

# **‘My mother would worry every single time I went out...’ - Meanings of ethnicities and sexualised coercion.<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The article is a part of a larger project on the personal meanings of sexualised coercion initiated at Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault in Copenhagen. The project presents a situated approach. It analyses differences and similarities of issues and their meanings in the lives of young women dealing with the aftermaths of sexualised coercion. The aim is to illuminate the way that personal meanings of sexualised coercion connect with ethnic aspects of the conduct of women's lives.

The accounts of the informants indicated that aspects of their perspectives on sexualised coercion were developed in relation to participation in ethnic communities, and that some differences were related to tradition-orientation and/or individual-orientation. But a simple categorisation into ethnic groups is in danger of overemphasising differences, as well as of overlooking common connections to underlying social/societal meanings of sexualised coercion. Conducting life as a young woman in late modernity was a condition common to all informants.

In the aftermath of coercion, participants from ethnic minorities as well as from the ethnic majority all modified their perspectives on - and conduct of - life. Dealing with complexity, change and contradictions in such issues as from whom to get support, of responsibility and guilt, and of the sexualised aspects of the meanings of coercion were important common concerns<sup>2</sup>. Yet the analysis reveals that similarities, differences and changes in the meanings attributed to the experience of coercion were personally and socially situated. They were related to ethnicities and late modernity in personal ways and connected to intersecting aspects of their trajectories of participation.

**Keywords:** Sexualised coercion, ethnicity, young women, personal and social meanings.

## **Approaches to Questions of Ethnicities and Gender**

A report from Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault at the University Hospital of Copenhagen in Denmark shows that from 2001 to 2004 14% of the women who contacted the Centre were of ethnic minority backgrounds (Statusrapport 2000-20004, p. 10)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The article is an altered version of an earlier article published in Danish in *Nordisk Psykologi* 57(4), 2005.

<sup>2</sup> In the population in Greater Copenhagen, the main area serviced by the Centre, this group constitutes 11, 5 % of the population.

In this country two approaches dominate everyday professional discourses on ethnicity and gender. By the means of individualised terminologies one downplays meanings of ethnicity, investigates ‘commonalities of mankind’, and ignores gendered aspects of the conduct of life (cf. Ronkainen 2001). In this approach the focus is primarily on similarities in the individualised meanings of sexualised coercion across ethnicities. The second approach focuses on generalised meanings of ethnicity and disregards similarities of issues and their meanings across diverse ethnically conducted lives. It entails overemphasising seemingly ethnically related differences, often understanding them in determinist ways. In the field of sexualised coercion both approaches, as well as the dominant use of the diagnostic category of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (cf. Marecek 1999), represent a common underlying theoretical stream that de-subjectifies and de-situates the meanings of sexualised coercion. They place ethnicity and other social/societal as external to the meanings of coercion. They often imply that sexual coercion means much the same to most women (cf. Mardorossian 2002), and/or something essentially different depending on ethnicity. In such approaches the relations of situated ethnicities to the personal meanings of sexualised coercion remain unexplored and undifferentiated. In order to inform practices in the field, such dominant approaches must be addressed. Failure to do so may result in a disregard for the meanings of gender, through what has been termed the ‘gender-blind eye of multiculturalism’ (Mørck 2002).

It is a common and important observation, that ‘preserving tradition’ in the contexts of lives in migrant communities has often been effected through control of the lives of young women (cf. Espin 1996). But constructing the dualism of migrants versus ‘natives’, or overlooking such phenomena as cultural/religious ‘fundamentalisms’ of *all* societal agents may - as in Denmark – create stigmatising categorisations of the very diverse strategies of participation of whole communities and their members (Madsen 2001). It stands in the way of understanding the diversity and multi-faceted ethnically informed meanings of such gendered events as violence against women, and as being subjected to sexualised coercion. Similarly in a society which is otherwise assumed to be characterised by gender equality (cf. Rokainen 2001), focus on gender and ethnicity has often led to a one-sided designation of women from ethnic minorities as uniquely constrained (in gendered ways) by social aspects of their ethnically conducted lives. This is a focus/belief obviously belied by the fact, that both majority and minority men subject women from both ethnic majority and minorities to sexualised coercion. For example, the analysis below shows that the accounts of the young women with different ethnic backgrounds point to many similarities in the social and personal meanings of sexualised coercion. The title of this article, a remark concerning the consequences of telling her mother about having been subjected to sexualised coercion, made by Zarah (23), a young women from an ethnic minority group, might very well have been made by Catrine (18), a young woman from the majority. Even the role of religion in relation to the sexuality of women, often exclusively associated with ethnic minorities (el Saadawi 1980 in Espin 1996), was clearly active in the reflections of a priest described by Nina (23), a young majority woman in this study. Fundamentalistic ethnic/cultural/religious agendas are historical movements present in all ethnic groups, but often overlooked in relation to the majority (Yuval-Davis 1997).

In Denmark, discriminatory and excluding categorizations of ‘them’ and ‘us’ (cf. Baumann 1998) are currently much in evidence (as in the influential rhetoric of The

Danish Peoples Party in which religion plays a major part). In the insistence on what is commonly called 'Danish Values', 'religious' choices made by young migrant women are designated as unequivocal signs of their ethnic/cultural/religious oppression by 'their own' community. Distress related to sexualised coercion may also be interpreted as specific difficulties imposed by "their own" communities. On the other hand, the pressures of the 'pornofication' of public arenas on young women, or fashions like wearing mutilating footwear, are generally considered to be a part of gender equality through their framing as 'freedom of choice'. Furthermore, other national deficits in gender equality, such as all forms of violence against women, trafficking, unpaid housework, discrimination on the labour market, and unequal wages, coincide with growing gender equality and affect minorities *and* majorities (Mørk 2002).

Still, such dualistic views are reflected in many perspectives on ethnicity, as suggested also in professional discourses. Much research on ethnicity and gender has focused on what apparently constitutes specific meanings of participating in minority lives (cf. Huisman 1997, Espin 1996, Goodenow and Espin 1993). It raises our awareness of restrictions on lives of migrant women, co-determined by both 'heritage' and limitations imposed by discriminating societal mechanisms. However it may also involve turning a blind eye on issues common to the majority as well as to minorities.

Dualist approaches to - and categorising interpretations of - the connections between gender and ethnicity construct categorisations into majority versus minorities, western versus non-western, migrants versus non-migrants (Quin 2004). Without naïvely equating the situation of all women, newer research illustrates how both minority subjects and majority subjects may develop strategies of participation, and experience difficulties, otherwise understood as specifically 'ethnic' (c.f. Staunæss 2005). Ethnic discrimination does in some cases seem to provoke a retrenchment into 'tradition' especially imposed on, or chosen by, ethnic minority women. Meanwhile, in other cases, or concerning different kinds of issues, the answers to the often class related discrimination of ethnic minorities seem to further the processes of 'modernisation'. There is no clear-cut clash between the seemingly different strategies of participation. They are answers to contradictory societal conditions for participation in the same societies. In these, multiple personal and social meanings of gendered and ethnicised participation intersect. They are continuously contextualised and re-contextualised. They are answers in which what may be termed re-traditionalisation is intimately entwined with 'late modern' strategies. In fact both tendencies, and the multiple personal and situated forms they take, are intersecting strategies in conducting life in late modernity (Giddens 1991). All participation is disconnected from unequivocal traditions, and is open to negotiation, although possibilities and restrictions on these negotiations are gendered, ethnically informed, and situated. Thus a critical and locally situated research approach is needed in interpreting personal trajectories of participation across contexts (cf. Quin 2004).

Therefore this article represents a multi-ethnic approach to the meanings of sexualised coercion. It encompasses what in feminist debates has been proposed as 'universality in diversity' or 'transversalism'. It explores common issues without ignoring the different positions of those to whom the universal is suppose to apply (Yuval-Davis 1997 p. 125). It makes use of analytical concepts that cross ethnic categorisations without turning the blind eye neither on gender issues, nor on their connections with lives lived in different and

intersecting ethnic communities. It explores gendered ways of participation, without overlooking the issue which Quin proposes as ‘that culture is composed of critical elements along asymmetrical power relations’ (2004 p. 307). These critical elements and power relations are embedded in overarching historical structurations of societal processes, but have personal meanings. Therefore this article is not primarily structured along the lines of ethnic differences or diversity, but around personal perspectives on core issues imbedded in the empirical material of the study. Before a brief introduction to the approach used, I will shortly discuss another aspect of the issues involved in exploring personal meanings of sexualised coercion.

### **Categorisations of Personal Distress**

In Denmark mainstream psychological research, on the ‘effects’ of having been subjected to sexualised coercion, has largely been based on the diagnosis of ‘Post Traumatic Stress Disorder’. Foa & Rothbaum’s frequently quoted work (1998) is another and internationally well-known example of this approach. In the United States, Marecek (1999), in what she refers to as ‘trauma talk’, has criticised this same approach for running the risk of constructing women exclusively as objects of oppression, even in feminist clinical practice. She points to the irony that ‘trauma talk’, far from countering the medicalised idiom of conventional psychiatry, has merely replaced one form of this idiom with another (Marecek 1999 p.165).

A diagnostic categorisation, like any abstract categorisations of personal distress, is based on 3<sup>rd</sup> person constructions in professional practices (cf. Danziger 1990). It excludes relevant aspects of 1<sup>st</sup> person perspectives, and of the conduct of lives of categorised subjects. Categorisations, such as in PTSD, do not conceptualise the uniqueness, diversity and complexity of personal perspectives, nor do they grasp their relations to the socially mediated intentions and strategies of action of subjects (cf. Ekeland 1981, Caplan and Cosgrove 2004). The concept of PTSD, including an abstract generalising, e.g. de-situated, concept of trauma, does not then encompass the complex and interconnected dynamics in the development of personal meanings attributed to situated and diverse experiences of sexualised coercion (Pedersen 2004). Instead, in reducing the experience of concrete women to ‘common’ symptoms such as flashbacks, it basically constructs a mechanistic cause and effect understanding of their personal difficulties and sufferings (cf. Marecek 1999). Hence in this country and regardless of ethnicity, knowledge of the diversity of personal meanings of sexualised coercion is very limited. In spite of that, the participants of the present study described a multiplicity of meanings concerning sexualised coercion that intersected with ethnicities in diverging ways. These meanings emerged within *and* across ethnically informed and situated lives. Their diversity underlined the need for alternatives to the over-generalisations of de-contextualised ‘knowledge’ implicit in such constructs as PTSD.

In the discursive practices that constitute therapies, the meanings of what is reflected on is always co-constructed by all participants, clients as well as professionals. But in therapies, as in research interviews, the inherent power of definition of professional discourses is underscored when theories-in-use over-generalise and de-situate the meanings of social events. This occurs especially when the assumption is that psychological concepts are

unrelated to social practices, and as such exist in a space free from prejudice and discrimination. In such cases theory-related implications, such as in PTSD, are uncritically imposed on women's (co)constructions of their personal perspectives, and hold the risk of severely distorting their possibilities of voicing the richness of these perspectives, as well as ours of understanding them (cf. Maracek 1999). This may lead to studies that report issues more or less exclusively constructed through the generalised assumptions of the theoretical approach and its related research methods (Pedersen 2004). Therefore, as practitioners have reported, vital issues in the personal conduct of lives may not be addressed (Linder 2004). Distress related to racism and refugee-experiences may be bracketed out, though implicitly colouring the relations between the mental health professions and migrant women (Ali 2004).

That the psycho-social meanings of ethnicity and gender are sometimes considered irrelevant, or even non-existent, in professional discourses (cf. Ronkainen 2001, Ali 2004) may, in the case of migrant women, contribute to the well known mechanisms of 'victim blaming' related to events of sexualised coercion. In therapy and in research, this may contribute again to psychologising and pathologising the concerns of participants, and to construct them and stigmatise them as mere victims. Both in therapies and in research it will strengthen the tendency to overlook personal concerns vital to the conduct of life. It will restrict agency, and lead to failures in support regarding context related issues of personal struggles in re-developing agency. That is an especially precarious issue, since loss of agency, during the event of coercion and in its aftermaths, was *the* critical problem that the women in this study reported. As Nina put it: *'I think, to start with... you lose control during coercion. And then when you don't have control over what is going to happen, because other people are making the decisions on what is going to happen, then it feels like you don't have control over your own situation.'* Consequently this study indicated the importance of overcoming the vicious circle of de-subjectification inherent in de-situated categorisations of subjectivities and the meanings of ethnicities, gender and personal distress. For this reason, it takes its point of departure as what each woman considered to be *her personal concerns*, and relates them to situated societal conditions (cf. also Linder 2004).

## Another Approach

The theoretical perspective in this study is inspired by a 'theory of the subject' approach (Dreier 1994, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, Nissen 2005). It does not investigate standard subjects, or the predictability of their actions. Rather, the starting point for an analysis of psycho-social problems is the first person perspectives of concrete subjects. Moreover, socially mediated intentionality, personal reasons for ways of participating, and the related development of standpoints, are researched. Concepts such as trajectories of participation, and situated and positioned perspectives, anchor subjectivity in local versions of societal conditions. These are concepts with which analytical connections are made between the personal conduct of daily life and life conditions. Since meanings are investigated as personal, situated and in flux, essentialisation and individualisation of ethnicity and/or gender, as well as of the meanings of sexualised coercion, may be addressed. Thus, the personal meanings of sexualised coercion can be understood as personal, emotional and cognitive evaluations of the consequences of participating as gendered and ethnic subjects

in gendered and ethnicised local, historical contexts. One of the young majority women in the study described aspects of such *complex constellations of situated personal meanings*, in the aftermath of sexualised coercion, in the following way:

*Well there was one day where there was a party that crossed the line. One of the girls began stripping, and the eyes of men I saw, they were just so...I just thought, it must stop now, it must stop now. Because you just saw the bestial... ooh... she has to be brought down, right? Whether she wants to or not, because now she is so drunk and stoned that tomorrow she won't remember what happened. And they pawed her over. And when she said: "Stop it, just because I'm stripping you don't have to touch me, do you?" Then well "she has asked for it hasn't she, she took her things off didn't she"? It was that limit again, between well... when it is OK? Actually, when do we girls say no, right?*

### **Consultation-accounts, Interviews and Ethics**

Within the course of a year's work at the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault, 40 women were referred to me for psychological consultations. They were the participants of the complete study, of which this article is a part. Accounts from consultations, conversations with relatives, supplemented with interviews with 15 of the women, are the empirical foundations of the study. The participants were not selected through particular criteria. All had accepted participation in the research endeavours of Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault, and knew that research was ongoing. It was referred to in therapies, and became an explicit part of the exploration of personal meanings of sexualised coercion. Some women mentioned participation in research as giving sense to their own efforts at overcoming the limitations sexualised coercion imposed on their lives, as their efforts may be of use to other women. Yet, I did have to examine and address the potential ethical dilemmas in using the therapy setting as part of a research project (Pedersen 2004).

One of the advantages of using accounts from therapies in developing knowledge in this field is that they are more than just here-and-now accounts. They provide possibilities for acquiring insights into changing considerations of participants as related to their conduct of life over time, as well as of illuminating intention and process related aspects of the development of personal meanings (cf. Haavind 1992, Pedersen 2004). One practical/ethical limitation in the use of such accounts is that in therapy, participants primarily need to reflect on their current personal concerns (Dreier 2000). For this reason, reflections in therapy must take their starting point in - and be guided by - these concerns. Thus in this study some issues, of importance for the development of an analysis of the meanings of sexualised coercion, were not accounted for through the reflections made in consultations. One example was that most of the women did not wish to talk in detail about the events of sexualised coercion<sup>4</sup>. Their focus was on how to deal with the aftermaths, and they only included the events in consultations when they were of immediate relevance to the topics they chose to reflect on. Some women expressed relief

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<sup>4</sup> They had already described the event at the gynaecological/forensic examination, which is part of the procedure at the Centre. They also knew that I had access to notes made from these descriptions.

at not having to describe the events of coercion in detail. On finishing an interview several months after terminating therapy, the woman cited above said:

*I must say, I have been very happy... that it (therapy) hasn't been picking every little detail apart (of the event of coercion), and analysed it, pulled it apart, and put it in the right boxes and frames and all that, but that we have (talked about) well how are you now? What has happened since you were here last time...because I am not the type that wants to pull things apart down to the last detail.*

She gives voice to the imperative importance of giving agency in support-initiatives. But during consultations as well as in interviews, this meant that how closely 'symptoms', e.g. the ways the young women conducted their lives in relation to the personal meanings of the concrete character of the event, was not always clearly revealed. Although I had access to descriptions made during forensic examinations, this issue was not sufficiently explored by the study. In consultations the changing meanings of gender in the aftermaths of subjection to coercion were not robustly examined either. Some women voiced them directly, others indirectly, while others again hardly mentioned them. Other concerns seemed of greater personal significance in the conduct of their lives. Therefore this was a subject discussed in interviews. In an interview, months after terminating therapy, a woman explained:

*My attitude towards gender has changed a lot. There was a period, while I was talking to you, where I really thought about it a lot... about the demeaning of women in general in society and advertising, and yes, I saw women being demeaned in some way or other all over the place, or described in ways in which they really aren't, some kind of lack of equality between men and women. And I was very attentive to that, at that time. Of course, I also had a period, where I just felt that all men are really stupid, and there is no helping them. But I still, how should I say, I am still probably more feminist than I was before.*

As 1<sup>st</sup> person perspectives and personal concerns were at the centre of both research and consultations, and since the aims of both was to explore these perspectives, there was no constitutive contradiction between research interests and the conduct of consultations. But since, as mentioned above, the main ethical concern was that research interests must never interfere with the concerns expressed by the women, topics important to a theoretical study were not explored. Many issues were simply not addressed in consultations because the women chose to reflect on them with lovers, friends, family, colleagues and other relations. Also their prioritised issues were diverse and in change in their personal lives. For some of the women, stigmatisation related to having been subjected to sexualised coercion was the main issue; for others specific 'symptoms' such as avoiding situations reminiscent of the events, or creating distress, were core concerns; and for others again the relationship with their lover, or the loss of a job, was in focus (Pedersen 2004). Thus, issues reflected on, and the respective amount of consultations in which each woman participated, could vary greatly. Furthermore, being embedded in the ensuing different and changing practices of consultations, concrete ethical questions could not be solved once and for all. Ethical issues were continuously explored and taken into account in practice.

Consequently, and no matter whether they were expected ‘effects’ of sexualised coercion or not, in both consultations and interviews, attention was paid to supporting clients’/informants’ possibilities of reflecting on the issues which they themselves found relevant. Not taping consultations was also a choice made out of ethical considerations. Taping them would have been experienced as loss of agency and control by most of the women. Instead reports on the content of accounts in consultations were written down immediately after sessions. This is why, below, some parts of the analysis are based on descriptions of what the young women have said and done, instead of on direct quotations. It is also why issues presented in many consultations and interviews, but not given voice in the interviews of the women primarily represented in this article, are illustrated through quotations from other women participating in the complete study. Here they serve to highlight common issues also addressed by the women represented in the article.

### Choosing Accounts

As argued above, focusing exclusively on ethnic minorities implies risks of interpreting the meanings of diverse phenomena as particular expressions of ‘their’ ethnicity. Further, in the analysis it might marginalise complex situated constellations of meanings related to intersecting societal conditions for participation. Two remarks by informants also stand in direct contrast to such an approach. About the social and personal meanings of sexualised coercion Zarah, from an ethnic minority group, said: ‘*It depends on how the families think, how far they have got with their lives....*’. As we shall see, a majority woman might well have voiced her reflections. Furthermore 22 year old Jasmin answered:

*It depends on what family you come from, just because it’s a foreign family, it’s not just one way...And for example it’s different from country (of origin) to country. There are some Turks, that are more open also than people from Somalia, and then there are the Iranians, they are completely different from the Moroccans. Actually it is so different, even though they all have the same religion, but for example they have different traditions.’*

For these reasons, and in order to enrich the analysis with possible contrasts and similarities, 12 central accounts including young women from the ethnic majority as well as from ethnic minorities were chosen.

Jasmin, Leyla, Zarah, and Madiha<sup>5</sup> belonged to ethnic minorities from the Middle East and Jessica to a Far Eastern minority. They (except Madiha) were the only young minority women participating in this study. Anna, Jette, Nina, Catrine, Sofie, Jennifer and Tanja belonged to the ethnic majority. The complete study indicates that there may be significant differences in the meanings of sexualised coercion for respectively younger and older women. As the vast majority of those who contact Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault are between 15 and 25 (Statusrapport 2000-2004)<sup>6</sup> the article focuses on youth. The known group of women who have been subjected to sexualised coercion is very small.

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<sup>5</sup> The interview with Madiha was made by Karin Sten Madsen and is published in *Årsrapport 2001*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> The youngest was 17 and the oldest 25 years of age.

Therefore ensuring anonymity is difficult and crucial. Though it severely limits analytical possibilities, the descriptions of the young women and their lives are minimised in the following.

Consultation accounts and interviews represent a broad spectrum of perspectives on different problems and different instances of sexualised coercion and its aftermaths. Accounts from young majority women are chosen according to a case method (Flyvbjerg 2001). In order to construct the foundation for a versatile, nuanced and knowledge generating analysis, the goal in selection was to create as rich a material as possible. If there are only one or few participant accounts to work with, a strategic selection may maximise the access to relevant information, and strengthen the analysis. The accounts are therefore chosen on the basis of their informative value. They are each and together the most saturated in relation to the subject of the article. They also represent a maximum of variations. Extreme/deviant or critical cases are criteria that enable critical questioning of frequently occurring aspects of accounts. The accounts are additionally chosen in consideration of similarities *and* diversities in perspectives and life conditions. Where names of informants are not indicated, the quotes are chosen from the main study in order to boost the discussions.

## Analytical Approach

In this context, the concept of ‘personal perspective’ is an analytical concept. It is not exclusively used to refer to what the participants say or think. It equally refers to connections between their verbalised perspectives and aspects of their daily lives. Likewise the concept of ‘meaning’ is used in a double sense. Firstly, as concrete and ongoing social consequences of the event of sexualised coercion, which intersect with different aspects of the contexts in which the women conduct their lives, and in which personal meanings are contextualised and re-contextualised. Such social processes are understood as a reality in and through which lives are conducted, but a reality that can only be conceptualised through situated and thus partial perspectives. Secondly, but indivisible from the first, the concept of meaning is also used for personal ascriptions of meanings in the trajectories of lives across social contexts. Taking point of departure in the perspectives of the participants of the study, means connecting their accounts to the situated societal meanings of sexualised coercion in their particular lives, and understanding perspectives as socially mediated.

As indicated above emphasis of the analysis is not only on aspects of meanings that distinguish ethnic minorities from the majority. However, even though such a categorisation is problematic, as variations in practices do not necessarily ‘run along ethnic boundaries’ (Eriksen 2001), a distinction is made between *ethnic minorities* and *ethnic majority* as an aspect of participation across contexts of action. To minimise the analytical problems involved, not only differences and similarities between - but also within and across - majority and minority lives are analysed.

Apart from specific issues of ethnicities, the *core issues* structuring the analysis below originate from an analysis of the complete empirical material of the project. They were identified through an analysis of meanings understood in the double sense described

above. They were constructed through exploring and re-exploring accounts, comparing them with each other, and comparing designated core issues, and changes in such issues, within each personal account. In attempts at deconstructing and reconstructing them into new insights, these issues were checked against my personal/theoretical assumptions, assumptions of other staff-members at the Centre, and against common research assumptions in the field. Most informants have reflected on them, in consultations as well as in interviews, in more or less explicit ways, depending on the meanings they had in the complex constellations of their personal concerns. As the analysis will show, they are *common issues with diverse personal meanings*, reflected on and dealt with in diverse ways, and more or less central to each participant's life. They are primarily related to life after sexualised coercion, in which they are given different meanings (cf. also Brison 2002). Since coercion is given personal meanings related to discourses in situated historical practices, and since the meanings of gendered ethnicities are rooted in these practices, the accounts of the young women are analysed as trajectories of participation in late modernity. Consequently they have been explored in their intersection with, and modification of, situated personal and common historical issues related to the meanings of subjection to sexualised coercion.

### **Issues of (In)Dependence**

As a condition of life, all the young women in the study had to deal with the processes of individualisation that are radicalised in late modernity. Not only were they developing strategies of action through which they sought to limit and change their participation in, and dependence on, parents and their contexts of action. The necessity of being able to deal with changes, dilemmas and contradiction in their participation, in diverse and at times contradictory contexts, in an individualised manner is generally intensified in late modernity (cf. Giddens 1991). That being so, many of the informants' reflections concerned contradictions in receiving help and support from their parents, and in maintaining or developing already acquired aspects of self-determination.

Sofie, aged 22, had recently moved to Copenhagen. She wanted to distance herself from her parents. After the experience of sexualised coercion she said; *'I feel as if I have been put in a play pen. They constantly want to know where I am'*. Her parents tried to keep track of her whereabouts through frequent calls on her cell phone. In the aftermaths of coercion she was very upset, but did not want her parents to know. She was afraid they would intensify what she saw as their interference in her life.

Jasmin had moved away from home. As she feared her violent perpetrator, she was afraid to live alone. She had not told her parents of the experience of coercion, but they came to know about the event, and consequently pressured her to move back home. But to avoid what she considered to be their attempts at controlling her life, she instead moved in with a female friend, although this friend lived in a single room.

Catrine, 18, had not yet moved away from her parents' home. After the event of coercion, and in spite of her parents' wishes, she spent most of her time at her boyfriends' home. She said;

*My mum always asks me how I am. It is almost too much... My dad doesn't ask about anything. He just looks worried... I don't want to talk to him about it either'.*

Instead she primarily turned to her peers for support.

In the aftermath of sexualised coercion development of self-determination and agency may become a project characterised by ambivalences. The young women may still be emotionally and practically dependent on their parents, especially if they still live at home. Dependency may increase if they experience anxiety and feel at risk of further coercion. Most had limited experience of dealing with crisis-like situations without the support of their parents. But to involve their parents, in what they referred to as their *private* lives, was often perceived as limiting self-determination for both minority and majority women. Even when they had moved out of their parents' homes, the young women's relationships with them were complicated, for instance in situations when they felt obliged to move back home, partially because they experienced their parents' wish to protect them as deprivation of agency, some of the young women, from the majority as well as from the minority, found this decision to be extremely controversial. Nina, who had been living on her own, and who for a short while moved back with her parents, said:

*It feels as if you aren't in control of your own situation, and at the same time... For example, my parents, they wanted to help. It was nice when they were at home, but they weren't supposed to talk too much about it, and they weren't supposed to sit in the same room as me, and not to look too much at me. But I did not want them to be indifferent either. Well, it's like both and all the time, right?*

As she described, loss of agency is inherent in the experience of sexual coercion itself. For some of the women, moving back home seemed to be a step in the wrong direction, as one more experience of subjection. Nina's reflections resemble Jasmin's, who for such reasons absolutely refused to move back with her parents.

### **Issues of Confidence(s)**

Conditions for - and contradictions between - individualisation and family community, are aspects of further difficulties actualised by sexualised coercion, and mentioned by the participants. Because of children's dependence on their parents, relationships between children and parents constitute exceptions to a late modern tendency towards 'pure relationships' (Giddens 1991). But the relations of children to their parents are gradually developed into personal arrangements that resemble pure relationships, in which not everything is potentially shared. This became evident in the relationships between some of the young women and their parents. In the ethnic Danish families, parents sense of confidence in their daughters was, up until the event of sexualised coercion, mainly established through parents' knowledge of boyfriends, and through the young women discussing their daily lives and many of life's diverse problems with them. Keeping up a sense of community thus appeared to be a question of sharing confidences. It was a form of confidence(s) and community that the parents expected and took for granted, but which they now feared was threatened. When Nina and Catrine were subjected to sexualised

coercion their parents were particularly concerned about their daughters not wanting to talk to them about it. Catrine said:

*My mother constantly asks me how I am. It's almost too much. But I want to talk to her when I am afraid. My father doesn't ask me anything. He just looks very worried. I don't feel like talking about it with him either... I think my mother tells him things.*

Several parents contacted me and asked what they could do to preserve or re-establish the former confidential communication.

Keeping up trust through conversations about what had happened was occasionally experienced as an indicator of the quality of familial community. Tanja, 17, had a mother who thought that she must be incompetent as a mother since her daughter waited a fortnight to tell her about the event. Anna, 19, who as a consequence of the event of coercion had to have an abortion, only told her mother about it after the abortion had been performed. She said:

*When she (her mother) has phoned, and I have said that I didn't feel like talking, then she has respected it, and then she has asked if she should call back in an hour or so. And I have said yes, because I don't know how I feel in an hour. Just the fact that she has respected my boundaries, and how much I want her involved in it... in that way it has been really, really important.*

But, when confidences in relation to coercion were limited, it occasionally became a matter of conflict between parents and daughters.

This dynamic was not in the same way constitutive of relationships between the young minority women and their parents. Community/family membership was maintained through (re)traditionalisation, common housing arrangements and the allocation of duties. 'You have rights, we have duties' a woman with ethnic minority background participating in a related study explained (Sten Madsen & Uddin 2003). Zarah, who had not wanted her parents to know about her experience, explained:

*When you live with your parents, then you know how they think. If they don't tell you to come home, and tell it when something has happened, then you don't do it'.*

Several of the young minority women explained, that they did not believe that their parents wanted to be told about experiences of sexualised coercion. Zarah adds: '*It would hurt them awfully, it would disappoint them awfully, and it would worry them awfully*'. Equally, before experiencing coercion, these young women distinguished more strictly than the young majority women between what to tell parents, and what not to tell.

But, as differences in standpoints are not exclusively found along abstract lines of ethnicity, the wishes of parents to discuss problems with their children, and the refusal of daughters to tell their parents about potentially worrying occurrences, should not just be reduced to a question ethnic 'heritage'. They are also aspects of variable situated standpoints concerning issues of the importance of talking about problems related to

personal trajectories of participation in concrete contexts. In a group interview Jasmin's sister Leyla (25) says:

*The reason I don't ask her about it is because I don't want to lead her to the same topic all the time.*

Jasmin comments:

*If you have experienced something terrible, then it may also be good to talk about it. But like you say, sometimes, well OK, you really have had enough talking about it. I think you should just talk about it until you reach the point where you yourself (think it is enough).*

The young women in the project evaluated the personal importance of talking about experiences of coercion in dissimilar ways, that also crossed ethnic 'boundaries'.

### **Gendered (Re-)Traditionalisation**

While all issues discussed in this article are gendered, some are more dominantly so than others and specifically connected to (re)traditionalisation. The meanings of traditions and migration may influence the lives for several generations. Issues regarding gender and the regulation of daughters' participation may have important and continuous meanings (Goodenow & Espin 1993). In (re-)traditionalisations of the conduct of lives of migrant families, young women are often expected to adhere to prescribed forms of action (cf. Mørck 2001). They may be transmitted through words as well as through silences. They may include relationships between men and women, sexual behaviour, pregnancies, and concern sexualised coercion (Espin 1996 p. 91).

Zarah, Leyla and Jasmin had grown up with traditionalised and communal family oriented practices. They were all educated and employed, none of them were married, and none of them lived with their parents. All three had had boyfriends. As such, they did not resemble the Danish stereotypes of women from ethnic Muslim minorities. Still Zarah, Leyla and Jasmin said that their parents expected them to protect their virginity until marriage. But as protecting virginity is a not dominant aspect of the conduct of lives of young women in Danish society, the participation of these young women in the manifold and rapid societal changes meant that they had the opportunity – and were obliged - to conduct their lives in new and changeable ways. They chose to have sexual relationships, but pretended sexual abstinence. In their considerations of how to keep the experiences of sexualised coercion secret they drew upon such experiences with secretive participation.

Distinctions between the meanings of self-initiated sexual relationships and sexualised coercion were not clear in their families. Both sexualised coercion and sexual relationships had implications for whether the young women were perceived as virgins. Jasmin said:

*There it is again that thing, that you (the majority women) don't have to be a virgin when you get married. But we do. If I was Danish, and had Danish parents,*

*of course I would tell them (about being subjected to coercion), but not when my parents are foreigners.*

(Re-)Traditionalisation, related to issues of sexuality and virginity, was presented by all minority informants as occasions for possible conflicts. Zarah said:

*If they (her parents) said that there was nothing wrong with it, that it wasn't a problem with virginity, then of course you would tell them quietly and easily.*

Despite their very different relations to their families both Zarah and Madiha referred to the soiling of family honour, should their experiences become public. Madiha explained:

*It is also hard for the family to go through all that: Muslims have a saying: Keep the face of your father clean, don't do anything stupid. Do something your father can be proud of, or the family can be proud of.*

In some of the (re)traditionalising families, the father is the leading figure in relation to sanctioning the daughter's life (cf. Mørck 2002), and as Madiha said: '*The hardest thing was to think about telling my father. Fathers react very, very strongly*'. In host countries such as Denmark, disempowerment through a racist delegations of positions is often experienced by men as a process of emasculation. This encourages a (re)construction of - and retrenchment in - traditionalised meanings of gender such as those Madiha describes (Yuval-Davies 1997 p. 67). Thus positions and actions of families and fathers cannot only be understood as aspects of ethnicities, religions or traditions. They must be analysed as ways of dealing with aspects of the character of overarching social relations in the nation in which they are unfolding.

But since both self-initiated sexuality and coercion are associated with (re)traditionalised constraints in the rights of the young women to decide about their bodies, some of the young women from ethnic minorities experienced particular forms of ambivalence in their attempts at developing agency. Zarah said:

*I live alone. Of course it wasn't (OK) in the start. But I fought until the end, so now I have moved.*

She made this remark, while we were talking about whether to tell, or not tell, parents of incidents of coercion, and as an argument against telling them. Concerning her own situation, Jasmin reflected:

*Yes, well it is not my responsibility (that I was raped). But when it is someone that I have a relationship with, then maybe I think the thought that: Oh no, could it be my own fault (that I was raped)?*

The ambivalences of the young women were related to (re)traditionalised restrains, yet mediated through their participation in - and across - the diverse ethnic contexts of majority and minorities, as in Jasmin's conflicting standpoints on being at fault.

## Disclosure and Conflicts

In the aftermaths of coercion women are often especially sensitive to experienced constraints and conflicts. Not being able to talk about sexualised coercion also limits possibilities of dealing with some of the many related problems that may arise in this aftermath (Sidenius & Pedersen 2004). If relevant others do not know about the event, and conflicts arise, they may be intensified and their resolution be complicated.

The young women from ethnic minorities face problems related to contradictions in and between the varieties of ethnic contexts they participate in. They keep secrets, share confidences, and navigate with sometimes very different ways of participation in ethnic and generational contexts. When she was 17, Zarah was subjected to sexualised coercion. She chose only to talk with her physician:

*Well, my physician was afraid that I had become pregnant. So I asked him, if I was pregnant how could I get an abortion? But no matter what, he would have to have my parents' signature.*

In the interview she explained that she was lucky not to be pregnant, as she did not want her parents to know what had happened.

The rigidity of standpoints towards sexuality and upbringing that the young women often ascribed to their parents and to 'their' ethnic communities, and the conflicts they feared, may have made it especially difficult to seek support in their families. Madiha said:

*I knew my father would react very harshly. The day it happened I thought: I close my eyes and go on without telling them. I thought I needed help. But I didn't tell anyone, because I thought if I tell one, it will get to the other, and so on, and so on. That's the way it is with foreign families.*

Such ascriptions of standpoints correspond and are related to powerful 'majority' discourses about minorities, as also suggested by Madiha's use of the word 'foreign', and may be maintained by such discourses. But they may not always correspond to what parents would actually do, if they learned about the event (cf. Årsrapport 2001). Jasmin had been subjected to coercion several times, and had contacted the Centre previously. As she was afraid that her parents and others in her ethnic minority network would find out about what she had been subjected to, it was only the second time, and after pressure from friends, that she reported the extremely violent perpetrator to the police. She said:

*After a couple of weeks they (the police officers) turned up and showed my parents the transcripts of my interrogation, and then they got to know everything. And I had to say that it was not true. It was just something that hadn't happened'.*

But Jasmin's parents did know and her mother, with the knowledge of her father, continued to support her financially and otherwise.

Women from minority backgrounds are slightly overrepresented at the Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault where anonymity is guaranteed. Fear of potential conflicts and social

exclusion may make these minority women turn for help to places like this. However, overrepresentation may also be due to the fact that many who contact the Centre are young women, who in different ways transgress traditionalised demands on their lives. They do not wear tradition-oriented clothing, they go out at night with friends, and so forth. Madiha said:

*... then of course it becomes the woman's own fault... it is she who has been advertising her body down town. It is she who has been posing in mini skirt, attracting men. When a woman goes her own way, it will always be her fault (Årsrapport 2001).*

They may even be regarded as 'ready game' by men in their communities (cf. Bellil 2002). But as in Jasmin's case, the ascribed standpoints may also prevent the women from reporting sexualised coercion to the police or, if they are under age like in Zarah's case, from getting professional help in public institutions. She also said

*I think there are many who don't report it, because then the family finds out, and then police comes, and then it is discovered.*

Zarah, Jasmin, Leyla and Madiha's reasons for keeping their secrets are of a more clearly common character than those of the majority women. Jessica's (18) - who had an ethnic Danish father and ditto sister-in-law - navigation in relation to her parents is interesting in this context. Her experience was not kept a secret. But she did not turn to her mother, who came from a Far Eastern country and who was a Catholic, for support. She explained that she did not want to talk to her mother about how she felt. In an ethnic majority-oriented perspective, she considered her to be 'old fashioned'. Instead she drew on the perspectives and support of her stepfather and sister-in-law. Like Jasmin she could have said about her mother: *'If my parents were Danish, of course I would tell them'*. Jasmin also talked of her parents as 'old fashioned'.

Echoing the other ethnic minority women Jessica spoke in discourses that reflected dominant discriminatory and degrading discourses of 'them' and 'us'. In these discourses ethnic majority women are seen as 'free' and having 'rights', and ethnic minorities as 'constrained' and having 'duties'. In her perspective, as in that of Jasmin, constraints in choices of forms of participation such as confiding in - and negotiating with - families are aspects of ethnicity. But as mentioned, Tanja waited a fortnight before she told her mother about her experience, and Anna waited till she had had an abortion. But although, in the cases of both majority and minority women, the meanings of ethnicity and sexualised coercion must be understood as personal and situated (Baumann 1998), the young majority women also had something in common. Like Zarah, Leyla, Jasmin and Jessica they did not want their parents to worry, to restrict them in their agency, or that knowledge of their conduct of lives should occasion conflicts. But unlike them, as it was inconsistent with their relationship to their parents, keeping serious secrets worried them, and was continuously reflected upon.

All the young women kept secrets for reasons similar to some of those voiced by Zarah: *'I probably wouldn't not tell them (her parents) so that they wouldn't worry'*. Yet again and again the minority women compared their situation to that of majority women, generalised

and idealised it, and found their own lacking. Dominant discourses of ethnicity, that are integrated aspects of the symbolic violence to which women in general may be subjected, radicalised conflicts in their self-images and in their conduct of life in the aftermath of sexualised coercion. As Espin comments, not all pressures on migrant women's lives come directly from their ethnic communities (1996 p.91). Discriminatory and degrading practices and discourses that complicate their lives are also mediated directly and indirectly through their participation in majority-dominated contexts.

Regardless of ethnic backgrounds all the young women in the study experienced problems, conflicts and marginalisation in the aftermath of sexualised coercion. However, this study indicates that talking about feelings and thoughts related to coercion, and getting support, was especially difficult for those who, regardless of ethnicity, already prior to coercion experienced many difficulties in the conduct of their lives. These young women were particularly disoriented and uncertain about how to make sense of their experience, and how to act in relation to the meanings ascribed to it. As new complex and contradictory situations contributed to uncertainties, they attempted to deal with them by maintaining the status quo, and/or making drastic changes in their lives. In these attempts they sometimes developed situation-specific, as well as contradictory, strategies of action that complicated the development of more personally meaningful and coherently goal-oriented strategies. Due to this, they often had difficulties in participating in classes, groups of friends, and in other activities that would have contributed to the restoration of their sense of agency.

## Meanings of Sexuality

In Scandinavia, sexuality is an integrated part of public discourses, and serial monogamy is on the agenda. Most young people from the ethnic majority are sexually experienced. Sex is not associated with shame, and related themes can be talked about with friends. One woman described getting help from her friends in the aftermaths of coercion:

*Yes, the girls! We have gathered many times, sat down, cooked a good dinner, and then things were talked about.*

To young women, serial monogamy means openly exploring sexual relations, and is regulated individually by the participants of relationships (Byriel 2002, cf. Giddens 1995). Also, like most of the other young women in the study, Jette (23) had had several sexual relationships. When she was subjected to sexualised coercion, she explained that the sexual aspect of coercion was not the most difficult part for her. She, and a few others, compared it to waking up next to a man in the morning after a night on the town, and thinking: *'What am I doing here??'* She did not feel that it brought her reputation into question, nor her experience of her own sexuality. Nor did she, as it is often assumed, have problems with her sexuality in the aftermaths of the events. But she was extremely angry about what had happened, and felt it as an affront to her as a self-determining subject.

Even though she had had many problems related to coercion, another young woman pointed out:

*He had nothing to do with my relationship to sexuality, sensuality and that kind of thing. He was not a part of my sex life as such. So I don't think my relationship to sex has changed much.*

The young women and their parents made very clear distinctions between sexualised coercion and self initiated sex. Yet another young woman reflected:

*When you use the word sex you immediately think of something nice. Something two people have together. So when you use the word sex in association the concept of rape, then it doesn't seem quite right, right?*

Simultaneously, sexuality, by some of the women in the study, was regarded as private. Nina, who struggled with the sexualised aspect of coercion, presented an example of the latter: *'It was difficult to tell my mum and dad... it is also embarrassing... We never talked about sexuality in the family'*. To Nina, problems of talking about sexualised coercion were also related to worrying that her interlocutors, e.g. her father, may associate it with sexuality. As such it would have been a private matter that she would not have liked to discuss. On the other hand, Nina, like the others, said that she did not associate the event with her own sexuality, and that she had told a friend about the details of the event of coercion.

These young women did not reflect on their perspectives as specifically ethnic, nor were they asked about this. As part of the majority, they and I took their perspectives more or less for granted. But obviously, even disregarding this inconsistency in the study, and in spite of similarities with the problems of the minority women, their concerns are as ethnically informed as those of Jamin, Leyla, Zarah and Jessica.

### **Issues of Guilt, Responsibility and Agency**

Feelings of guilt and shame have often been mentioned in connection with sexualised coercion, but not clearly connected to ethnicity. As in Madiha's words above, some of the young ethnic minority women reported that they were considered guilty by their families and acquaintances, presumably because they had challenged gendered and traditionalised forms of conducting life. Madiha said:

*When you are raised not to be out late at night or go clubbing... not to do this and not to do that, then of course it is the woman's fault.*

Jasmin explained how young men and adults, in the aftermath of coercion, addressed her of their own accord. They instructed her to behave in accordance with 'tradition' and some suggested that she should marry the perpetrator. It appeared to her as if she could reduce her 'guilt' by making the perpetrator her husband, and that by doing so she would once again be recognised in the 'community of ethnic identities' (cf. Eriksen 2001). As mentioned, she reflected:

*Yes, well it is not my responsibility (that I was raped). But when it is someone that I have a relationship with, then maybe I think the thought that: Oh no, could it be my own fault?*

And she adds:

*Even if it isn't... then I might sit and argue with myself: Oh no, maybe I did something wrong, something or other, right? I think it is much easier if... If I had been assaulted on the street, and then raped, then perhaps it was not my responsibility.*

Although her family tolerated it, having a boyfriend was considered a transgression of tradition. Jasmin felt that she might have failed her duties and was to blame. Some of the ways in which others evaluated her experience lead to cognitive and emotional conflicts about her relations to boys and about her sexually active life. The ambivalences in her evaluations of this contributed to her worrying whether she herself was responsible for what had happened.

In the same manner, young women from majority families, particularly when they were also blamed for actions that were regarded as connected to the event of coercion, talked about sexualised coercion as something they felt responsible for, ashamed of, or even guilty of. Some experienced blame for not having been careful enough. Jennifer (17) was twice subjected to sexualised coercion. She had been drinking both times. She described her parents' reaction:

*They were very angry with me and told me off, and said that surely now I would stop drinking so much. Yes... they thought it was my own fault.*

Jennifer, who was in despair over her parents' attribution of guilt, reflected a great deal about drinking and her own feelings of guilt. Conflicts in the family intensified, and she felt compelled to move. Like the young minority women, she connected her thoughts and emotions with what she saw as her parents' or other people's appraisal of her.

Several other women who contacted the Centre had been drinking when they had been subjected to sexualised coercion (cf. Manniche 2003). In majority families and networks, responsibility was then often individualised and guilt ascribed to them. That appraisal may be just as contradictory, as that to which minority women are subjected. In both cases the appraisal is related to contradictions in what is considered normal and appropriate within ethnic communities. The parents of minority women may be proud of their daughters for doing well in many aspects of life that do not correspond to (re-)traditionalised expectations. Equally, the drinking of young women like Jennifer, may regularly be accepted as a part of being young and having fun. But when ways of conducting life become associated with sexualised coercion, the victim is frequently blamed.

In all ethnic groups there is a tendency to relate the event to personal ways of conducting life, at the expense of understanding it as primarily related to problematic gendered aspects of societal conditions. This goes for the young women themselves as well as for their parents. 19 year old Anna described that she had been excited about, and proud of, the

fact that her parents had allowed her to move to Copenhagen on her own, when she was just 16. She said:

*I don't like telling my parents about it. They have taken such good care of me. It is as if I haven't taken proper care of the freedom they have given me.*

Her reason for not telling her parents was, as was the case for Zarah, related to possibilities of agency she had been delegated. An implicit, individualised, and, in the case of the young majority women, apparently gender-neutral responsibility for one's own life, which implies responsibility in relations to parents, seems to be connected to these possibilities (see also Ronkainen 2001). Anna, like Zarah, felt that she owed it to her parents to take good care of herself.

As in Anna's case, most of the ethnic Danish women expressed concerns about possible failures in their individualised, and seemingly gender-neutral, responsibilities in the conduct of their lives. When they 'exposed themselves' to violence, rape or other problem-causing events, such practices were seen by themselves and by others as failures in their capacity to take responsibility for their own lives, and as possibly suggesting some guilt or complicity in their own victimisation.

But for the young minority women the tendency was that they were more explicitly concerned with their families' sanctioning their ways of doing gender. They were particularly concerned with whether they were guilty in the eyes of others. The young minority women may, through their trajectory across differently informed contexts, grow ambivalent and critical towards (re)traditionalised perceptions of women's sexuality (Byriel 2002). Still, they are members of communities of ethnic identities in relation to which parts of their lives are conducted. Significantly, they applied a 1<sup>st</sup>. person plural 'we' when they talked about these communities. They are communities from which they risked exclusion, as they may be excluded by families and friends, and thus from participation in contexts including others with whom they have shared experiences and perspectives. They are acutely aware that they may lose the possibility of that 'we'. They risk complete isolation, because they themselves and others still identify them with the minority community. However, the risk of isolation is also present for the ethnic majority women, although mostly in relation to same-aged peers (Salkvist 2006).

Regardless of ethnic backgrounds, the young women found the events of sexualised coercion unexpected and incomprehensible (Sidenius & Pedersen 2004). They, like Jette above, described it as an unexpected offence against their right to self-determination. Personal reflections on their own actions in the situation of coercion and its aftermaths resembled each other. But their reflections on agency or guilt did not simply represent the almost naturalised and un-mediated 'reactions' to sexualised coercion as 'trauma' presented in much 'trauma talk' (Marecek 1999). They were basically related to blame assigned by others. Jasmin's reflections on possibly blaming herself less if coercion had been the result of a sudden assault by a perpetrator unknown to her, was reminiscent of those of many of the young women. Their reflections and consequent (re)evaluations of their own actions were also reflections on personal responsibility related to possible alternatives for action. They were attempts at (re)constructions of personal perspectives on being a subject, being subjected, and on agency in the conduct of their lives (cf. Brison

2002). They must all be understood as personally important, ethnically/culturally informed situated attempts at understanding the event and its aftermath, and not just as universal and unwished for 'reactions' to sexualised coercion (cf. Marecek 1999, Helliwell 2000).

## Changes

Values and beliefs concerning the relations between parents and children, appropriate sexual behaviour, and the personal meanings of sexualised coercion may of course be transmitted from one generation to the next in any ethnic community, whether majority or minority. Meanwhile historic changes and situated diversity are involved in the development of all perspectives and standpoints, just as differences, contradictions and changes in concrete lives have specific meanings in personal perspectives on participation. Leyla's, Zarah's, Madiha's and Jasmin's accounts in this article, like those of Nina, Catrine and the others, represent generational and personal changes in aspects of ethnic/societal meanings of sexualised coercion. The different meanings Nina and Jette ascribed to the sexualised aspect of coercion are an illustration hereof. But as transmitted values and beliefs are situated they may change more or less quickly in diverse contexts. In this study generational changes seem more in evidence in the lives of the young minority women than in those of the majority women.

About her possible future relationship to a daughter:

Zarah: *...I'd rather that she'd come and tell me.*

Jasmin: *But that is double standards. You want your daughter to come and tell you, but you won't tell your own parents.*

Zarah: *Yes, I know, but that's because our parents are much more eh... a little more old fashioned.*

Jasmin's and Zarah's accounts referred to transformations of, and contradictions with, traditionalised standpoints ascribed to parents and others from their community. In their viewpoint, ways of thinking and acting seemed far more negotiable. This created dilemmas in their perspectives on participation in different contexts, and they experienced it as necessary to operate with 'double standards'. One side of these concerned the relationship to parents, the other what they considered to be their own standpoints unfolded and brought into play in their relations with peers. Zarah underlined this by saying:

*I wouldn't tell my parents... I know they'd be terribly disappointed... Perhaps later on I'll tell my siblings.*

She had already told women friends. The young women also mentioned that they would deal differently with their 'secrets' in relation to a boyfriend than in their relations to young women friends. Boys and men of similar ethnic backgrounds were ascribed the same standpoints as the parental generation. Still, Jasmin had told her brothers about her experience.

These young women referred to a diversity of differentiated ways of participating in different contexts. They seemed to develop their conduct of life as a form of creolisation making it a personal and kaleidoscopic composition of ways of thinking and acting (cf. Eriksen 1994). It was developed across contexts in which ethnicities were ascribed and had different meanings. They gave voice to wishes for more individualised conduct of lives, and for more confidential ways of communicating, than they experienced was possible in their own families and in parts of 'their' ethnic communities. This being so, but also reminiscent of the young majority women, they primarily turned to their peers, especially girlfriends, when they needed to reflect on the event of coercion and its consequences, or needed practical support. Neither Jasmin nor Leyla wished to tell their parents about their experiences, but they had different reasons. Jasmin refrained from telling her parents in order to spare them from knowledge she thought they might not want. Leyla, like Nina, understood it as something private.

In the group interview, the young women negotiated possible perspectives. Of the minority women, Leyla, echoing Jessica and her majority father, was the one who aired the most individualised reflections on the meanings of sexualised coercion. She proposed: *'I think it is more sort of personal... how you want it yourself. How you assess it'*. She tried to express that choices of courses of action related to having been subjected to sexualised coercion as individual, personal and private concerns. Leyla's standpoint quoted here came as a kind of conclusion to their discussion, and was approved by all. Seen from this angle the discussion appeared to facilitate the development of new aspects of their personal standpoints. Similarly, this was also the case in the course of group meetings in which only ethnic majority women participated. But when Leyla, Zarah and Jasmin constructed a description of coercion as something private, they simultaneously changed the community and (re)traditionalisation oriented perspectives that were characteristics ascribed to 'their' ethnic minority community. It was a change in direction of, and influenced by, dominant majority discourses.

## Concluding discussion

Focus in this study has been on connections between ethnicity, and personal meanings of sexualised coercion. The number of participants from ethnic minorities is small. In the conduct of their lives they performed rather advanced forms of 'creolisation'. It is difficult to say how the accounts and analyses would have evolved if more tradition-oriented and (re)traditionalising young women had participated. Also, all participants have contacted Centre for Victims of Sexual Assault. Neither the young women from the ethnic majority, nor from the minority, can be considered representative of young women who have been subjected to sexualised coercion (Pedersen 2003). Also the analysis within the framework of this article is far from exhaustive. Meanwhile the personal the perspectives on the meanings of sexualised coercion, and of interconnected aspects of lives, were much too divergent for uncritical, depersonalised and de-situated generalisations to be constructed. In the presented theoretical approach, making room for complexity and differences, and relating them to social/societal conditions for participation, is *the* main analytical point. However, personal meanings develop embedded in - and drawing on - significant activities, relations and overarching conditions that may be highlighted. Such core issues are related to what Quin (2004) calls *'critical elements along asymmetrical power*

*relations*'. The asymmetrical power relations are connected to critical elements such as the social/societal meanings of being young, to ones positions in families, to gender, as well as to ethnicities. Core issues, related to such critical elements that are aspects of ongoing social/societal structurations, may serve as anchor-points in exploring personal meanings.

*The relations of young women to their parents*, is one such anchor-point. Despite differences in life conditions, the young women all had strong bonds with them. They cared for them and worried about possible conflicts with them. Veiling coercion in secrecy was particularly related to the sexualised and potentially scandalising aspects of coercion, as well as to situated and conflict-generating meanings. Minority women's secrets were a continuation of a more general secretiveness, whereas constraints in confidences appeared to be a particular cause for worry for young majority women, and especially for their parents. For all the women, irrespective of ethnic backgrounds, keeping the event secret may mean limited access to support. The resulting communicative isolation also risked complicating their participation in different contexts.

The young women's *personal assessment of the event and its aftermath* is a second anchorage-point. It was closely connected to assessments made by others. It appeared that minority women primarily connected feelings of guilt to the transgression of gendered rules of conduct. Personal responsibility for one's life was more central to young ethnic majority women. Feelings of guilt did not appear as frequent as presented in trauma-literature, in which necessary reflections on personal agency and responsibility may have been over-interpreted as feelings of guilt. Also, such feelings and reflections are gendered historical ascriptions of meaning that may be changing, e.g. as minority as well as majority women are relieved from traditionalised regulation of their sexuality. For the ethnic majority, and perhaps to some extent also for the young minority women, meanings of sexualised coercion appeared to be individualised and privatised, parallel to a growth in dramatising public discourses on rape.

The relationship between *ethnicised contextual and personal meanings of the sexualised aspect* of coercion is a third anchorage-point with different and changing meanings. Expectations of virginity seemed to restrict the possibilities of the ethnic minority women for confiding in and getting support from their parents, and public knowledge of the event entailed risks of exclusion. The sexualised aspect was given more individual meanings by the majority women.

*Complexities, constraints, contradictions and ensuing conflicts* in the lives of young women is a fourth important anchorage-point for analysis. They are aspects that cross personal contexts of participation, but have specific meanings in each of these contexts. The greater the complexity, and the more constraints and contradictions, the more the young women seemed to have difficulties, and experience distress in their struggles to (re)gain agency. Creolisation of the conduct of life was one aspect contributing to this. However, other struggles were obvious in the lives of majority women. Nothing points to the young majority women having fewer problems in the aftermaths, as Jasmin for instance seemed to believe. Accounts from the overall project indicated that there may be other important anchorage-points for analysis of the personal meanings of sexualised coercion. These may be the relations to boyfriends, relations to groups of peers, reporting to the police, relations to the perpetrator, as well as more specific aspects of gendered

meanings (Pedersen in prep. and Salkvist & Pedersen in prep.). Summing up, and regardless of ethnicities, the analysis of the accounts in this article, as well as in the complete study, indicates that the personal meanings of the aftermaths of sexualised should at least be as much in focus as the meanings of the event itself.

This analysis presents some tendencies in differences that seem connected to ethnicity as well as to individualisation, (re)traditionalisation and gender. Impressions of differences are, however, reinforced by the construction of categories of ethnic majority and minorities. It is also strengthened by the explicitness of ethnicity in the accounts of minority women, in contrast to the implicitness of this dimension in the accounts of majority participants. The anchorage-points mentioned all had different meanings to the women involved. They were connected in the unique unities of their participation in and across contexts, as personal trajectories through past, present and future. In its aftermaths, sexualised coercion itself did not alone determine the meanings ascribed to it by the women. Neither did ethnicity. But the meanings of sexualised coercion, although situated, are in themselves expressions of overarching gendered asymmetrical power relations, and are as such co-constitutive of all its personal meanings.

In order to comprehend the personal meanings of the anchorage-points mentioned, the historical connections that arise between, and across them, in the personal conduct of lives must be investigated, and the current meanings of gender and sexuality explored more closely (Pedersen in prep.). This kind of approach to the analysis represents an alternative to individualising, de-situated generalisations in researching sexualised coercion. It also represents an alternative inspiration to therapy practices. It does not, as the diagnosis of PTSD and similar universalising conceptualisations do, locate the distress and concerns of women in their minds and understand them as common - yet individualised and socially dislocated - reactions to an event that is predefined as traumatic. On the contrary, it firmly indicates the necessity of understanding the meanings of personal distress and concerns in the aftermath of sexualised coercion as contextual and re-contextualised. Irrespective of ethnicity, it also points to the necessity of relating concerns and distress of all women subjected to sexualised coercion to their participation in situated, gendered, ethnically informed, historic lives. Dualisms of universalism versus relativism, as well as of psychological theory and profession versus theories of society and politics, have to be overcome in transversalist efforts to relate universality to diversity and diversity to universality (cf. Yuval Davies 1997), particularly if we wish to avoid further subjectification of the already subjected.

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