hégémonique concernent non seulement les hommes et les masculinités « déviantes » et non normatives, par exemple les homosexuels, mais caractérisent aussi la constitution des identités masculines des garçons qui pourraient être considérés comme faisant partie de la « norme ». En soulignant les multiples façons dans lesquelles les garçons façonnent leurs vies et identités sexuelles, cette thèse a révélé l’hétérogénéité chez les garçons.

L’approche multi dimensionnelle sur le genre s’est révélée non seulement pertinente dans son application chez les garçons mais aussi précieuse par rapport aux filles. Alors que cette thèse a confirmé les inégalités de genre générales qui sont défavorables aux filles, elle a aussi montré que les filles ne sont pas passives et sans agency ou désir sexuel. L’exploration des sexualités féminines sous dominantes, bien que présentes, a représenté les filles comme des agents sexuels dotés d’agency. Ce que je veux dire, c’est que le genre et les identités sexuelles ne peuvent être réduites à une position ou à une norme, mais que leur performance les rend dynamiques et multiples. L’avantage de voir que les garçons sont à la fois dominants et n’ont pas la maîtrise, et que les filles sont dominées mais ont aussi l’agency, est que ni les filles ni les garçons ne peuvent être réduits à des catégories homogènes. Ainsi, une perspective multi dimensionnelle permet une analyse plus subtile de la dynamique du pouvoir entre les filles et les garçons. Pour revenir aux Caldwells (Caldwell et al. 1989), cette thèse souligne les critiques sur la thèse de permissivité africaine : la sexualité des jeunes à Dakar connaît des restrictions et est régulée par des codes moraux. De plus, la façon dont la sexualité prémaritale est contrôlée et construite est sujette à des processus de changements. Cette thèse ne brosse pas un tableau de la « sexualité africaine », ou plus précisément de la sexualité des jeunes de Dakar, en les présentant comme un « cas spécial » radicalement différent de l’occident. Il y a à la fois des similitudes et des différences entre les expériences des dakarois et par exemple des jeunes occidentaux. Cela suggère que la démarche des Caldwells d’analyser la « sexualité africaine » par opposition à ce qu’ils appellent l’Eurasie n’est pas très utile. Cette étude est utile dans le sens où elle propose une démarche émique en analysant la construction de la sexualité genrée en rapport aux significations qu’elle a pour les sujets étudiés.

Avec cette démarche émique, je voudrais en appeler à une réflexion plus nuancée sur l’existence et la signification de l’amour et de l’échange dans les relations des jeunes. Cette thèse a révélé que la notion de l’amour romantique ressort des récits sur les relations intimes des filles et des garçons. Le discours sur l’amour constitue une différence de
générations avec leurs parents. Cela souligne l’importance du désir et des sentiments de lien fort ainsi que le choix individuel d’un partenaire dans les relations prémaritales puis maritales, qui coexistent avec le contrôle familial et la responsabilité sociale qui sont au centre de la façon dont les mariages étaient arrangés par la famille dans le passé. De plus, alors que la notion d’amour romantique est considérée comme incompatible avec les intérêts matériels, cette étude a aussi montré que l’amour et l’argent, ou l’échange ne s’excluent pas mutuellement dans les relations des jeunes. Cette thèse a fait remarquer qu’une classification des relations en termes soit d’amour ou d’échange ne rend pas compte de la diversité des relations dans lesquelles les filles et les garçons dakarois se trouvent. 

La multi dimensionnalité de la masculinité et de la féminité, la démarche émique de la sexualité, et le fait que l’argent et l’amour sont liés l’un à l’autre montre qu’il est important de voir comment les jeunes se voient et interprètent les phénomènes. La force de cette étude qualitative, telle qu’elle a été conduite dans cette thèse, est de faire la lumière sur les significations de pratiques et de phénomènes. Il devient alors clair qu’il y a toujours de multiples significations et interprétations. Une telle multiplicité de significations peut se présenter dans différents contextes, comme par exemple la virginité est considérée dans des contextes religieux comme un contact non sexuel, alors que dans le contexte des vies intimes des filles, cela peut être interprété dans une sens plus restreint comme un rapport vaginal sans pénétration. Les significations des mêmes phénomènes sont susceptibles d’être différents pour des personnes différentes, mais les personnes peuvent aussi exprimer des significations différentes selon les circonstances variées dans lesquelles elles se trouvent. C’est à dire que, selon le contexte, la même fille peut exprimer les deux sens de la virginité. La multiplicité, qui devient évidente lorsqu’on étudie les perspectives émiques sur les pratiques, révèle la complexité des dynamiques de pouvoir entre filles et garçons. L’intérêt de cette thèse se trouve dans le fait qu’elle offre une autre analyse des relations intimes et sexuelles des jeunes. Plutôt que de confirmer l’opinion répandue que les jeunes filles sont victimes dans les relations transactionnelles dans lesquelles les garçons ont une position dominante, cette étude a attiré l’attention sur la complexité des relations intimes et sexuelles des jeunes dans lesquelles l’amour et le sexe font partie d’un tout interconnecté et dans lesquels les filles et les garçons ont simultanément une agency et un manque de contrôle. Ces dynamiques de pouvoir complexes sont importantes pour comprendre la pratique de la sexualité sans risque chez les jeunes. En plus, la multiplicité des sens joue aussi un rôle primordial pour comprendre pourquoi et comment les filles et les garçons pratiquent, ou non, la sexualité sans risque.

2 L’ABC des rapports sexuels à risque

L’intérêt principal de cette thèse, c’est à dire les pratiques de sexualité sans risque, ont constitué la charnière du Chapitre 6. La première partie de ce chapitre a montré comment les informations sur la contraception et le VIH/SIDA sont maintenant connues d’une grande partie de la population sénégalaise, y compris les jeunes. Cependant, des idées fausses sur la conception, par exemple, ou les modes de transmission du VIH existent, ces informations sont aussi souvent incomplètes ou erronées. Les méthodes de contraception ne sont pas communément utilisées, particulièrement chez les jeunes, où de un à six pour cent
seulement des jeunes sénégalaise ont déjà utilisé une méthode moderne. Pour Dakar, selon un rapport, le port systématique du préservatif dans ce qu’on appelle les «relations sans attache », est observé par 24 % des jeunes femmes (15-24 ans) et 60 % des jeunes hommes dans le même groupe d’âge. Le port du préservatif est en augmentation depuis l’arrivée du SIDA dans le pays, particulièrement dans les relations non maritales, mais il est loin d’être pratiqué par tous. Dans les études, les femmes mentionnent le partenaire unique et la fidélité comme stratégies de sexualité sans risque, et les hommes mentionnent le port du préservatif et la fidélité. Mon travail sur le terrain indique que les grossesses hors mariage sont une plus grande source d’inquiétude pour la plupart des jeunes que le VIH/SIDA car le premier est plus visible et marquant dans leurs environnements que le dernier. Donc, il est important de noter que, bien que l’avortement soit-il légal, c’est une option que les jeunes prennent en considération en cas de grossesse non désirée, et les jeunes connaissent plusieurs façons de mettre fin à une grossesse non désirée. Les récits sur leurs vies intimes confirment aussi que les rapports sexuels à risque ne sont pas rares chez les jeunes. Cette thèse a cherché une explication de cette pratique limitée de la sexualité sans risque dans deux directions. Premièrement, j’ai observé l’attitude des jeunes concernant les trois stratégies de l’ABC de la sexualité sans risque. Deuxièmement, j’ai analysé comment la construction de la sexualité genrée prémaritale, tel qu’il en est question dans le Chapitre 3 au Chapitre 5, positionne les filles et garçons dakarois avec l’agency pour pratiquer l’abstinence, la fidélité et le port du préservatif.

Significations des stratégies ABC
L’abstinence est souvent citée comme la première option pour se protéger contre l’infection VIH et les grossesses non désirées. Alors que l’abstinence semble un terme plutôt direct, les récits des filles et garçons indiquent quatre significations différentes du terme abstinence. Premièrement, il veut dire contact limité ou inexistant avec le sexe opposé. Deuxièmement, dans le discours de prévention et le discours médical traditionnel, abstinence veut dire absence de rapports sexuels. Troisièmement, les garçons à Dakar comprennent parfois l’abstinence dans son sens temporel, où chacun a pour but l’abstinence mais peut parfois avoir des rapports sexuels. Quatrièmement, les filles dakaroises indiquent que la signification de l’abstinence dépend de la définition du sexe : quand le sexe veut dire pénétration vaginale, alors il est possible d’avoir des rapports oraux, anaux ou manuels et ainsi de pratiquer l’abstinence « partielle ». Ces différentes interprétations du terme abstinence soulignent l’importance de prendre en compte les questions de significations en rapport au sexe et à la sexualité sans risque. En ce qui concerne l’abstinence, une des questions cruciales est : qu’est-ce que les gens veulent vraiment dire quand ils prétendent pratiquer l’abstinence, ou plus précisément, que font-ils vraiment lorsqu’ils pratiquent l’abstinence ? Le Chapitre 6 a montré qu’en ce qui concerne la deuxième signification, les jeunes ont quand même des rapports sexuels. Ces rapports sexuels peuvent se produire très rarement et non intentionnellement (en cas « d’abstinence temporaire ») ou les contacts sexuels peuvent comporter des rapports oraux, manuels ou anaux (en cas « d’abstinence partielle »). Une importante conclusion à tirer est que revendiquer la pratique de l’abstinence évoque la pratique de la sexualité sans risque, mais que les rencontres sexuelles peuvent exposer filles et garçons à des risques de grossesses non désirées et d’infections par le VIH si elles ne sont pas accompagnées de protection supplémentaire. Il faut prêter une attention particulière aux risques plus importants d’infection par le VIH par rapport sexuel anal, risque dont les jeunes dakarois ne semblent pas être informés ou conscients. Néanmoins, ce ne sont pas seulement les multiples significations du terme
abstinence qui empêchent sa pratique sans risque, mais surtout les difficultés de se comporter selon ses propres rideaux. Par contraste avec les attitudes très positives envers l’abstinence, les filles ainsi que les garçons ont en fait des rapports sexuels avant le mariage pour de multiples raisons.

Le Chapitre 6 a montré que la sécurité de la fidélité, la seconde stratégie, est aussi influencée par les significations et les difficultés à mettre cette fidélité en pratique. D’un point de vue médical et culturel, être fidèle équivaut à avoir des rapports sexuels avec un partenaire unique. Sa résonance avec l’élément exclusif de la notion de « vrai amour » fait de la fidélité une stratégie attirante pour les jeunes dans le Dakar d’aujourd’hui. Néanmoins, des références à l’amour donnent lieu à des interprétations créatives : lorsqu’ils défendent le fait d’avoir plusieurs partenaires, les filles et les garçons disent que les « autres » relations ne sont pas un signe d’infidélité puisqu’ils n’aident pas le(s) autre(s) partenaire(s) autant que le ou la « vrai(e) » petit(e) ami(e). Bien que courante, cette interprétation de la fidélité est contestée, et la plupart du temps, les partenaires n’acceptent pas que leur petit(e) ami(e) ait d’autres partenaires. Néanmoins, être fidèle ne veut pas nécessairement dire être monogame, et par conséquent n’équivaut pas nécessairement à une protection contre les risques de la santé sexuelle et reproductrice. Un autre problème concerne la pratique de la fidélité qui devient problématique dans un contexte où les filles et les garçons de Dakar ont souvent de multiples partenaires en même temps ou dans une série de relations monogamiques. Les risques sur la santé d’avoir plus d’un partenaire doivent être séparés des grossesses non désirées d’un côté et des infections par le VIH/ITS de l’autre. En ce qui concerne ce dernier, avoir de multiples partenaires n’est pas par définition risqué, du moment qu’aucun des partenaires n’a le VIH ou une ITS. Afin de pouvoir évaluer ce risque, les partenaires ont besoin de parler de leur passé et de leurs contacts sexuels. La communication sur ces problèmes, particulièrement les contacts sexuels actuels, est cependant difficile dans le contexte dakarois où la méfiance entre les sexes s’ajoute à l’idéal du « vrai amour » exclusif et à l’intolérance envers les autres partenaires.

En ce qui concerne le risque de grossesses non désirées, un défaut majeur de la fidélité est qu’elle ne protège pas contre la conception, puisqu’elle permet les rapports sexuels sans l’utilisation de contraceptifs ou de préservatifs. En ce qui concerne à la fois l’abstinence et la fidélité, cette thèse a trouvé que ces termes apparemment directs sont souvent ouverts à l’interprétation et peuvent avoir plusieurs significations dans la vie des jeunes dakarois. L’importance de cet éclairage est que même si les jeunes disent pratiquer soit l’abstinence soit la fidélité, cela ne garantit pas la protection contre les risques de santé sexuelle et reproductrice. Le Chapitre 6 a révélé que les questions de signification ont une incidence sur la stratégie du port du préservatif, la troisième stratégie considérée, bien que ce soit de manière différente. Les interprétations n’ont pas vraiment d’incidence sur la définition de ce que sont les préservatifs ou de comment ils peuvent être utilisés, mais elles concernent les implications de cette utilisation, proposition d’utilisation, ou le fait d’en avoir où que l’on aille (pour ceux qui le font). Les jeunes dakarois sont partagés sur les préservatifs. Alors que les préservatifs sont contestés et considérés inappropriés pour les jeunes, certains disent aussi que les préservatifs peuvent protéger contre le VIH/ITS et les grossesses non désirées. En fait, la pratique du port du préservatif est, parmi d’autres, remise en cause par des doutes sur leur fiabilité ainsi qu’une préférence pour les rapports sexuels sans préservatif. De plus, l’expérience de rencontres sexuelles « surprises » fait que la plupart du temps, aucunes précautions n’ont été prises. Quand ni les filles ni les garçons n’ont de préservatif avec eux, le moment suprême intime doit être interrompu par un des partenaires afin d’aller chercher un préservatif. La majorité des garçons sont réticents à le faire parce qu’ils ont peur que la fille perde l’intérêt à cause de cette interruption.
J’ai montré que les significations ont une incidence sur le port du préservatif de trois manières différentes. Premièrement, les préservatifs sont liés à des idées sur les identités appropriées de la sexualité des femmes et des hommes. Les préservatifs sont généralement considérés comme l’affaire des hommes, parce que les hommes sont ceux qui doivent être responsables, parce que les hommes prennent en général l’initiative en matière de sexualité, parce que les hommes occupent la relation dominante par rapport aux femmes/filles, et parce que les hommes sont ceux qui mettent le préservatif. Il est généralement considéré inapproprié pour les filles d’acheter un préservatif, d’en avoir un avec elles ou d’en apporter un pour un rapport sexuel. Les préservatifs révèlent ce que les filles préfèrent garder secret, c’est à dire leur connaissance et expérience du sexe. Pire, les préservatifs peuvent être considérés comme un signe que la fille est sexuellement active, et même qu’elle cherche à avoir des rapports sexuels. Pour les garçons aussi, les préservatifs, même s’ils sont l’affaire des hommes, montrent la sexualité des garçons de manière trop ouverte pour les parents, la famille, et même les pairs et les filles qui sont courtisées. Les préservatifs laissent à penser qu’un garçon est trop préoccupé par le sexe, et donc qu’il n’est pas sérieux. Ces associations empêchent filles et garçons de prendre des précautions en apportant ou proposant des préservatifs.

Une autre façon où les significations jouent un rôle est dans le sens où (la proposition du) port du préservatif peut facilement être considérée comme un signe de méfiance et de manque de confiance. Demander des préservatifs viole la confiance quand c’est interprété comme la mise en question de l’amour exclusif et de la fidélité du partenaire. Sinon, cela peut rendre la partenaire suspicieuse lorsque vous n’avez pas été fidèle et que par conséquent vous avez besoin de vous protéger. Renoncer au port du préservatif est ainsi justifié par des questions de confiance. Les garçons surtout disent souvent que les préservatifs ne sont pas nécessaires lorsqu’on « connaît » un partenaire. Ce raisonnement est basé sur la supposition qu’une fille qu’ils « connaissent » n’a pas de contacts sexuels multiples ou occasionnels et qu’on peut ainsi lui faire confiance qu’elle constitue un faible risque d’infection par le VIH ou ITS. Troisièmement, les significations ont une incidence sur l’utilisation du préservatif. A la fois les filles et les garçons ont des difficultés à trouver le bon moment pour commencer à parler du préservatif. Les difficultés de mettre correctement un préservatif ne constituent pas vraiment un problème, mais les garçons particulièrement se soucieraient de l’embarras et de la gêne lorsqu’ils mettent le préservatif sur leur pénis. Malgré le fait que les préservatifs soient l’affaire des hommes, ils peuvent aussi devenir une menace à la masculinité lorsque les garçons, bien qu’ils soient censés s’y connaître et être expérimentés en matière de sexe, essaient d’enfiler un préservatif de façon maladroite. L’utilisation du préservatif est ainsi problématique pour les filles et les garçons. Prendre en considération les significations et interprétations permet de mieux comprendre, tout d’abord, pourquoi les filles et les garçons dakarois ont des attitudes positives envers les stratégies ABC, et ensuite, pourquoi ils ne les mettent en fait pas souvent en pratique.

L’agency pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque
La troisième partie du Chapitre 6 a analysé la pratique des trois stratégies de sexualité sans risque du point de vue des filles et garçons non mariés en explorant comment leur pratique est liée aux sexualités genrées performatives des jeunes. Cette analyse a examiné comment filles et garçons, en tant que sujet sexuels genrés, sont positionnés en tant qu’agents pour les différentes stratégies de sexualité sans risque. De quelles manières les subjectivités sexuelles genrées, exprimées et incarnées par les jeunes, s’accordent ou ne s’accordent-elles pas avec l’agency requise pour la pratique de l’abstinence, de la fidélité et
du port du préservatif ? J’ai cherché une réponse à cette question en examinant à la fois les constructions dominantes et sous-dominantes de la sexualité prémaritale des femmes et des hommes.

Etant donné que les identités sexuelles des filles sont construites par rapport à une forte norme dominante de virginité, il a été constaté qu’on attribue avant tout aux filles l’agency pour qu’elles s’abstiennent de tout rapport sexuel. Lorsque les filles ne sont pas en position de prendre part à une sexualité active et de dire « oui » aux rapports sexuels, elles n’ont pas l’agency pour pratiquer la fidélité ni le port du préservatif. Il existe une marge de manœuvre pour la fidélité dans le sens où les filles peuvent s’établir de manière positive en tant que partenaire fidèle. Parce que être fidèle est mieux considéré que d’avoir des relations sexuelles multiples, les filles ont la possibilité de revendiquer une position acceptable dans leur sexualité. La stratégie du port du préservatif, cependant, n’est absolument pas compatible avec les subjectivités dominantes féminines de la femme vierge/fidèle, ce qui veut dire qu’on n’attribue pas aux filles l’agency pour se protéger grâce aux préservatifs.

Bien que la sexualité prémaritale des femmes soit réduite au silence, les récits des filles ont apporté un éclairage sur la façon dont les filles vont au-delà de ces normes restrictives : elles ont des rapports sexuels, connaissent le (et répondent au) désir sexuel féminin, pratiquent d’autres types de sexualité que la pénétration vaginale, et ont de multiples relations. Ces subjectivités sous-dominantes féminines indiquent tout d’abord qu’il est difficile pour les filles de pratiquer l’abstinence ainsi que la fidélité. Autrement dit, les filles ne sont pas positionnées sans ambiguïtés pour s’abstenir ou être fidèles, et créer une marge de manœuvre pour être active sexuellement ou avoir de multiples partenaires. Les sexualités féminines sous-dominantes fournissent une ouverture aux filles pour qu’elles utilisent les préservatifs, dans le sens où elles sont positionnées comme agents sexuels actifs qui peuvent opter pour, proposer et négocier le port du préservatif. Néanmoins, pour les filles, de décider d’avoir des rapports et du désir sexuels sont des entreprises extrêmement précaires. Parce que dévier de l’image de la fille respectable a des répercussions rapides et foudroyantes, les filles ont une marge de manœuvre très limitée pour négocier la sexualité sans risque. En ce qui concerne les filles, j’ai alors conclu que dans le tableau général des subjectivités sexuelles féminines dominantes et sous-dominantes, il y a une disparité considérable entre l’agency requise pour les pratiques sexuelles sans risque et les constructions spécifiques de l’hétérosexualité prémaritale féminine à Dakar. L’agency limitée qui est imputée aux filles dakaroises en raison de cette disparité, est davantage limitée dans la dynamique des genres dans les relations, dans lesquelles les garçons prennent un rôle dominant. Même si les filles usent l’agency dans leurs relations intimes avec les garçons, il est difficile pour elles de contrôler la fidélité de leur petit ami, et de proposer et négocier le port des préservatifs.

Le Chapitre 6 a révélé que les garçons sont positionnés différemment en tant qu’agents de la sexualité sans risque. Leur désir et besoins sexuels ne sont pas réduits au silence, mais, au contraire, ils sont assumés et valorisés dans la masculinité hégémonique. Les éléments centraux de la puissance sexuelle et de la virilité font que la sexualité masculine est incompatible avec la stratégie d’abstinence. De plus, sa qualité de « toujours prêt » et « naturellement incontrôlable » fait que la sexualité masculine ne s’accorde pas bien avec la fidélité et le fait de se limiter à un partenaire unique. Par conséquent, la sexualité masculine hégémonique ne positionne pas les garçons pour qu’ils s’abstiennent, ni pour qu’ils restent fidèles. La stratégie du port du préservatif reste ainsi une alternative importante. La position dominante que les hommes prennent, ou qu’ils sont censés prendre, par rapport aux femmes et aux filles, conjugué au fait que les garçons et les hommes sont censés prendre l’initiative en matière sexuelle, fait que les préservatifs sont facilement
considérés comme l’affaire des hommes. Cependant, la masculinité hégémonique ne décrit pas complètement la vie et les expériences sexuelles des garçons, et ceux-ci ne sont pas aussi maîtres des choses qu’on ne le pense. Vu que le sexe est une « surprise » et que les garçons sont « provoqués » à avoir des rapports sexuels, les garçons ne se retrouvent dans une position d’agents de sexualité sans risque, et par conséquent ne sont souvent pas préparés quand ils ont un rapport sexuel. De plus, les préservatifs peuvent poser une menace à la masculinité, parce que pour des garçons sans expérience, le port du préservatif pourrait aller contre l’image de l’homme expérimenté sexuellement et au fait de la sexualité, qu’ils s’efforcent de créer.

J’ai ainsi conclu que pour les garçons, il y a une disparité, bien que moins prononcée que pour les filles, entre les subjectivités sexuelles masculines et l’agency requise pour la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. La reconnaissance de leur désir et activité sexuels fait que qu’on attribue aux garçons en principe plus d’agency pour se protéger. De plus, la seconde norme de la sexualité masculine, c’est à dire le sérieux, positionne d’une certaine façon les garçons en tant qu’agents de la sexualité sans risque, puisqu’on leur rappelle leur responsabilité de réfléchir aux conséquences de leurs actes (sexuels). L’association de la reconnaissance du désir sexuel masculin et de la norme de sérieux constitue un point de départ pour les garçons pour utiliser l’agency pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque, du moins si l’on compare aux filles. Cependant, l’exigence de sérieux positionne les garçons surtout pour s’abstenir, et on peut douter à quel point elle permet aux garçons de pratiquer la fidélité ou le port de préservatif.En définitive alors, les subjectivités sexuelles masculines et l’agency pour la sexualité sans risque ne vont pas ensemble.

Une des conclusions de cette thèse est donc que les identités sexuelles genrées spécifiques que les filles et garçons dakarois cherchent à établir, sont antithétiques à l’agency dont ils ont besoin pour pratiquer soit, l’abstinence, soit la fidélité, soit le port du préservatif. Cela veut dire qu’à travers la constitution de subjectivités sexuelles genrées, les questions de signification et interprétation jouent un rôle central dans la pratique ou non de la sexualité sans risque. La disparité entre leurs sexualités genres spécifiques et l’agency pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque peut expliquer pourquoi l’attitude plutôt positive mais abstraite des jeunes envers la protection contre les grossesses non désirées et les infections par le VIH/ITS ne se traduisent pas immanquablement à la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. Dans le Chapitre 6, j’ai aussi mis en lumière un autre facteur qui contribue à mieux comprendre pourquoi beaucoup de jeunes ont des rencontres sexuelles non protégées : le degré d’indécision dans la pratique de la sexualité sans risque et de la sexualité des jeunes.

Cette indécision se manifeste dans un contexte où à la fois filles et garçons doivent négocier des identités de genre sexuel opposées. Les filles négocient la tension entre la virginité asexuelle, et le désir et plaisir sexuel féminin (et d’autres intérêts tels que l’amour et l’aide matérielle), et les garçons trouvent un équilibre entre la virilité et le sérieux. Alors que ces subjectivités se contredisent souvent, les filles et les garçons cherchent à trouver un équilibre entre les deux et incarner des éléments des deux. Mais parce que incarner complètement un extrême exclut automatiquement l’autre, les jeunes passent souvent de l’un à l’autre pôle de leur sexualité genrée : les filles incarnent la virginité et cherchent en même temps à pouvoir exprimer leur désir sexuel. Dans leur activité sexuelle, elles doivent prendre garde à ne pas devenir trop « faciles », car cela est nuisible à leur réputation. Les garçons incarnent la virilité et la puissance sexuelle, et en même temps doivent rester sérieux et se contrôler, mais sans pour autant devenir trop responsable au point que leur identité masculine puisse être mise en doute. J’ai fait remarquer que les mouvements continus entre les sexualités genrées contradictoires et leurs négociations expliquent l’indécision dont les jeunes font preuve dans leurs pratiques de la sexualité sans risque. Les
jeunes, que ce soit les filles ou les garçons, ne choisissent pas souvent explicitement une des trois stratégies de sexualité sans risque, mais font plutôt un peu de tout. Ils respectent l’abstinence mais ne peuvent (souvent) pas être à la hauteur de cet idéal. Ils respectent la fidélité mais ne s’en tiennent pas à un seul partenaire. Ils voient les avantages des préservatifs mais ne les utilisent pas. Alors, malgré des attitudes fortement en faveur de la protection contre les grossesses non désirées et les infections par le VIH/ITS en général, et leurs évaluations abstraites positives de chacune des trois stratégies de sexualité sans risque, ils ont quand même des rapports non protégés dans la réalité. En plus de la manière limitée citée ci-dessus dans laquelle ils sont positionnés par ces sexualités genrées en tant qu’agents de sexualité sans risque, j’ai interprété le manque de pratiques de sexualité sans risque comme étant le résultat d’indécision qu’ils expriment dans le contexte de sexualités genrées extrêmement contradictoires.

L’enjeu est considérable pour les jeunes dans l’exécution et l’incarnation performatives de ces sexualités féminines et masculines. C’est à ce moment que l’impact de la compréhension théorique de la sexualité genrée performative se fait ressentir : c’est à travers l’incarnation de subjectivités dominantes et sous-dominantes que filles et garçons s’établissent comme sujets, et leurs relations comme respectables. Cela a un impact sur la sexualité sans risque dans le sens où proposer et discuter des préservatifs ainsi que discuter des contacts et du passé sexuels est malvenu et contreproductif, lorsque les jeunes incarnent les identités de filles vierges et de garçons virils dans leurs relations « amoureuses » intimes (supposées) exclusives. Cependant, ces mêmes identités et relations rendent la pratique de l’abstinence difficile, et donc exigent l’agency pour discuter du port du préservatif et/ou des partenaires sexuels.

Les jeunes cherchent non seulement à s’établir en tant que sujets sexuels et genrés, mais aussi en tant que personnes croyantes. En adhérant aux prescriptions et normes religieuses, les gens expriment le désir de vivre selon les directives d’Allah et de s’établir en tant que musulmans. Cela a un impact sur la sexualité sans risque dans le sens où le désir de vivre selon ces normes et règles est plus important que le comportement réel : les être humains sont souvent considérés comme imparfaits, et donc peuvent être pardonnés en cas de mauvaise conduite s’ils le demandent. Cette conception religieuse donne un poids particulier à la manifestation et l’incarnation de la sexualité dominante en termes d’abstinence et de sérieux. Lorsque les jeunes disent pratiquer l’abstinence, il est possible que cela décrive ou ne décrive pas leur véritable comportement, parce que c’est surtout l’expression de leur désir de vivre selon les idéaux d’Allah, et donc l’expression être un bon musulman. Cela a un impact sur la pratique de la sexualité sans risque dans le sens où s’efforcer de pratiquer l’abstinence rend difficile de parler de son vrai comportement, plutôt que de parler d’un comportement idéal. Cela fait de la réflexion et la discussion sur la sexualité et de la protection contre les risques de santé reproductive et sexuelle une question délicate et compliquée.

Un dernier point du Chapitre 6 a attiré l’attention sur les tensions de la société qui entourent la sexualité prémarielle, particulièrement les tensions qui surviennent entre la « tradition » et la « modernité » dans le processus contemporain du changement sociétal. L’adolescence, c’est à dire être jeune et dans une position intermédiaire, est une nouvelle étape dans la vie qui modifie la place des jeunes non mariés et la relation avec leurs parents. Les relations prémarielles, le choix individuel d’un partenaire (avant ou pour le mariage), l’importance grandissante de « l’amour » dans ces questions, et la sexualité prémarielle prend une place centrale dans le conflit entre les générations. L’abstinence est considérée comme faisant partie de la « tradition » alors que la sexualité et les relations prémarielles sont associées à la « modernité ». J’ai fait valoir que cela signifie que la
construction des identités sexuelles prémarielles est non seulement importante en elle-même mais qu'elle est aussi connotée par la modernité et la tradition. Cela donne une nouvelle dimension à cette construction, et en fait, donne plus de poids à l'enjeu : si les filles et garçons agissent dans les relations intimes et contacts sexuels et si ils en font partie indique non seulement leur identité générique et sexuelle, mais les positionne aussi dans une opposition tradition/modernité. Dans cette interaction et tension créée, les trois stratégies de l’abstinence, la fidélité et le port du préservatif ne sont plus des actes neutres, mais sont porteurs de connotations particulières. L’abstinence est alors perçue comme ne s’accordant pas avec les jeunes identités « modernes » des relations prémarielles. La fidélité s’accorde avec les notions « modernes » de l’amour romantique ainsi que des idéaux « traditionnels » sur la fidélité dans le mariage. Les préservatifs sont associés à la médecine « moderne » et au style de vie occidental, et sont considérés comme étant contraires à la « tradition ». Ce qui est important ce n’est pas vraiment si ces stratégies sont vraiment traditionnelles ou modernes, mais le fait qu’on les appelle de cette façon. La conséquence de cet étiquetage et de la contradiction qui est perçue et créée entre les pratiques modernes et traditionnelles rend plus difficile pour les jeunes de négocier et équilibrer les sexualités génériques contradictoires, et ainsi ajoute à leur indécision.

En conclusion, cette thèse a révélé les nombreuses manières dans lesquelles significations et interprétations ont un impact sur la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. Premièrement, j’ai fait remarquer que le fait que les stratégies ABC sont ouvertes à interprétation a une incidence sur leur pratique et leur sûreté. Deuxièmement, j’ai découvert que les hétérosexualités génériques prémarielles féminines et masculines telles qu’elles sont construites dans le contexte de Dakar, n’attribue que peu d’agency aux filles et garçons pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque. Troisièmement, les tensions que connaissent les filles et les garçons à Dakar en établissant leurs identités et façonnant leur comportement, génèrent un certain degré d’indécision dans le comportement des jeunes vis-à-vis de la sexualité sans risque. Ceci est aggravé dans un contexte où les stratégies ABC ainsi que les identités sexuelles génériques des filles et garçons sont considérées comme « modernes » et « traditionnelles ». Cet ensemble de significations et interprétations de la sexualité sans risque et prémarielle a été mentionné comme une explication plausible de la protection limitée utilisée par les jeunes dans leurs rencontres sexuelles.

La perspective de sexualités génériques et d’indécision que j’ai utilisée dans mon analyse permet de mieux comprendre la sexualité sans protection, mais peut aussi aider à suggérer où la promotion de la sexualité sans risque peut être faite. Dans mes recherches et mon analyse, une disparité criante entre les sexualités génériques et l’agency pour la sexualité sans risque s’est révélée. Il y a cependant des exemples où les deux éléments s’accordent. Les discours sur le sérieux et le contrôle attribuent de l’agency aux garçons et filles pour refléchir aux conséquences et prendre leurs responsabilités. La lutte pour un espace où les filles peuvent exprimer une sexualité active, pourrait en principe accorder aux filles de l’agency pour protéger leur santé reproductrice et sexuelle. De plus, alors que mes recherches suggèrent que les tensions entre les sexualités génériques contradictoires amondissent l’agency des jeunes pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque, on pourrait par principe dire le contraire. Dans le sens où les contradictions font parties de processus continus de changement social, les multiples subjectivités sexuelles féminines et masculines (et la dynamique qui se révèle entre eux) pourraient aussi créer des ouvertures et un marge de manœuvre où à la fois les filles et les garçons pourraient rester de façon créative les normes et les identités. Dans ces processus de transformation, les filles et les garçons pourraient en principe acquérir plus d’agency pour pratiquer l’abstinence, la fidélité et le port du préservatif. L’individualisation croissante qui caractérise les plus jeunes générations...
dans des villes comme Dakar peuvent renforcer ces développements. Tout cela veut dire que les processus d'interprétation et les processus pour donner du sens fournissent aussi des ouvertures pour la promotion de la sexualité sans risque.

Au delà du médical et de la personne : culture et négociation
Cette thèse a montré comment les significations et les interprétations ont un impact sur la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. La pratique limitée de la sexualité sans risque des jeunes non mariés à Dakar a été considérée dans son encrage dans les sexualités genrées performatives. L'intérêt de cette thèse se trouve dans le fait qu'elle révèle une autre facette de la sexualité sans risque et de la sexualité avec risque. Il a été clair que le niveau de connaissance des jeunes de la santé reproductrice et du SIDA et que leur accès aux services et aux préservatifs (des facteurs qui sont généralement mis en avant d'une perspective médicale behavioriste) n'explique pas tout de la sexualité sans protection. Même si je ne suis pas la première à le dire, le message reste parfaitement pertinent étant donné l'étroitesse d'esprit du discours hégémonique sur le SIDA. L'histoire des subjectivités sexuelles féminines et masculines telle qu'elle est racontée dans cette thèse met en évidence que les relations et la sexualité ont de multiples significations. Les filles et les garçons dakarois recherchent l'amour et/ou la compagnie, trouvent ou apportent de l'aide matérielle ou non matérielle, et cherchent des occasions d'avoir des rapports sexuels et d'explorer la sexualité. L'enjeu est considérable pour les jeunes dans leur vie sexuelle et intime : ils établissent leur identité en tant que jeunes croyants et en tant que sujets sexuels genrés et donne de l'importance à leur relation. C'est à travers ces processus performatifs de devenir des sujets dans l'ordre social que l'agency spécifique pour pratiquer les stratégies de l'ABC de la sexualité sans risque est attribuée ou retirée aux filles et aux garçons. L'ABC dans le titre de cette thèse (The ABC of unsafe sex, l'ABC de la sexualité sans protection) fait référence à ces processus discursifs de signification et de subjectivité comme explications de leur pratique limitée de la sexualité sans risque. Cela a montré que la pratique de la sexualité sans risque est présente dans les relations sexuelles et les contacts intimes de jeunes qui ne s'inquiètent pas que de la santé, même si filles et garçons sont conscients des risques de santé. Je ne peux tirer des conclusions, à savoir si ces facteurs socioculturels sont plus ou moins importants que les facteurs médicaux pour comprendre le degré de protection contre les grossesses non désirées et les infections par le ITS/VIH dans les rencontres sexuelles des jeunes, parce que cela ne fait pas partie du but de cette étude. Cependant, je peux conclure qu'il est nécessaire d'aller au delà de l'aspect médical pour comprendre la sexualité sans protection.

L'analyse de cet ancrage des pratiques de sexualité sans risque dans la construction des sexualités genrées est aussi cruciale pour comprendre comment les pratiques sexuelles sans risque ne sont pas seulement une affaire individuelle. La construction des identités sexuelles féminines et masculines des jeunes ne se produit pas toute seule, au contraire elle fait partie de la transformation et reproduction simultanées des tendances culturelles des subjectivités. L'analyse qualitative de cette thèse s'est avérée utile, parce qu'elle a montré que l'agency que les filles et les garçons ont (ou n'ont pas) pour pratiquer la sexualité sans risque résulte de la façon dont ils ont été positionnés par ce discours. Cela veut dire que le comportement sexuel sans risque, ou son contraire, n'est pas que le fait d'une prise de décision rationnelle individuelle. Les actes des personnes sont plutôt ancrés dans leur constitution en tant que sujets, c'est-à-dire dans la construction de leur identité : les manières particulières dans lesquelles les garçons et les filles dakarois s'établissent en tant que jeunes, en tant que croyants et en tant que sujets sexuels genrés sont déterminées en
grande partie par les subjectivités et les discours qui leur sont disponibles dans le contexte spécifique de Dakar. Le port du préservatif ou la pratique de l’abstinence ou de la fidélité ne sont alors pas simplement le résultat d’un processus de prise de décision rationnelle par les jeunes, mais surtout créés par les tendances culturelles que les jeunes reproduisent et transforment. En faisant remarquer cela, l’analyse développée dans cette thèse a permis de comprendre que la pratique de la sexualité sans risque va au-delà des comportements, croyances et attitudes individuelles qui sont l’idée centrale des études KAPB. Le titre de The ABC of unsafe sex le souligne en mettant en évidence l’importance du discours et du langage pour comprendre les pratiques sexuelles sans risque.

En bref, l’approche qualitative de cette thèse a révélé l’impact de processus ambigus et multiples d’interprétations. Elle a mis en évidence que des phénomènes tels que l’amour, le sexe, les échanges, l’abstinence, la fidélité et le port du préservatif ont de multiples significations qui varient selon le contexte dans lequel elles se produisent et les personnes qui sont impliquées. Cela veut dire que la sexualité sans risque est autant une affaire de négociation identité et de significations que de connaissances et accès aux services. Plusieurs points de négociations peuvent être identifiés. Chacune des stratégies ABC peut être abordée comme un point de négociation. Tout d’abord, les jeunes doivent équilibrer les exigences contradictoires de la virginité ou de sérieux avec la curiosité et le désir sexuel. Plus ils sont capables de négocier ces contradictions, plus ils pourront prendre des décisions explicites sur la façon de se protéger. Deuxièmement, la négociation fait partie de la stratégie de fidélité comme par exemple s’informer sur les partenaires sexuels d’un(e) petit(e) ami(e) ou discuter de son propre passé sexuel. Troisièmement, les difficultés que rencontrent les jeunes en ce qui concerne les associations négatives du port du préservatif les obligent à négocier les contradictions dans la sexualité, le genre et les tensions entre modernité et tradition. Il est absolument crucial de reconnaître que pour chacune des trois stratégies, les points de négociation sont ancrés et donc impliquent la négociation des identités sexuelles générées. Parce que ces négociations sur les significations du sexe et de la sexualité sans risque ont rapport à la résistance aux tendances culturelles et à leurs reproductions, elles concernent la société toute entière. Cela implique que la culture devienne moins une barrière à la promotion de la sexualité sans risque, mais plutôt une ressource sur laquelle s’appuyer. Sur la base de la reconnaissance de ce rôle crucial joué par la culture, c’est-à-dire les processus interprétation et de construction des subjectivités, j’en appelle à une reconceptualisation de la promotion de la sexualité sans risque en termes de négociation, dans la section suivante sur les implications pour des politiques.

3 Implications pour des politiques

La reconnaissance du comportement sexuel sans risque n’a pas qu’un aspect médical, cela veut dire que l’aspect médical ne peut être isolé des processus sociaux et culturels de signification et d’interprétation qui ont une incidence sur la sexualité. Au contraire, les interventions et politiques doivent traiter explicitement les identités sexuelles générées des jeunes et des multiples significations du sexe et des relations. De plus, ainsi, il est important de reconnaître que les pratiques sexuelles sans risque vont au-delà de la personne. Etant donné le rôle des multiples significations et de la disparité entre les sexualités générées et l’agency pour la sexualité sans risque, telles qu’il en est question dans cette thèse, la négociation est primordiale pour promouvoir les trois stratégies ABC. J’ai déjà fait remarquer que les subjectivités sexuelles générées peuvent fournir des points d’entrée créatifs pour la promotion de la sexualité sans risque et le changement de comportement qui est
souvent nécessaire dans les campagnes contre le VIH/SIDA et les grossesses non désirées des adolescents. Ces identités sexuelles et culturelles genrées peuvent être mobilisées afin de promouvoir le positionnement des jeunes comme agents de la sexualité sans risque.

Je vois deux points d’entrée pour incorporer les questions de négociation. Le premier est d’aider les jeunes à négocier leur identité, leurs relations et leurs choix. Les programmes d’aptitudes à la vie quotidienne (life skills) ont traité cela en tentant d’aider les jeunes à réfléchir à leurs vies, leur futur, leurs attentes des relations et de leurs partenaires, aux risques de santé reproductrice et à de possibles stratégies de prévention. Du point de vue de cette étude, ces programmes d’aptitudes à la vie quotidienne (life skills) devraient se concentrer sur le fait de donner aux jeunes les moyens de développer une stratégie décisive de protection. Trouver une adéquation entre les sexualités genrées et l’agency pour la sexualité sans risque est primordial afin de réussir cet objectif. En ce qui concerne l’ABC de la sexualité sans risque, cette thèse a indiqué plusieurs points de négociation avec lesquels les programmes d’aptitude à la vie quotidienne (life skills) pourraient aider les jeunes : à comment gérer le désir de s’abstenir et le désir être sexuellement actif, comment parler des contacts et passés sexuels lorsqu’on choisit la fidélité, comment négocier le port du préservatif avec un partenaire. Evidemment, pour que les jeunes en viennent à une stratégie décisive de sexualité sans risque, il faudrait porter plus son attention sur leurs négociations, ainsi qu’à leurs attentes en amour, échanges, sexualité et relations. Cela veut dire que la négociation implique aussi comment leur besoin de protection de leur santé doit ou peut être équilibré avec leurs besoins d’amour, de sexe, d’intimité ainsi que d’autres intérêts. Le caractère genré profond de la sexualité et des pratiques de la sexualité qui a été révélé par cette thèse souligne l’importance primordiale du genre pour les interventions d’aptitudes à la vie quotidienne (life skills).

Parce que la construction des sexualités genrées, et donc la pratique de la sexualité sans risque, n’est pas une affaire individuelle, le deuxième point entrée est de mettre les identités en pratique dans les campagnes publiques pour la population. On pourrait par exemple à une campagne publique avec le slogan « les vrais hommes savent utiliser un préservatif », ou « les filles qui demandent à leurs partenaires d’utiliser un préservatif méritent le respect ». Ces genres de messages sont susceptibles d’influencer les associations et interprétations que les jeunes, et les adultes, ont en rapport aux stratégies spécifiques ABC. Il faudrait aussi prendre en considération la façon dont la tendance à parler en termes idéaux et en directives peut être confronté au besoin de traiter le comportement réel. Les campagnes de prévention peuvent non seulement transmettre des informations, mais aussi s’impliquer activement dans la construction de la signification des rapports sexuels, de la sexualité, et des pratiques sexuelles sans risque. Ainsi, elles peuvent contribuer (et elles le font) au positionnement des filles et des garçons en tant qu’agents de la sexualité sans risque. Elles s’adressent non seulement aux jeunes eux-mêmes, mais aussi par exemple aux adultes, parents, représentants religieux et représentants de la communauté, et autorités qui prennent les décisions. Alors que ces types de campagnes ne peuvent rédefinir les mots et les significations elles-mêmes, elles peuvent au moins contribuer au débat et au dialogue sur les interprétations et ainsi ouvrir un espace de créativité et la transformation des significations.

Les deux points d’entrée sont des occasions d’engager des processus interprétations et ainsi, de s’appuyer sur la culture plutôt que d’aller contre elle. Il est crucial que les décideurs, les autorités qui prennent des décisions et le personnel des institutions qui s’occupent de la santé reproductrice des jeunes soient conscients de l’importance des questions de négociation et de signification. D’ailleurs, un engagement de la part de ces représentants et de ces décideurs est nécessaire afin ces interventions abordent ces ques-
tions. Les représentants religieux et communautaires doivent aussi s’impliquer. La sensibilisation et l’engagement exigent que les décideurs et représentants soient informés des perspectives et besoins des jeunes, ainsi que des facteurs qui font obstacle à leur pratique de la sexualité sans risque. Cette thèse espère y avoir contribué.

Je vais conclure avec une recommandation particulière sur le contexte sénégalais. Le chapitre d’introduction a examiné comment les faibles taux d’infection par le VIH ont fait gagner au Sénégal l’étiquette de « pays qui réussit » (success country) dans la lutte contre le SIDA. J’ai posé la question : les campagnes de prévention actuelles seront-elles suffisantes pour faire en sorte que les taux d’infection par le VIH restent bas. Les résultats de cette étude soulignent le caractère urgent de cette question. Dans la lignée d’autres études (Lagarde, Pison & Enel 1996 ; Pison, Lagarde & Enel 1996 ; Barnett & Whiteside 2002), cette thèse a indiqué que les rencontres sexuelles des jeunes ne sont pas toujours complètement protégées. Les données limitées de l’étude indiquent que les jeunes sont sexuellement actifs, mais que tous n’utilisent pas de contraceptifs ou de préservatifs. La conclusion de l’analyse qualitative de mes informations indique aussi que les sexualités genrées et les interprétations des stratégies ABC ne sont pas complètement favorables à la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. Pour le dire plus franchement, les comportements à risque font partie des relations intimes des jeunes et exposent les filles et les garçons à des grossesses non désirées et des infections par le VIH/ITS. Les données limitées de l’étude indiquent que les jeunes sont sexuellement actifs, mais que tous n’utilisent pas de contraceptifs ou de préservatifs. La conclusion de l’analyse qualitative de mes informations indique aussi que les sexualités genrées et les interprétations des stratégies ABC ne sont pas complètement favorables à la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. Pour le dire plus franchement, les comportements à risque font partie des relations intimes des jeunes et exposent les filles et les garçons à des grossesses non désirées et des infections par le VIH/ITS. Les données limitées de l’étude indiquent que les jeunes sont sexuellement actifs, mais que tous n’utilisent pas de contraceptifs ou de préservatifs. La conclusion de l’analyse qualitative de mes informations indique aussi que les sexualités genrées et les interprétations des stratégies ABC ne sont pas complètement favorables à la pratique de la sexualité sans risque. Pour le dire plus franchement, les comportements à risque font partie des relations intimes des jeunes et exposent les filles et les garçons à des grossesses non désirées et des infections par le VIH/ITS.

Si l’on observe les comportements sexuels sans risque des jeunes, il semble, soit qu’ils n’ont pas de rapports sexuels ou alors qu’ils ont des rapports non protégés. Ils s’abstiennent, ou essaient de le faire, du moins temporairement, mais lorsqu’ils ont des rapports sexuels, cela se passe souvent sans protection. D’un point de vue religieux/traditionnel, qui place une grande importance dans la virginité, il n’existe pas de distinction entre les rapports protégés et les rapports non protégés, puisque tous deux tombent dans la catégorie du comportement inacceptable pour jeunes non mariés. Du point de vue de la santé, cependant, il y a une différence entre les deux. Le défi pour les politiques et les interventions, à Dakar et ailleurs, est de voir comment filles et garçons, lorsqu’ils ne pratiquent pas l’abstinence, peuvent avoir des rapports sexuels protégés plutôt que des rapports non protégés. Mis à part l’amélioration de l’accès pour les jeunes aux informations sur la santé reproductive, la contraception et le VIH/SIDA, je voudrais suggérer que l’attention soit portée sur les processus de négociation.

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The ABC of unsafe sex takes a critical perspective on mainstream research and policies on AIDS in general, and young people’s sexual and reproductive health in particular. Central are the intimate lives and sexual relationships of Dakarais girls and boys. Contrary to dominant norms valuing virginity, young people in Dakar are sexually active prior to marriage. They are, however, not universally practising safe sex, as amongst others is signified by the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies. Unsafe sex also exposes them to HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. This thesis investigates how the safe sex practices, or lack thereof, of unmarried girls and boys are embedded in the construction of their gendered sexualities.

The largely qualitative analysis is based on participant observation, secondary statistical data, and most importantly ‘talking about sex’ with young people, aged 16 to 23, in focus group discussions and individual interviews. How do these Dakarais girls and boys of varying backgrounds look at intimate relationships, love and sex? What kind of relationships are they engaged in? What strategies do they adopt to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections?

Distancing herself from the behavioural paradigm and the notion of ‘African sexuality’, Anouka van Eerdewijk builds on the social constructionist and intersectional understanding of both sexuality and gender. By understanding gendered sexualities as performative, space is created to explore the agency of both girls and boys to practice abstinence, fidelity or condom use – the three strategies in the ABC approach to safe sex. The ABC of unsafe sex provides an alternative perspective on safe sex by showing how it is affected by processes of giving meaning and interpretation.

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