

**Desiring to be desired: A discursive analysis of women's responses  
to the 'raunch culture' debates**

Laura Thompson

*This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Murdoch University, 2012*

*Declaration*

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed: .....

Laura Thompson

## Copyright acknowledgement

I acknowledge that a copy of this thesis will be held at the Murdoch University Library.

I understand that, under the provisions s51.2 of the Copyright Act 1968, all or part of this thesis may be copied without infringement of copyright were such a reproduction is for the purposes of study and research.

This statement does not signal any transfer of copyright away from the author.

Signed: .....

Laura Thompson

## **Desiring to be desired: A discursive analysis of women's responses to the 'raunch culture' debates**

### **Abstract**

In recent years, an explicitly sexualised style of femininity has become more visible in Western media and societies, accompanied by the idea that women can freely choose to use this mode of sexuality to signify their empowerment. This emergence of 'raunch culture' has sparked significant debates within the feminist literature as to how female agency should be conceptualised in a context wherein the seemingly continued objectification of women has come to be widely (re)interpreted as reflecting female empowerment and choice. This study seeks to contribute to these debates through a discursive analysis of talk produced in a series of focus groups with seventeen women, in which they discussed the raunch culture phenomenon and some of the related feminist arguments that have been raised. Whilst the participants frequently drew on the notions of 'confidence/self-esteem', 'choice' and 'doing it for yourself' as a defence for women's participation in raunch culture, an underlying ambivalence and sense of discomfort about the quest for 'empowerment' via raunchiness was detected in their talk, though this was only rarely expressed as an explicit social critique of the gendered aspects of their lives. These findings are discussed in relation to the ways in which the participants' use of these discourses allows them to position themselves as autonomous and freed from gendered constraints, as well as where these discourses become insufficient.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am sincerely grateful to A/prof Ngaire Donaghue for being a wonderful supervisor and providing me with endless guidance, support and advice.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering patience, support and encouragement throughout the year, and Justine for helping me with proofreading.