

Faith, Relationships and Sex Education:
Giving voice to young people of different
faiths and none in regard to
faith-sensitive relationships and sex
education

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PhD Dissertation

Declaration:

'I, Joanna Sell, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

Dedication

This study is dedicated to its participants and the young people this research was designed to serve.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments within theses could be seen as clichés and so effusive that they seem false, but I now realise that there aren't enough words to describe the gratitude felt at the end of a journey like this, a journey that has included help, encouragement and sometimes sacrifice by so many. Michael Reiss, thank you for being prepared to supervise a thesis which seeks to study the intersection of religion and faith, sex and education. Many shy away from putting these subjects in the same sentence let alone in the same study. You knew how complicated this would be, how misunderstood it is possible to find yourself by those of faith and those who have no faith. You understood the research aims and were there to guide through tricky waters. Your wisdom, care, generosity of spirit and encouragement, during what were sometimes difficult personal as well as academic times, have been tremendous, thank you. Supervision from Jo Pearce has greatly added to the clarity and richness of the study. Jo, thank you for challenging my assumptions and making me question or explain concepts I took for granted.

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Abstract

The intersection between religion or faith and relationships and sex education (RSE) is understudied. Yet, worldwide, levels of religiosity remain high, and in parts of inner-city Britain are increasing, even though much of Britain is seeing a decline in religious observance. Using student voices to inform the design of data collection methods and the direction for the study, I investigate the views, wishes and struggles that young people, including young people of faith, face when forming their relationships and sexual identity on their journey through adolescence. I also examine how high-quality relationships and sex education can support that journey. A pragmatic, constructivist, grounded theory methodology was developed and a total of around 460 year ten students from three very different inner-city schools in areas of high religious observance and one rural school in an area of low religious observance were involved in the research.

The findings reveal the wish of students to receive effective, relevant, age appropriate, faith- and student-sensitive relationships and sex education. This was seen, by all groups of students, not only those from religious backgrounds, as important for enabling the provision of high quality, equality-based teaching. Student views as to the content and age at which topics should be taught in RSE varied, often, but not always, dependent on the religious or cultural background of students. On average students of high religiosity felt that most topics should be introduced a year later than students of no religious faith. Responding to these findings requires flexibility, understanding and sensitivity on behalf of schools when formulating policy and planning the curriculum concerning relationships and sex education. Overall, this area of education was found to be fraught and contested, so, following a review of the literature and data analysis, models to support those teaching RSE were developed.

Impact Statement

In schools, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) can be a contentious issue; differing ethos and approaches are common, and conflicting opinions, concerning the teaching and content of RSE, are frequently expressed both locally and nationally. This is especially true in the UK when considering various aspects of equality, the 2010 Equalities Act and the various protected characteristics it identifies. Tensions are often seen between vocal adult pressure groups, including, not infrequently, between religious and secular groups. These tensions can also be evident in young people. There is therefore a need for research to identify what can be done to address such tensions and to find positive ways forward in which those who come to RSE from very different perspectives can nevertheless, so far as is possible, listen to the views of others.

This study, using only data from students, investigates what being 'sensitive' to faith issues that are pertinent to RSE might look like in practice in the classroom. Students considered that 'faith-sensitive' RSE should be respectful of faith alongside other belief systems and should also, to a lesser degree, expect to have discussions concerning what faith groups believe regarding relationships and sex, in a positive way. Students from non-faith backgrounds and an area of low religious observance considered it as important to respect faith in RSE as did those from highly religious households in areas of high religious observance.

It is expected that seeking to be respectful of faith and discussing belief systems may present a way forward to help dissipate conflicts of interest and best serve young people who come from a non-faith background as well as those from faith backgrounds. Faith-sensitive RSE should form a vital bridge between the epistemological and ethical impasse sometimes seen between certain groups. Faith-sensitive RSE may also allow schools to better fulfil their duty to deliver education that considers the importance of SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues) and the Prevent Strategy.

The findings from this study have already informed teacher training concerning RSE, in both primary and secondary schools, in the state and independent sectors, and in

both mainstream and faith schools. The findings are also being used to advise and inform Members of Parliament (in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords) on issues concerning the intersection of faith and RSE.

It is expected that in the future the findings from this research project will support schools as they interpret and implement Government guidance on RSE. This should lead to the improvement and increased effectiveness of RSE, which in turn should increase the wellbeing of students and enable them to flourish as they go through what can sometimes be a conflicted adolescence into adulthood.

Table of Contents

Key Terms	15
1 Introduction to thesis	19
1.1 The dyslexic's advantage and my use of metaphor	20
1.2 Personal motivation.....	21
1.2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	<i>21</i>
1.2.2 <i>Background.....</i>	<i>21</i>
1.2.3 <i>Growing up</i>	<i>21</i>
1.2.4 <i>Starting to teach</i>	<i>22</i>
1.2.5 <i>Parenting</i>	<i>22</i>
1.2.6 <i>Back to teaching again.....</i>	<i>23</i>
1.2.7 <i>Mohammed's and Joy's stories.....</i>	<i>25</i>
1.3 Why me?.....	26
1.4 History keeps repeating itself: Why?	28
1.5 Statement of importance of the work	29
2 Literature Review	30
2.1 Introduction.....	30
2.2 Literature review: foundation or cradle?.....	31
2.3 Reactive literature investigation.....	32
2.4 Faith, students' voices, school RSE and sexual values and practices	32
2.5 History of sex education, SRE and RSE	32
2.6 Student voice	39
2.7 Brain function and neuroscience	41
2.8 Identities.....	43
2.9 Culture, national heritage and Britishness.....	48

2.10	The intersection of religion and relationships and sex education.....	50
2.11	Gender issues, identity and discrimination.....	52
2.12	Equality and diversity	54
2.13	Intersectionality.....	56
2.14	The journal <i>Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning: A framework for common discourses</i>	58
2.14.1	<i>'Obstacles to good quality sex education': a special issue of Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning</i>	58
2.14.2	<i>A year of the journal Sex Education</i>	60
2.15	Putting the needs of students first	67
3	Methodology and methods	68
3.1	Methodological stance	68
3.1.1	<i>Constructivism</i>	69
3.1.2	<i>Grounded theory</i>	69
3.1.3	<i>Theoretical framework or cradle and lens</i>	71
3.1.4	<i>A cradle for development of findings that work towards theory</i>	72
3.1.5	<i>Pragmatism in the study</i>	75
3.2	Methods and methods used	76
3.2.1	<i>Sampling methods</i>	76
3.2.2	<i>Data collection methods</i>	78
3.2.3	<i>Difficulties encountered during data collection</i>	81
3.2.4	<i>Data analysis methods</i>	82
3.2.5	<i>Discussion of methods of quantitative analysis</i>	89
3.2.6	<i>Procedures for data analysis</i>	90
3.3	Ethical Issues.....	93
3.3.1	<i>Access and field relations</i>	95

3.3.2	<i>Pseudonyms and anonymity</i>	98
3.4	Research questions	99
4	Findings	101
4.1	Semi-structured focus groups	101
4.1.1	<i>Areas of interest for the study</i>	102
4.1.2	<i>Experiences of RSE in school</i>	102
4.1.3	<i>Ways to improve RSE in school</i>	104
4.1.4	<i>What should faith-sensitive RSE be like and what questions should be asked to find out what young people want?</i>	105
4.1.5	<i>Mismatch and conflict between beliefs and practice</i>	110
4.1.6	<i>Listening enables insight into the views of and respect for others</i>	111
4.1.7	<i>Young people want (and need) to know more than ‘just don’t do it’</i>	112
4.1.8	<i>Constructing a scale for religious observance</i>	113
4.1.9	<i>Ideas for data collection</i>	114
4.1.10	<i>Questions for the questionnaire</i>	115
4.2	Pilot study for questionnaires and the scenarios to be used for the workshops	118
4.3	Workshop data and analysis	119
4.3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	119
4.3.2	<i>Methodology for workshops</i>	120
4.3.3	<i>Findings</i>	120
4.4	Questionnaires and interviews	138
4.4.1	<i>Introduction</i>	138
4.4.2	<i>Demography: Gender, age, ethnicity and religious identities of questionnaire and interview participants</i>	138
4.4.3	<i>Demographic questions</i>	140

4.4.4	<i>Demographic findings</i>	141
4.5	What is good quality RSE?	158
4.5.1	<i>Questionnaire data</i>	159
4.5.2	<i>Interviews</i>	177
4.5.3	<i>Discussion</i>	188
4.5.4	<i>Characteristics of a good quality RSE teacher</i>	191
4.6	Should Relationships and Sex Education in schools be faith sensitive?	199
4.6.1	<i>Context: Religion, religious literacy and the growth of faith communities</i>	199
4.6.2	<i>What the participants say</i>	201
4.6.3	<i>What is ‘faith-sensitive RSE’ and how should the concept manifest itself in classrooms?</i>	205
4.6.4	<i>Discussion: Why is the faith-sensitive delivery of RSE important to schools?</i>	208
4.7	Compulsory RSE and the right to withdraw from lessons	210
4.7.1	<i>Context: Toward the provision of statutory RSE</i>	210
4.7.2	<i>What the participants say</i>	211
4.7.3	<i>Discussion</i>	219
4.8	Identities and conflict	222
4.8.1	<i>Identity and its importance</i>	222
4.8.2	<i>Conflicted identity</i>	223
4.8.3	<i>Conflicted lives</i>	224
4.9	LGBT+ – Area of conflict and conflicted identity	230
4.10	Guidelines to live by: Tenets, opinions and dilemmas	238
4.10.1	<i>Religious backgrounds</i>	238
4.10.2	<i>Non-religious students</i>	240

4.10.3	<i>Conflict, complexity, stress and pressures encountered at the junction of religion, family, society, the media and sexual practices</i>	242
4.10.4	<i>Sex and marriage</i>	243
4.10.5	<i>Peer, media and societal pressure</i>	246
4.10.6	<i>Faith sensitivity and student sensitivity as strategies for helping students to deal with confliction</i>	247
4.10.7	<i>Implications for faith and student-sensitive RSE</i>	248
5	Discussion	250
5.1	Introduction	250
5.2	Research questions addressed in the study	251
5.2.1	<i>What is seen by participants as good quality RSE?</i>	251
5.2.2	<i>Is there a place for faith-sensitive Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in mainstream schools and if RSE is taught faith sensitively can that be beneficial to all students?</i>	252
5.2.3	<i>Is there a need for RSE to be more inclusive of and sensitive to LGBT+ and other minority groups of students?</i>	253
5.3	Conflicted identities:	255
5.3.1	<i>Cognitive dissonance</i>	255
5.3.2	<i>Cultural or religious background and prevailing societal values and practice, including those impacting on sexuality</i>	256
5.3.3	<i>Gender Issues</i>	267
5.3.4	<i>LGBT+ issues</i>	269
5.3.5	<i>Sex before marriage</i>	271
5.3.6	<i>Agency and changes to religious practices</i>	273
5.4	Filter models for RSE	274
5.4.1	<i>The Faith-Sensitive Filter Model for RSE</i>	274
5.4.2	<i>LGBT+-Sensitive Filter Model</i>	288

5.4.3	<i>Student-Sensitive Filter Model</i>	290
5.5	Limitations of the research	298
5.6	Recommendations	300
5.6.1	<i>Recommendations for students</i>	300
5.6.2	<i>Recommendations for parents</i>	301
5.6.3	<i>Recommendations for the Government, Department for Education and Ofsted</i>	303
5.6.4	<i>Recommendations for teachers, schools and local policy makers</i>	306
5.6.5	<i>Recommendations for faith leaders and others in faith groups</i>	308
5.6.6	<i>Recommendations for agencies, organisations, voluntary groups and businesses providing RSE</i>	310
5.6.7	<i>Recommendations for sexual health service providers</i>	311
5.6.8	<i>Together – for everyone</i>	311
5.7	Further research	312
5.8	Conclusion of the study	313
6	Reference list	315
7	Appendices	359
7.1	Appendix 1 - List of verbatim questions provided for the study by students in the formative semi-structured focus groups	359
7.2	Appendix 2 - Scenarios for workshops	363
7.3	Appendix 3 - Workshop - Personal Response Form	364
7.4	Appendix 4 - Workshop - Group Response Form	367
7.5	Appendix 5 - Research instrument – Questionnaire	369
7.6	Appendix 6 - Example transcription from interviews	377

Table of Figures

Figure 3.1 A cradle for the development of research findings (Sell)	75
Figure 3.2 Scale of religious importance used for focus groups	92
Figure 3.3 Question 6: Scale of religious importance remodelled and used for questionnaires	92
Figure 4.1 Demographic questions in the questionnaire	139
Figure 4.2 Religion or belief system of participants	143
Figure 4.3 Original family nationality	144
Figure 4.4 Participants' self-elected national identities	145
Figure 4.5 Perceived 'Britishness' of participants	146
Figure 4.6 Questionnaire extract: levels of religious importance	152
Figure 4.7 Levels of importance of religion or belief systems in the lives of participants.....	153
Figure 4.8 Students whose religion or belief system "influences everything they do"	154
Figure 4.9 Age at which it is "Ok to have sex for the first time"	157
Figure 4.10 Fitzgerald School – religious observance of participants	203
Figure 4.4.11 St Joseph's School – religious observance of participants	204
Figure 4.12 Snelgrove School – religious observance of participants	204
Figure 4.13 Rural School – religious observance of participants	205
Figure 4.14 Student views concerning respect for religion in RSE	209
Figure 4.15 Student views on learning about religious teachings and beliefs in RSE	209
Figure 4.16 Student Participant views as to whether RSE should be compulsory in schools.....	212
Figure 4.17 Should parents have the right to remove their children from RSE?	212
Figure 4.18 Should students have the right to remove themselves from RSE?	213
Figure 5.1 'Faith-Sensitive Filter Model' for relationships and sex	278

Table of Tables

Table 2.1 Identity types: natural, institutional, discourse and affinity identities (Gee, 2000); situation and experiential identities (Sell)	45
Table 4.1 Participants' opinions on age appropriateness of topics in RSE	185

Key Terms

This is not a glossary, but a discussion or explanation of some of the key terms used in this thesis as some terms are open to interpretation and can easily be misunderstood within the context of this research study. This discussion of terms is designed to give substance to some of the words used that may mean different things to different people, depending on their perspectives and experiences.

Sex and relationship education (SRE)/Relationships and sex education (RSE)

SRE and RSE are used in the study to mean the same thing. However, SRE is generally used when discussing UK Government policy up to 2017, when Government terminology changed to RSE. RSE is a term I have been using since 2008 because its greater emphasis on relationships better demonstrates the reality of RSE which should start in primary school. RSE is also better received by parents. The change from SRE to RSE was recommended by the Education Select Committee in 2015 and subsequently adopted by the British Government.

Delivery (of relationships and sex education)

Whilst I am aware some people could take 'delivery' of RSE to mean providing a didactic, lecture-style lesson, this is far from the meaning intended here. Delivery is seen in this study as a broader term expressing not just the teaching itself, but the myriad of factors that affect and underpin the teaching of RSE in schools. These factors may include Government policy, the parental right of withdrawal, methods and materials chosen by the school, timetabling, training of staff, school policy and ethos and the priority, or not, given to RSE by the school, as well as the teaching that goes on in the classrooms.

Offering

Offering describes what is brought into the classroom by educators which may have an impact on the way RSE is taught, or on the way students

participate or perceive lessons. This could include: training, or lack of it; values; attitudes; abilities; teaching methods and materials; experiences; backgrounds; aspirations for the RSE lesson; confidence or uncertainty; knowledge; opinions; personality; humour, sexuality; mood; politics; behaviour and much more. It is worth mentioning that students too bring an 'offering' to the classroom that may affect the lesson and will undoubtedly affect the methods and strategies employed by the teacher.

Educators

Educators are those people who may teach RSE in schools. They may be sexual health providers or community groups that go into schools; they may or may not be teacher-trained. They can also be teachers from the school, who are trained specialists in RSE or teachers who have no training in RSE and possibly no interest in RSE either. The terms 'teachers' and 'facilitators' may also be used at times, teachers to denote those individuals who are trained teachers and facilitators to denote those who are untrained educators.

Sexual identities

There is a plethora of terms used when referring to sexual identities. In addition to 'straight' the terms LGBT, LGBTIQ, LGBT, LGBT+ and Queer are increasingly used in society or the media, to say nothing of terms that relate to those who are trans*. The longest acronym found, for what in the study is referred to as LGBT+, was LGBTTTQQIAAP (Data Lounge, 2014) which stood for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, pansexual. These individual terms are explained below and either appeared in the literature read for the study or were used by the students in their responses.

Homosexual: Someone who is same sex attracted.

Lesbian: A woman who is same sex attracted and may or may not be in a relationship with another woman.

Gay: A man who is same sex attracted and may or may not be in a relationship with another man. Gay is also often used as an umbrella term for anyone who is same sex attracted.

Bisexual: Someone who is attracted to both men and women and who may or may not be in a relationship with either sex or both.

Trans*: This term is inclusive of a range of sexual identities and social practices that mean that a person may dress like, identify as, or has gone through a process to take on the identity of, the opposite sex. These include: transsexuals; transgender men and women; transvestites; drag queens; drag kings; and cross dressers; it may also include other or merged identities, bridging the perceived divide between men and women.

Queer: Often used as an inclusive term for any sexual identities that are not the dominant sexual identity. It is often used by academics or those who comfortably take on a 'queer identity' for themselves, and who want to be inclusive. Some people struggle with the word queer due to its derogatory use in the past.

Questioning: Those who haven't made up their mind about their sexual identity and are exploring that aspect of themselves.

Intersex: People born with indeterminate genitals. They often have their sexual identity chosen for them at birth and so are brought up as either a boy or a girl and may be conflicted because of that decision; they may feel they identify as the opposite sex or are happy with their intersex identity.

Asexual: Those who don't feel sexual.

Ally: This term is used for those from the dominant sexual identity that see themselves as allies to those who may be LGBT+. It is not strictly a sexual identity, but was an identity adopted by a number of the students in the study.

Pansexual: This sexual identity or preference is similar to bisexuality, but makes no assumption that there are only two sexes and may be more fluid in attraction.

Heterosexual: Someone who is opposite sex attracted.

There could be other sexual identities that have not been included here. An inclusive and all-embracing term for all sexualities other than the dominant one, which in most situations is a heterosexual one, has been adopted for the study, that of LGBT+.

Word Count: 96,990

1 Introduction to thesis

There is a phrase used by many, 'You can't see the wood for the trees', meaning you can't see the big picture, because you are too focused on the smaller things that go to make up the big picture. At the beginning of this thesis, you the reader and I the author are at the lower side of the wood, although in this case it is more like a forest, one side of the big picture. I see the forest as being relationships and sex education (RSE) in schools and the developing identities, sexualities and values of young people, the trees as the issues that these subjects throw up for students and practitioners alike.

During your reading of this study, I hope to take you on a journey through that forest. We will pass through dark places of confusion and conflict, where the paths are many and the directions a little muddled, but also find ourselves on straight, wide, clear paths where most concepts and ideas travel in one direction and the way forward is obvious. We will learn from stories and lives lived, where young people speak about their struggles and their wishes for RSE and their futures. They will identify the impact, or not, of RSE in schools. The media, peer group, society, friends, the internet, their family, religion, belief system or worldview, all bear down on them to create pressure or freedom, or a mixture of both. As we pass through the forest, we will see stumps of broken dreams and saplings of new beginnings. We will travel to places where large overbearing trees influence the microclimate to the detriment of those developing in the shadow they cast.

This journey is one of complexity and ambiguity, but I hope never to run ahead in my enthusiasm for the voices contained in the data to be heard, or because having been steeped in my veiled and partial understanding of the trees in the wood for so long, I do not stop long enough to explain how to traverse a path I have already become familiar with. It would be easy to assume knowledge in others, but as I have been made aware from the literature review, not many have been prepared to take a similar path through this forest even though it needs exploring. I hope to lead you carefully into a greater comprehension of the issues revealed in the data contained in this research, so that as we emerge on the other side of the forest,

further up the hill, it will be possible to stand and look back from where we have come and comprehend what will be needed for the forest to flourish in areas where little work has been done, work that, it is anticipated, will help young people in our schools to flourish too, not just now but in their future also.

The path taken here is only one of many. This thesis does not ask all the questions necessary to understand young people's views concerning relationships and sex education and certainly does not have all the answers, but it endeavours to be valuable and to make a distinctive contribution to the body of knowledge in the area of relationships and sex education, especially in its intersection with young people, religion and belief systems.

1.1 The dyslexic's advantage and my use of metaphor

Brock and Fernet Eide in their book *The Dyslexia Advantage* (2011, p. xvii) write: "The brains of individuals with dyslexia aren't defective; they are simply different. These wiring differences often lead to special strengths in processing certain kinds of information, and these strengths typically more than make up for the better-known dyslexic challenges". As someone who has struggled with, fought against and learnt to live with the limitations that dyslexia brings, I have realised too that I am often able to step back and see the big picture, that it is easier for me to understand things and explain myself using practical examples, visualisations, metaphors, analogies, vignettes, illustrations and diagrams, which may explain some of the graphic, as opposed to purely academic, writing you may encounter in this thesis.

1.2 Personal motivation

1.2.1 Introduction

My personal motivation to undertake this research comes from 36 years of teaching and the experiences of two particular young people, Mohammed and Joy, as will be explained later. However, my journey towards this point, started long before I became aware of Mohammed and Joy.

1.2.2 Background

I grew up in a mainly white British town. My parents didn't really talk much about sex, except when I initiated the conversation, or a situation came up in life or on the television, which they took as a conversation starter. My best friend was given a book on the subject by her parents, so we would disappear into her bedroom, aged ten, and giggle at the diagrams. In our indoctrinated phonetic understanding of the written word, Debs and I thought penis was pronounced pen-is, until I heard a news item on TV about a boy who had had fireworks in his pocket and burned his 'peenas'.

1.2.3 Growing up

Sex education, in my all-girls' school, comprised of discussions about sexually transmitted infections and contraception. It was made clear that the best way to protect yourself from unplanned pregnancy and STIs was not to have sex in the first place. As far as I can remember relationships were not talked about or discussed and homosexuality was not even a small murmur, except when girls were called 'lesbian' in the playground, because they were sporty.

In my teens I was level-headed, responsible and self-confident; I was a 'go to' person for help and advice. However, I felt all the normal insecurities of those teenage years and experienced the pressure, from peers, the media and society, to become sexually active, to prove and demonstrate attractiveness and worth.

1.2.4 *Starting to teach*

Call me an idealist, or naïve, but when I started to teach, I set out to make sure that my brand of education would have a life-enhancing benefit to my pupils; I was looking forward to making a difference. My first teaching job was in a mixed-sex, special school for secondary aged pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), teaching home economics (the comprehensive, old school type, not food technology). I soon realised that I had been engaged to teach just cookery, as a way to keep the more difficult students busy doing something practical. I realised early on that if these disaffected, difficult, but utterly charming, teenagers were to be any use to themselves, any family they may have or to society in general, it was partly my responsibility to get them as ready as I could, for the practicalities of everyday life. I started to teach other parts, of what I considered, the Home Economics curriculum; this included life skills, health education and childcare. I undertook training with the Family Planning Association (FPA) and other agencies to better equip myself to teach the subject, as Health Education, or Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) as it is now called, had not been covered at my teacher training college. I developed a mantra: *'Education is for life not just for now, achievement or a career'*.

1.2.5 *Parenting*

When my second child was born, I had a break from teaching, but volunteered in schools, being a governor and sitting on our Council's Education and Overview and Scrutiny Commissions. After 10 years I felt I wanted to get back into the classroom. Being a parent enabled me to see, even more vividly, just how important it is to equip children and young people for life, as well as for employment. I feel the time I spent nurturing my own children enabled me to be more sensitive to the needs of children and young people in general.

1.2.6 Back to teaching again

When I undertook my 'return to teaching' course I was already back in the classroom part-time, teaching maths and English, but applying it to everyday life. Same old mantra: *'Education is for life not just for now, achievement or a career'*.

Whilst running an out-of-school service for disaffected young people I asked a local drugs awareness charity to come in to take a couple of sessions with the group. The pupils were given scenarios and asked what they would do. The scenario given to one of the boys was of a couple who had taken drugs and began to feel 'horny', what should they do? One of the facilitators explained that because the girl was under the influence of drugs, she could accuse the boy of rape given that she might not have been aware of what was happening to her (Freidman & Valenti, 2008). The male pupil said in a very worried voice: "Well then, we would just watch tele; I don't want to be accused of rape". While this may have been a little idealistic, the pupil had made a wise and healthy choice in this circumstance. However, he was told by the second facilitator: "Yes but we know you would have sex really, so make sure you use a condom". To assume this seemed disrespectful to the pupil and a much more affirming reply could have been: "Good choice, but if you did decide to have sex, then it would be best to use a condom, because...". This was just one incident, out of a string, that concerned me about the quality of outside facilitators being employed by the local council to go into educational establishments in the borough.

I decided to retrain to teach drugs education and SRE myself, undertaking training with several organisations, including: Oasis Esteem, the local sexual health service providers; Education for Choice; Romance Academy and Evaluate. I also went on train-the-trainers courses with FPA, Speakeasy and Delay Training. This array of very varied courses came from different political, religious and ethical stances. Each seemed to have its merits, and each had its failings, either in content, the method of delivery or emphasis. Some could be seen as faith-sensitive; others didn't seem to be, even though they were all produced in the light of the DfE Guidance (2000, p. 8), which states:

Schools should ensure that pupils are protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate, having regard to the age and cultural [which would include religious] background of the pupils concerned.

The words 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' are hard to translate consistently into action. What is appropriate to one person can be inappropriate to another, but one thing seems clear; if a pupil's culture needs to be regarded, then faith sensitivity in RSE is a must. Decisions about dealing with difficult issues and unexpected opinions are the minefield you choose to tread when dealing with relationships education and sexual health in schools, especially in areas where strong faith perspectives are manifested in the classroom.

So, the journey begins, to discover the route we, as educators, need to take to decide what we should teach in the classroom and what will give 'good' education that will last a lifetime. The philosophical debate about what is 'good' is a deliberation that will last a millennium, taking us through social justice, liberal and neoliberal discussions and working through paradigms that are too intricate, too philosophically contentious and divergent from the main focus of this research to discuss here, but it is important that we delve into the importance of faith sensitivity in RSE and try to find a way ahead, one that will serve pupils in our education system by using the pupils themselves to inform the discussion.

Over the past ten years I have been teaching RSE in schools and community settings as well as being involved in a number of innovative projects seeking to engage adults and young people of faith and no faith in the debate around what makes 'good' sexual health and then trying to put these ideas into practice in the classroom. I am a founder member of our local inter-faith sexual health forum; I have also run local and national conferences for people interested in the issues posed by the mixture of faith and sexual health when delivering RSE in schools and have set up a website to support adults working with young people from faith backgrounds and young people of faith to negotiate issues of relationships and sex.

During this time, I have collected data, quotations and information from a whole range of people and situations, all of which have helped me realise the importance of this research. Polarised views on what and how RSE should be taught in schools

need to be looked at in the light of these quotations from three local faith leaders: “It is not a problem for us, our young people just know that they don’t do it until after they are married” (Muslim imam); “It is not something we have to worry about, because our young people behave like brother and sister until they are married” (Sikh community leader); “Well, I have a son who is seventeen and I know he has never thought about sex, because he is filled with the Holy Spirit” (Christian pastor). None of these men explained what ‘it’ meant, but I took it to mean teen sexual activity. In contrast, secular organisations arrange campaigns like Brook’s ‘Sex Positive Campaign’ (2015) which claims to challenge society’s negative attitudes to sex and the Channel 4 series ‘More sex please we are British’ (2015), both of which gave the impression that more sex is the way to go, with little explanation of how that may benefit young people.

My journey towards evidence-based, comprehensive and faith-sensitive RSE is a tough but incredibly important one. It is essential that young people of faith and no faith have as much influence on their school RSE experience as possible. They need to be informed and empowered to make healthy and wise choices that are ‘right’ for themselves, choices that they will be proud of and not regret. They need the capability to say ‘no’ as well as ‘yes’ and ‘maybe later, let’s talk about it’, so that they are not damaged in the way Mohammed and Joy were damaged by the system.

1.2.7 Mohammed’s and Joy’s stories

‘Mohammed’ (not his real name) found himself in a Year 10 classroom with other 14-15-year-olds and a facilitator who seemingly had little care or respect for the pupils, their cultural, or religious background. The boys in the class were informed that they should always carry a condom with them, so that when they decided to have sex they could have safer sex. Mohammed put up his hand and said that he didn’t want to do that. He was asked why and replied that he didn’t intend to have sex until he was married so didn’t need to carry a condom. The facilitator just said: “Really?” and then laughed at him and the rest of the class joined in.

'Joy' (not her real name) had come to Britain to stay with her Aunt. The Aunt was very religious and so removed her niece from sex and relationships education at school. I interviewed Joy for some research in 2013. She had gone looking for love and ended up pregnant, having had unpleasant sex, only once, with a boyfriend who had left her to go back to a previous girlfriend. Joy had not taken part in the relationship lessons that may have helped her make more intelligent relationship choices. She had not received the sexual health lessons that may have equipped her to understand the importance of contraception, or the possibility of taking emergency contraception. When her boyfriend said he had not 'pulled out', but 'come' inside her, she thought a shower would sort the problem.

Here lies the conundrum we face. How do we decide what should be included in a curriculum of relationships and sex education, which will protect, inform and empower the 'Joys' in our class rooms whilst showing our 'Mohammeds' the respect they deserve? How can we produce lessons that will give confidence to parents and carers like Joy's Aunt that the values espoused in the family will also be respected in the classroom?

I argue that it is possible to have comprehensive faith-sensitive RSE. What this might look like needs, for the most part, to be up to the young people in our schools some of whom are were consulted in this research.

We have a real dilemma here; it is dodgy and problematic ground to tread, but worth it, because by treading in the quicksand of dichotomy and difficulty, we find ourselves shoulder deep in the same uncomfortable place as young people, who are often confused and torn by the conflicting pressure and influence of their family, possibly their faith community and the views projected and demonstrated in the media, including social media, peer groups, schools and parts of society.

1.3 Why me?

Whilst working in partnership with agencies and other teachers of relationships and sex education (RSE), I have seen 14-15-year-olds given goody bags following a sexual health event and then watched them leave them on the table once they

realised the bags contained condoms. I have witnessed students with head scarves disengage from lessons and have encountered students, embarrassed by the content of the lesson, being silly and giggly, whilst their need to be put at ease was ignored by those leading the session.

When teaching RSE, I endeavour not to see or plan for just a group of students, but a collection of individual young people from varied backgrounds and with a range of experiences. The need for young people to have their differing backgrounds considered at school was brought home to me in stark reality by Ola. Ola was a teenage girl who attended the youth group I helped to run at my church. We were talking one day about complex issues to do with school, when Ola broke into tears. Sobbing, she said: "Jo, I don't know what to do. I have to be one person at school and then I have to be someone different at home and I just don't know who I am".

Many children from faith backgrounds (and others who may be seen as 'different') can feel alienated from the culture of school or conflicted by it. Viewed in this way there is no choice but to seek to engage with, put at ease and be sensitive to the divergent needs of the students. RSE is a difficult, but important, subject to facilitate or teach. It seems that few want to study the place of religion and religious affiliation within RSE, but this is a juncture that has intrigued and challenged me for years. I considered that research into whether there was a place for religious sensitivity in RSE was an important aspect of RSE that needed investigating. I judged that I had not just the knowledge and experience to begin to investigate this topic in depth, but also the confidence and the vision to research the subject, attempting to give voice to the young people themselves.

Whilst Ola's story is important in explaining part of the context of this research, I was reticent to discuss it in the context of the church youth group in which I met her. By commenting on the outworking of my Christianity as part of this thesis I am aware that I may have opened myself and my work to additional scrutiny and judgement. My experience has shown that many people, especially practitioners in the field of RSE and sexual health advice, have a very narrow understanding of what religion has to offer young people concerning issues of relationships and sex. Many

have taken the writings of various academics and writers like Blake and Frances (2001) and Gresle-Favier (2013) who have questioned the validity and effectiveness of 'abstinence-only-until-marriage' (AOUM) RSE in the United States of America (USA) and assumed this to be the 'Christian' way to deliver RSE. The questioning of the AOUM method of teaching RSE in the USA has transitioned, in some places, into a suspicion of those from a faith background who are involved in RSE in Britain. It is true that religions do have teachings concerning relationships and sex, with most of religious groups maintaining a sex positive attitude in theory, although this is not always expressed in practice. I often find myself in classes where students are not accessing the lesson because they seem unsure what their religion, family or community might say if they knew they were discussing sex and so shy away from learning RSE. For Jews, Christians and Muslims, at least, who believe in a creator God, their holy writings include the story of Adam and Eve where God is shown to have created man and woman and then told them to populate the world. This would suggest that God created man and women for sex and then asked them to get on with making babies (having sex), which is quite a sex positive message.

Most religious sex positivity comes with boundaries and values, but an understanding of religious backgrounds can help teachers and other practitioners to open doors for young people, doors that will enable them to understand their faith in the context of relationships and sex and vice versa. To stereotype, taking a narrow or judgemental attitude toward those teachers or pupils who may be seen as 'different' for any reason, including having a religious background, should be challenged.

1.4 History keeps repeating itself: Why?

Part of the context for RSE in the early part of 2019 is that the British Government has decided that the teaching of relationships education (RelEd) in state primary schools, relationships and sex education (RSE) in state secondary schools and sex education (SE) in private schools will be a statutory duty. This decision was taken following consultation and a change of heart (under severe pressure) as a result of a House of Commons Education Committee (2015) Report. The guidance will soon be

published and the statutory nature of ReEd, RSE and SE will come into force in 2020. What that will look like in practice in classrooms has yet to be seen, but some of the rhetoric that has accompanied changes in RSE has been repeated over the years; there were calls for improvements in sex and health education back as far as the 1920s. Students in the research reported in this thesis are still calling for improvements. Why it has taken so long is hard to say, but the journey so far is explained more fully in section 5.2.

1.5 Statement of importance of the work

We don't know enough about the views held by young people concerning the intersection between religious faith and RSE. As the data in this thesis will show, the relationship between faith and RSE is not as straightforward as some might suppose.

Although this thesis has been carried out as part of a doctoral study, it has been done with practice in mind. It is hoped that the young people given voice in this study, and those whom they effectively represent, will have their opinions and needs taken account of by those formulating policy and practice, both nationally and at school level.

It would seem from my data that it is possible to have comprehensive faith-sensitive and evidence-based relationships and sex education. What this might look like in individual schools should be developed in consultation with the young people themselves. I believe that the contributions of my participants, analysed and interpreted in this thesis, will make a significant and original contribution to the understanding of young people and their wishes for, and relationship to, RSE in schools.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is seen as helping to inform shape and direct and enlighten the study as well as helping to understand where and why there are gaps in the literature. It was mostly conducted prior to data collection in order to consider writing pertinent to my research. It forms part of the basis or 'cradle' for the research (Figure 3.1).

My research seeks to understand the experiences, opinions and beliefs of young people concerning relationships and sex education, and any issues that might be pertinent to them generally, in the pursuit of good quality RSE but also in relation to faith. The literature review looked at: the history of RSE; student voice; faith in relation to RSE; identities and issues concerning gender and national identity; the educational, social and political contexts of RSE in the first part of the 21st century; and other issues also linked to RSE that may affect young people.

Internationally, pleasure-based (Ingram, 2005; Hirst, 2013), feminist (Lenskj, 1990), comprehensive (Kirby, 2008; Moore, 2012), rights-based (Osotimehin, 2013) and abstinence-only (Denny, 2006) relationships and sex education, are approaches that are espoused by various researchers, practitioners, educators, social scientists, commentators on the subject, activists and policy makers. These theoretical stances are heard fighting their corner as they strain towards the provision of 'Good Quality Sex Education'. Most, if not all, of those involved in the debate want what is 'best' for children, young people and society. Most work within an ethical and professional framework of 'safe-guarding' where they are expected to 'cause no harm' (BERA, 2014), yet they still argue fiercely and with a combative style, accusing others of 'childist' actions and opinions (Gresle-Favier, 2013) or coming from a hidden racist and eugenics position (Riches, 2004).

At this time in England, the great debate about what form RSE should take, whether content outside of the present National Curriculum should be made compulsory and whether the existing parental right to opt out should be removed, seems to

have been partially settled as the Government, following increasing pressure, has decided to rename SRE as RSE and said they will make relationships education (RelEd) in primary schools and RSE in secondary schools compulsory for all schools in England. The parental right to withdraw their children from RSE has at present been retained. This change of policy has, to a certain extent, been prompted by a report, initially ignored by the Government, from a recent Government Select Committee on Personal Health Social and Economic Education (PSHE) (Education Committee, 2015). Pressure has also been growing from other organisations like the PSHE association and the Sex Education Forum (PSHE Association, 2017) as well as from inside Government (Education Committee, 2016).

Looking at RSE and young people's sexual values and practices through the prism of their faith is important (Reiss & Mabud, 1998; Blake & Katrak, 2002; Halstead & Reiss, 2003; Katrack & Scott, 2003; National SACRE, 2007; Yip and Page, 2013) but where that happens, controversy often follows (Luker, 2006): "Sex education is seen as one of the most controversial subjects on the school time table" (Measor, 2000, p. 1).

So it is that my research enters the fray.

2.2 Literature review: foundation or cradle?

Originally, I saw this literature review, along with my experience and understanding of the issues, as the foundation for data collection and any future findings or theory that emerged. Now I see it acting as a 'cradle' for the ideas, opinions and 'the voice' of the young people who participated in this study. Rather than being a fixed foundation for the research, my experience, the literature and my theoretical understanding did not and should not have dictated or overly directed the research. Instead, the literature served as a place of nurture, protection and growth for the pupils' ideas, their recommendations, and their wishes for the study as a result of the 'constructivist, grounded theory' approach chosen for this research.

2.3 Reactive literature investigation

Some literature was read during data collection and analysis in reaction to the themes emerging from the data as the study progressed, in line with having a theoretical framework, or researcher lens, based on 'Constructivist Grounded Theory' (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014). CGT expects a researcher to react and respond to the data, developing theory and the direction of the study as the data uncover their secrets. In line with this type of emergent theory development, additional literature was reviewed depending on the interests, experiences and struggles of the participants. Whilst it was important that the study was underpinned by a robust initial literature review, it has been no less important to look at literature in the light of the data. Where this has been done and linked to the findings, the additional literature studied has been, for the most part, included in the Discussion Chapter 5 of the thesis.

2.4 Faith, students' voices, school RSE and sexual values and practices

In so far as I have been able to ascertain, there is very little literature that takes account of all the strands of my research concerns: students' voices; faith; school RSE; and sexual values and practices, together. The literature review presents what is available on these topics and seeks to understand the way that the literature views religion and belief in the light of RSE, but also school RSE more generally.

2.5 History of sex education, SRE and RSE

History repeats itself, has to, no one listens (Turner, 2002, p. 129)

What we, in Britain, have come to call relationships and sex education (RSE), or sex and relationship education (SRE), began in schools as simple hygiene education, then health and hygiene education and later sex education, which, over time, grew to include most of the biological aspects of RSE. RSE is actually a mix of sexual health, personal relationships and education about sexual practices. Increasingly, 'safeguarding' has fallen within the remit of RSE as determined by the Government (House of Commons, 2015 p. 4): "When provided in an age-appropriate way, RSE

can contribute to a school's safeguarding efforts, and instil the principle of consent that will protect young people as they grow up". In much of the literature and certainly research carried out in countries other than England, 'sex education' seems to be the term of preference (Stephenson et al., 2004; Walker et al., 2004; Mueller et al., 2008).

Interestingly, it is world events and politics that have mostly influenced the teaching of sex education in British schools. In the context of the First World War, young men started to be taught about the risks of venereal disease and how to prevent it (now referred to as sexually transmitted infections (STIs)). Following the publication in 1923 of a handbook entitled *The Health of School Children* (Board of Education, 1923), it was clear that the Government intended that there should be more training for teachers on the subject. It is notable that this is a call reiterated in 2008 by the Sex Education Forum (SEF, 2008), later by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills too (Ofsted, 2013) and then in 2015 and 2016 by my participants.

In the 1930s the emphasis was on hygiene. Girls were expected to behave well, with modesty and control, while boys were expected to behave in ways to keep themselves away from temptation (Reiss, 2005), meaning that girls were expected to act as gate keepers for male sexuality while at the same time being seen as a problem for the men, who were trying to keep themselves away from 'temptation'. At this time there was little or no mention of the possibility of homosexual relationships.

Although 30% of girls were getting some sex education, normally done on a one-to-one basis (Board of Education, 1930), in some areas of the country sex education was not being taught at all. George Newman, Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education, criticised the neglect of sex education in schools (Board of Education, 1943). This same criticism could also be levelled at some of our schools today.

In the 1940s, sex education was mostly limited to biology using the fertilisation of plants as an example, not human biology, leaving students to guess at what was involved in human reproduction. Sex education seemed to be cross curricular and

implicit rather than clear and straightforward (Board of Education, 1943). At that time only around half of local authorities were carrying out some kind of sex education, mostly in the form of hygiene and mostly in girls' schools. Boys, it seems, did not need to know about sex (Pilcher, 2005). The following quotation from the Board of Education has resonance nearly eighty years later. Teachers were expected to make sure students were: "not left in dangerous ignorance, nor alternatively left to acquire knowledge in ways which are likely to distort or degrade their outlook upon sex and their sense of responsibility in regard to it" (Board of Education, 1943, p. 4). We now have the internet and other media platforms that can and do "distort and degrade' young people's outlook on sex and sexual practices", with easy access to pornography and other information with nothing, apart from parental settings, or hyper-vigilant parents and schools, to monitor young people and steer them towards age-appropriate material.

The 1940s saw sex education affected again by world events, the advent of World War Two, with men (mostly) away from home, resulting in a rise in STIs, whilst at the same time women's sex education was criticised because practitioners in the hygiene field were not informing women and girls about menstruation effectively and only dealing with the subject of conception whilst discussing caring for an infant (Pilcher, 2005). These may not be our problems today, as most primary schools teach about puberty, including menstruation and possibly human reproduction, STIs form part of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2000) and are normally taught at secondary level. However, important areas of knowledge and necessary skills are not provided as part of many schools' RSE curriculum (Ofsted, 2013). Some schools are still open to the criticism that they are leaving their students in 'dangerous ignorance' (Board of Education, 1943). Lessons that fail to deal with issues including: consent; domestic violence; the objectification of the body (men's as well as women's); pornography; the dangers of the internet; and sexting are certainly lacking in providing a twenty-first century curriculum for young people in schools (Benotsch et al., 2012). It is hoped that the new DfE guidance for RSE will rectify this paucity in some schools.

In Pilcher's (2005, p. 160) understanding, the Education Board pamphlet of 1943 was a "clear expression of the ideal that sex education must necessarily encourage the 'sexual instinct' to be channelled into approved social contexts, of marriage and parenthood". Social norms have changed; feminist and liberal thinking has influenced the relaxing of those strict social moralities. Today, almost half of all children born in the UK are born out of marriage (ONS, 2013), but we still have difficulties in delivering first class sex education to our young people (Ofsted, 2013). Feminists, liberal thinkers, politicians, educationalists, service providers, faith and community groups carry out their socio-medico-moral discourses, normally in confrontational style, and the chances to improve the quality of RSE are lost (DfE, 2015), as the Government largely ignores advice, even advice that most of the warring factions might agree on. A simple example of this is found in the Government's refusal to rename 'sex and relationships education' as the more parent-friendly and proportionate 'relationships and sex education' (DfE, 2015), until 2017.

The 1950s saw the Government starting to advise how sex education should be taught in schools, and the Ministry of Education included alcohol use and the link to unplanned pregnancy within its chapter in the handbook *School and the Future Parent* (Ministry of Education, 1956). In its 1968 *Handbook of Health Education*, the Department of Education and Science first mentioned contraception and STIs, which were included alongside the need to teach about puberty to boys and girls. Words such as penis, vagina, testicles, ovaries, womb and sperm were introduced into the handbook for the first time. Wet dreams, or 'seminal emissions', as they were called, were also introduced as a topic that could be dealt with in lessons and thus: "Between the 1940s and 1960s, it is clear from the text of the handbooks that sex had moved from a position of absence to one of pre-eminent concern within official guidance on health education" (Pilcher, 2005, p. 162). One survey of 15-19-year-olds in the early 1960s found that 86% of girls but only 47% of boys recalled having had sex education at school (Schofield, 1968). The 1977 edition of *The Health Education Handbook* (DfES, 1977) called the chapter on sex education 'Sex

Education' for the first time with homosexuality and sexual pleasure being included as topics for discussions in lessons.

In 1978 the percentage of pupils receiving sex education had gone up to 97% of girls and 87% of boys (Farrel, 1978). Carol Lees, writing in 1983, outlined that the teaching and learning that were being undertaken in the field of health education or sex education, in different parts of the country, were very variable. The overt institutionalised sexism of the 1970s had largely been removed from British schools in the 1980s, so that both boys and girls were now likely to receive broadly the same curriculum in sex education, as long as they were in mixed schools. Ofsted's report *Not Yet Good Enough* (2013) showed that 40% of children were still not receiving adequate sex education, then called sex and relationship education (SRE) by most. However, some had already started to name it relationships and sex education (RSE) such as councils (Leicestershire County Council, 2016) and some practitioners going into schools to take part in RSE lessons (REALationships, 2016; Relate, 2016).

During the 1980s, sex education became more liberal and comprehensive in nature and then in the mid-1980s AIDS became an international scare story and once again world events influenced the content of RSE lessons. This led to an emphasis on condom use and safer sex (BISH, 2016).

It soon became clear that the AIDS-causing HIV virus could be transmitted sexually. AIDS was seen by some, mostly religious people, as judgement for immoral behaviour, partly because, in Britain and America at least, infection rates were highest in the male gay community (Mitchell, 1987). At this time there was very little drug therapy to combat the disease and people started to die. Sex education became a 'political football' (Reiss, 2005), with people on both sides of the political divide feeling that sex education and the way it was manifested in our schools was increasingly important (Reiss, 1998). In 1985 the House of Lords ruled that young people under the age of sixteen could be given contraceptives without the knowledge or permission of their parents and the Frazer Guidelines (Wheeler, 2006) were introduced to safeguard those under 16 who were receiving

contraception. At the same time, abstinence-only-until-marriage (AOUM) teaching programmes gained a foothold in the US, although AOUM has not been commonly seen in non-faith schools in this country; what ensued was a battle for the ethos of school sex education in Britain.

By the 1990s, it was compulsory to teach certain aspects of SRE in most schools although not academies and other exempt schools, where the content and nature of provision was under the jurisdiction of individual schools, with policy being the responsibility of the school governors (DfE, 2000). Parents were still able to remove their children (DfE, 1994) and at the turn of the century the Government guidance on sex education or sex and relationship education, as it had become, was published (DfE, 2000). This guidance had not been updated by 2016, even though there had been many chances to do so.

Following Sir Alastair Macdonald's report (2009) new guidance and legislation were proposed by the then Labour Government to make sex education statutory; however, time was running out to get their Education Bill through parliament and so the controversial PSHE section of the bill was dropped to enable its swift passage through The House of Commons. An educational select committee's report (DFE, 2015) was largely ignored by the Government, even in the simple task of changing the curriculum name from SRE to relationships and sex education (RSE). This small change could have made such a difference to the acceptability of the subject to many parents, who were unclear about the content of these lessons. The fears about the content of SRE lessons, often referred to, especially by the media, as sex education (Curtis, 2009; Fleet Street Fox, 2015), are still strongly felt in primary schools where parents are worried about the appropriateness of the lessons and their content. Parents, when told that their five-year-olds are having sex education (Christian Institute, 2011), imagine the worst for their children.

Alongside the development of sex education in schools, there has also been the development of organisations giving sexual health advice largely outside schools. In 1923 Marie Stopes opened her first clinic (Copland, 2009), following the publication of her book *Married Love* (Stopes, 1918).

In 1939, The Family Planning Association was founded morphing from the National Birth Control Council and in 1964 Helen Brook started her clinics to provide help and advice to those at risk of unplanned pregnancy. She was seen as a figure head for those who wanted to push boundaries as far as sexual health services were concerned, however she did not approve of either promiscuity or abortion (Furedi, 1997).

In 1967, abortion was legalised as was homosexuality, whilst in 1974 the Government made contraception available to everyone, not just married women. These social changes as well as the sexual health scares during the two World Wars and the discovery of AIDS/HIV, have all added to the complexity of dealing with RSE in the twenty first century. In her conclusion about the history of a hundred years of sex education, Pilcher (2005) mentions many of the players involved in the formulation of sex education including historical events (the wars) and health issues (HIV/AIDS). These together with social and cultural shifts brought about by contraception and a more open, liberal and, some say, more promiscuous society, have affected policy and practice in sex education. Demographic change and social movements to do with feminism and sexual identity have also affected outcomes and policy pertaining to RSE.

At a conference in 2014 academic David Paton from the University of Nottingham said: "Recent research suggests that improvements to educational outcomes and demographic change explain much of the recent decreases in teenage pregnancy rates" (Girma & Paton, 2014), rather than the increased provision of sexual health and contraceptive services to young people. If this is so, and I am sure others would dispute it, then that demographic change also needs to be acknowledged and possibly even celebrated in RSE in schools as it has influenced sex education in our schools (Blake & Katrak, 2002). There is no mention in Pilcher's conclusions about the demographic changes brought about through immigration and the cultural and religious value systems that some of these incoming communities bring to the discourses about RSE.

During this journey through the changes in sex education, in all its manifestations, over almost the last hundred years, a few things have become apparent. There is a need for better trained RSE teachers (Board of Education, 1923; SEF, 2008). Those directly involved in RSE, students (Schofield, 1968), practitioners in the field of RSE (Lee, 1983), those responsible for policy and curriculum (Board of Education, 1943; Ministry of Education, 1956; DfE, 1994, 2000, 2015; DCSF, 2009) and those tasked with scrutinising the quality of RSE in Britain (Ofsted, 2013) want to see better quality RSE. The opinions of these individuals and organisations and the discourses that have raged for decades, continue as the Government seeks to produce “high quality” (DfE, 2017a), RSE in British schools. It remains to be seen how ‘high’ the quality of RSE will be and who decides what content and pedagogies will be adopted for RSE in the future.

2.6 Student voice

A main motivation for carrying out this research comes from young people’s ‘lived’ stories, and so it is, that student voice is the only focus of the data collection, respecting my participants, enjoying their participation and having high aspirations for the results of their involvement. As others have made clear in their writing, children and young people could play a major part when planning research (Measor et al., 2000; Halstead & Reiss, 2003).

Thompson (1997, p. 267) warns against the danger of “leaving the experiences and voices of young people out of the debate over values in sex education” so that “the debate becomes a battle between different adult groups, over their preferred vision”. It is clear that partiality exerted by adults can have an effect on the type of RSE delivered in our schools. This is one of the reasons why it is important that student voices are heard (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

There is a small quantity of literature that directly considers the views of young people on RSE in the light of their faith. One such example, and the only place I have found the phrase ‘faith -sensitive’, is a filmed series by the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE, 2007)

showing young people in an inner-city context discussing their religion and their sex education in schools. The DVD demonstrates how mixed the views of young people are on the topics of relationships and sex education. Themes picked up by the students interviewed in my study were love and sex, as well as the feeling that RSE is a good thing if it is “taught properly”, but that it might encourage children and young people, to have sex. The students felt that topics, like menstruation, ought to be taught in Year 6, but some of the other RSE topics, should wait until Key Stage 4. They also expressed the need for religious beliefs to be part of what is taught. A number of religious leaders who were also interviewed as part of my project, understood religion to talk positively about sex, but within a caring relationship, ideally marriage.

Yip and Page (2013) look, in depth, at the real-life experiences of young adults, many of whom identify themselves as religious in one form or another. The study involved mostly students between the ages of 18 and 24 and used questionnaires and one-to-one interviews. The study findings demonstrate the importance of RSE in school for later life, how strongly young people can hold onto their beliefs and how there are often tensions between their everyday practice and the beliefs held by them.

The “mapping of the lived experience” (Yip & Page, 2013, p. 1) speaks to the need to investigate what young people of faith require from RSE in schools. Yip and Page’s research demonstrates what those in early adulthood, experience, believe, think and practise. These findings enlighten our understanding of physical and sexual development as well as the struggles for young people, which start in childhood, develop in adolescence and continue into adulthood. Values such as monogamy, virginity until marriage and love within a committed relationship were generally seen as important to those taking part. The descriptions of religion as a “canopy of meaning, for life” (p. 21) and as providing a “moral and ethical compass” (p. 22) are helpful when exploring how young adults view their religious beliefs and practices. The work of Yip and Page shows the need to consider religion seriously in the context of RSE in schools, as part of preparing children and young people for adult life.

2.7 Brain function and neuroscience

Adolescence is the time when most pupils are likely to undertake RSE in school; a study of some of the literature investigating brain science and neurology has been included here to help educational practitioners to understand the development of the adolescent brain and how a knowledge of that development can help inform what might be seen as 'good' RSE; what should be taught; how; when and by whom at this transformational time in a young person's life.

Brain science research has developed since the 1950s as a result of the new technology available, principally in the form of brain scans. To some extent the technology simply helps to demonstrate what parents and teachers around the globe have always known, namely that adolescents can be moody, do silly things and demonstrate lack of care, but research has found that there are neurological reasons for this behaviour. The research evaluated and reported in Paul Howard-Jones' book, *Introducing Neuro-educational Research* (2009), suggests that adolescence is a time of great upheaval, as the brain develops differently to that of children and adults.

In Howard-Jones (2009), the work of McGivern et al. (2002), Sowell et al. (2003) and Blakemore and Choudary (2007) is used to assert that young people are less empathetic, not as good at directing attention, more likely to engage in risky behaviours and less able to plan for the future. Howard-Jones also draws on research by Bjork et al. (2007) and Eshel et al. (2007) to maintain that young people are more likely to display inappropriate behaviour. Additionally, Baird et al. (2005) are cited by Howard-Jones (2009, p. 6) to highlight that: "Such studies are providing new insights into adolescence that may influence educational perspectives on teenage behaviour and help understand a potentially problematic, and sometimes even dangerous, period of children's development".

Mariale Hardiman in her book *The Brain Targeted Teaching Model* (2012) suggests that, by incorporating her pedagogical method into school life, the brain will be encouraged to learn more efficiently. Her work shows that there is a need for emotional engagement for the brain to function most effectively, this is especially

interesting as it shows the importance of including emotional content in RSE lessons and that by doing this, students are more likely to engage with the knowledge and skills-based aspects of the lessons. Within RSE the easy material to teach is the knowledge and skills-based content, e.g. putting on a condom and how HIV is transmitted. The lessons which are harder to carry out effectively are the ones around feelings and emotions, and yet it seems from Hardiman's work that it is important to involve emotion in the delivery of facts and skills to educate more successfully.

Hardiman also points out that in adolescence, pupils are likely to look for the approval of peers (Giedd, 2009) and that there is a chance of increased morbidity with violence and suicide, often linked to relationship problems. This is a major killer among teenagers and those in early adulthood. Rates of suicide are highest amongst 20-34-year-olds, especially men and are often linked to relationship breakdown (ONS, 2013), as well as lifestyle choices and job insecurity.

These are some of the ideas that can be taken forward into my research and incorporated into the student questionnaires. For example, since, as Hardiman pointed out, it has been shown that young people look for approval from their peers, I decided to ask interviewees if peer pressure was affecting them and probed their experience of peer pressure. Hardiman's idea of emotional engagement may mean that using scenarios to teach even the main factual content of RSE could be a useful tool, as most students will be able to identify with personalities and situations more than they will by just learning basic facts. Scenarios were also suggested by students as a way of collecting data from the workshops in all four schools involved in the research.

The way that the brain develops through adolescence can also be presumed to be important and linked to a level of identity formation, which also takes place during adolescence, as a child becomes more independent of parents, family and upbringing, to discover who they are and want to be.

2.8 Identities

Identity and identity formation affect young people especially in their adolescent years, RSE can be a safe place to discuss, explore and respect various identities. This can help young people to develop a strong sense of self, which will aid resilience (Mitchell, 2011).

There is an extensive literature on identities their formation and development (Giddens, 1991; Kymlicka, 1995; Aloff, 2006). Existentialists like Kierkegaard, often seen as the father of existentialism (Wartenberg, 2008), and Sartre (Sartre & Barnes, 1993) consider that humans come into a world they don't understand and must make sense of it, but that 'humanness' enables them to make choices and lead 'authentic' lives, using reason as a guide. Essentialists, however, base their philosophical understanding concerning identity on the teaching of Plato (Silverman, 2002) and have suggested that individuals start at a place of 'being' and that there is an original 'essence' that makes them who they are; they then decide, based on this, what and who they become, using reason, so that original identities are more 'set'. Those like Mort (1989), Featherstone (1990) and Sarup (1996) would argue that identities are not fixed even at one time, but are fluid, that they are constructed by and respond to the world around the person. Mort (1989, p. 169) expressed it in these terms:

We carry a bewildering range of different, and at times conflicting, identities around with us in our heads at the same time. There is a continual smudging of personae and lifestyles, depending where we are (at work, on the high street) and the spaces we are moving between.

Young people's relationships with the identities with which they freely align themselves or the identities that sit awkwardly with them are central to my research. It is likely that that the self-presented identities adopted by young people are too complex to allow easy stereotyping and demonstrate the unique qualities of each student.

Gee (2000) points out that as the world becomes more interconnected, the notion of identity becomes more complex and that it is one lens through which to view research. However, having read his work it seems to be limited to identities driven by race and class, moulded by poverty and doesn't seem to investigate the more complex identities that are typically seen in young people constituted by gender, religion and national or cultural background. Research around the use of racial labels by individuals has shown that they tend to change depending on the person to whom they are talking (Phinney, 1990; Solomon, 2015). Solomon's research, carried out for the USA Department of Communication, told of a participant of mixed heritage, who described herself as Nigerian when with African friends, even though it was only her father who was Nigerian. When surrounded by white people she described herself as 'black'.

Whilst my work is primarily an exploration of identities based on students' views of beliefs, religion and relationships and sex education, it is evident from the data that the participants cannot easily be defined simply by religion or, in fact, by gender, family background, sexuality or perceived nationality.

Gee's view of identifiers such as, class or poverty seems both limited and different to the identifiers most relevant to this work. He does, however, make the important point that, when investigating what constitutes identity for young people, there are four types of identity: natural identity, institutional identity, discourse identity and affinity identity. The first four rows in Table 2.1 indicate what Gee says about these four types of identity. However, and as show in the table, I feel that there are two additional sorts of identity that need to be included: situation identity; and experiential identity.

Identity type	Example	Explanation
Natural identity	Age, gender, race	These things are decided before birth and are things that cannot easily be changed
Institutional identity	Manager, monarch, pupil, mother	Positions held within institutions and society
Discourse identity	Vegan, Labour or Conservative	Identities adopted in relation to discourses within society
Affinity identity	Fisherman, dog owner, member of a club	Identities assumed because of similarities with others
Situation identity	British, city girl, homeless	Identities based on where a person finds them-self
Experiential identity	Refugee, celebrity, survivor, homeless	Identities dependant on the experiences encountered

Table 2.1 Identity types: natural, institutional, discourse and affinity identities (Gee, 2000); situation and experiential identities (Sell)

Whilst Table 2.1 helps to show how there may be intrinsic differences in the types of, and causes for differing identities, some identities will inevitably straddle various categories. One simple example, referenced in Table 2.1, is that of the homeless. This label could be used by someone who finds themselves on the streets with nowhere to live; however, homelessness is also an experience and so the identity can be shared with other people in the same situation with the same experience of having no home. There could also be some overlap here between the experiential and affinity identity types, as people who are homeless may feel an affinity with each other; however, this may not be the case, with two homeless people feeling

only alienation from each other due to other factors, like ethnicity, social background or lifestyle, causing fear due to 'difference'.

Religion or belief can fall into many, if not all, the identity categories outlined in Table 2.1 and as such is multifaceted and inevitably complicated to explore when also considered alongside gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social background.

It is important for those teaching children from a range of backgrounds to try to understand and nurture their forming identities, making the classroom a 'safe place' for 'difference' (Showunmi et al., 2014; Gross & Rutland, 2015). This does not mean that teachers should not challenge ideas or even beliefs held by children and young people, as Giddens (1991, p. 3) writes:

Doubt, a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, permeated into everyday life [...] Modernity institutionalises the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses.

It is important, however, that educators teach students to question and evaluate the world and its values and beliefs in a way that shows understanding of, and normally respect for, any identities with which the pupils may already have aligned themselves. At the same time, educators need to open up the possibilities of 'thicker identities' to be formed, generating 'identity capital' (Coté, 2005) so that students may question their originally adopted identities, or where they originated, carefully, allowing them to develop their identities in a self-reliant way and from a place of confidence, understanding and valuing of 'difference'. Gross and Rutland (2015) argue, based on their research, that religion is an element of identity capital. De Souza's (2009) work demonstrates that religion can play its part in contributing to the identity capital that students acquire.

An example of identity capital would be the child or young person whose classroom experience included friends of different religions and cultures whilst maintaining confidence in who they are. If their school handles and embraces 'difference' in a positive way, 'difference' will become part of what is normal for that child. When entering adulthood, university or a place of work, they may be in the minority or

need to engage with people from minority groups or religions; but will not be daunted or made to feel awkward by the situation. Bricker (1998, p. 47) argues that “A state that ignores the cultural contexts of citizens inadvertently endangers the cultures of weaker groups”.

The idea of ‘culture’, a word that often encompasses the concepts of religion, nationality and race, but can also include class and gender, is intrinsically linked to identity and the sense of belonging. Belonging itself, or the lack of it, has been shown time and time again to be linked to resilience or vulnerability. In her chapter ‘Resilience and Belonging’ in *Reintegrating Extremists* (2017, p. 1), Sarah Marsden had this to say:

Developing a broader social identity rather than the single-minded focus on a narrow conception of identity related to the radical group was a central part of what practitioners believed was important.

Based on the extensive work of Robbie Gilligan (1997, 1999, 2001) concerning children’s identity and resilience, Fiona Mitchell in her briefing paper (2011) outlined what can be seen as the three building blocks to resilience:

1. A secure base, whereby a child feels a sense of belonging and security;
2. Good self-esteem, that is, an internal sense of worth and competence;
3. A sense of self-efficacy, that is, a sense of mastery and control, along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations.

Werner and Smith (1992) considered resilience in children ‘at risk’ and discovered that faith and a religious identity could have a protective effect on those children, as could other adopted strong identities, for example if a young person was having to look after younger siblings and saw themselves as a carer. These strong identities, it seems, can protect young people.

2.9 Culture, national heritage and Britishness

The largest ethnic group in Britain is white British, although people in non-white British groups are growing in number and many from immigrant backgrounds see their national identity to be exclusively or partially British (ONS, 2012). This movement from family's original national background towards Britishness was also demonstrated in my data. Some commentators, especially in right wing politics or sections of the media express the notion of divided communities between those of differing cultural or religious backgrounds. It has been suggested that communities, especially Muslim communities, lead 'parallel lives' (Bradford Race Review Team, 2001). However, even in 2001, following disturbances by Asian youths in the northern town of Bradford, the idea of 'parallel lives' was described by Philips in a report for the Government (2001) as a 'myth'. What is Britishness or who is British are questions with very elusive answers as Britishness is not easily defined (Julios, 2012).

Joint research carried out by Ipsos MORI and the Camelot Foundation (2006) showed that the young people taking part in the research found it hard to engage with Britishness and felt more at home with the idea of regional identities, e.g. Scottish or Welsh. English people were shown to be more readily accepting of a British identity, rather than English, where as those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were more nationalistic (Ipsos MORI/Camelot Foundation, 2006).

Research for the British Government using annual population data up to 2007 showed that those from Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds were more likely to identify as British than those from other non-white British ethnic backgrounds (Manning & Roy, 2007), while those from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds were less likely to identify as British. No reason for this was given but even at that time Manning and Roy suggested that social cohesion was important to the wellbeing of the UK and should be encouraged. Consultations were suggested by the authors of study to help facilitate understanding of what reforms were needed to strengthen British identity and decide what that identity should be.

A need to strengthen of British identity in immigrant communities is still needed in Britain today, especially in the light of terrorist attacks, which have been carried out on mainland Britain by British nationals. The Government, through Ofsted, is inspecting schools on their promotion of 'fundamental British values' (Department for Education, 2014). At present, Ofsted (2016, p. 37) understands fundamental British values to be: "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith".

One of the reasons for the importance afforded to the concept of Britishness is to help unify a nation around one set of values, to decrease the factions and fractures that are appearing in 21st century Britain. That is not to say that British society was unified before, but to recognise that the fractures are perhaps manifesting themselves in more dramatic and violent ways.

Ethnic, national and cultural identities are complicated especially in certain areas of the country where diverse and multicultural communities live in close proximity, but while some see any new immigration to Britain as a real problem (Winder, 2004; British Future, 2017), many see multicultural Britain as a 'melting pot', where all the ingredients being cooked keep their own characteristics but add to the flavour of all the others. That brings a richness to what it means to be British (Blinder & Allen, 2016). Cohen (1995, p. 59), explaining how complex the diaspora of Britishness is, wrote:

British identity shows a general pattern of fragmentation. Multiple axes of identification have meant that Irish, Scots, Welsh and English people, those from the white, black or brown Commonwealth, Americans, English-speakers, Europeans and even 'aliens' have had their lives intersect one with another in overlapping and complex circles of identity-construction and rejection. The shape and edges of British identity are thus historically changing, often vague and, to a degree, malleable — an aspect of the British identity I have called a fuzzy frontier.

I would argue that as the current Conservative Government attempts to clarify, define and constrain what might or might not constitute Britishness and British values, people will make up their personal version of Britishness and that in itself is rather British, and as such Britishness is likely to remain 'fuzzy' if we are to continue as a free democratic country. If we are to encourage a more homogenous, or at least a more harmonious view of what being British is then it is necessary to at least understand, if not respect, differing views of what being British may entail. Britishness probably means different things to different people and is likely to remain that way.

2.10 The intersection of religion and relationships and sex education

It is a challenge to find literature that lies at the intersection of faith, beliefs, relationships and sex education (RSE), sexual practices and the views of young people. Policy makers (DfE, 2015) and the academic establishment shy away from looking at issues of faith and sex alongside each other in a positive manner, whilst at times being happy to criticise religions' understanding of SRE (Blake & Frances, 2002; Santelli et al., 2006; Dunt, 2015). Few studies include the voices of young people and children.

Having read the Government guidance (DfE, 2000), PSHE Association guidance (2014), recommended for use by the Government and the importance given to Social Moral Spiritual and Cultural (SMSC) (Ofsted, 2015: Doing SMSC, 2016) issues, by Ofsted, then it might seem logical for 'faith-sensitive' relationships and sex education to be a mainstream concept already. The inclusion of faith-sensitivity in policies and practice could be seen as common sense. However, I have found sparse writing on the subject and very little information about faith-sensitivity demonstrated in the materials used in schools even in areas of high religious observance. Often, if religion is mentioned in RSE it is in conjunction with forced marriage and honour killing, female genital mutilation (H.M. Government, 2014) or homophobia (Hall, 2015).

A small number of books look at the issues of sex education, sexual values and religion (Reiss & Mabud, 1998; Blake & Katrak, 2002; Halstead & Reiss, 2003). However, they do not draw directly on secondary school student voice, but investigate the tension, and positive interaction that can exist, at the juncture of the sexual practices of young people, sex education and religion.

Halstead and Reiss, (2003) make the point that no form of sex education can ever be value free as both pupils and teachers bring their value laden perceptions, ideals and ideas into the classroom. Halstead and Waite (2003, p. 28) maintain that: “Our research suggests that there are many ways in which the contribution teachers make towards children's sexual and spiritual values can be enriched [...] [One] way is for teachers to reflect carefully on their own values and on the spiritual and moral example they set to children”. So it would seem that rather than assuming teaching can be value free, the values held by teaching staff can enrich the student experience, as long as the teacher is carefully reflexive and the pupils are allowed space to work out their own views and values, based not only on the lesson, but also drawing on their own background, values and understanding.

Halstead and Waite (2001a) have shown that children in primary schools are not always as sexually naïve as they are assumed to be, and that they can pick up sexual cues from the world around them. They suggest that young people are should be consulted prior to the planning of sex education lessons. I agree, and this is why student voice is at the forefront of this study.

Blake and Katrak (2002), with funding from the Department of Health, Teenage Pregnancy Unit and support from the Sex Education Forum, produced a useful book that informs and advocates the need for RSE to have a multi-faith perspective: “Teaching effective SRE means taking into account the many faiths and cultures of children and young people in Britain today” (Blake & Katrak, 2002, p. 1). This book seems to understand that often religion is misunderstood in the provision of RSE. “On a spiritual level, following these moral codes [and religious teaching] can provide members of religion with rules to live by, and consequently, can result in a profound sense of liberation. This is often unrecognised within SRE” (p. 8). This

book gives voice to those of faith and even though it wasn't based on research with students it does use research studies that have young people as participants.

Many of the young people in my study talk about having a moral code set out by their religion and wanting to follow that code. Many also say that part of that code is not to have sex outside of marriage, yet this discourse is seldom mooted in our classrooms because of the rather unsuccessful delivery of 'abstinence only until marriage education' (AOUM) in the USA. Around the same time that the Blake and Katrak work was published, Blake and Frances (2002) penned the book *Just Say No to Abstinence Education* which is cited in a number of studies that argue against any discussion about abstinence in British classrooms. Surely there has to be a balance here. Whilst abstinence-only RSE has been shown to have limited efficacy, abstinence needs to be one of the discourses in relationship and sex education if we are to engage young people of faith. More than that, delaying sex, or choosing to have sex with fewer, or only one, partner as in a faithful marriage, has been shown, according to the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL, 2018), to lead to lower rates of STIs. If fewer sexual partners leads to lower rates of STIs, then lower numbers of partners could be seen as a healthy, and possibly a wise, choice, so should be respected and valued in the classroom, whilst not stigmatising those who choose 'differently'.

2.11 Gender issues, identity and discrimination

Gender might seem quite straightforward if one simply looks at the sexes as numbers of male and female students, but biology is not the only difference between men and women or between girls and boys. As gender becomes a more fluid notion, one that surpasses merely chromosomal differences, gender equality and the merging and separation of societal gender stereotypes in twenty first century Britain mean that gender is a tricky and enthralling concept to explore. If you are a young woman you are more likely to be murdered by a partner (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014), but if you are a young man you are more likely to be stabbed in the street (Allan & Audickar, 2018) or commit suicide

(Samaritans, 2016). If you are a trans* person you have a one in four chance of being a victim of a hate crime (Backman & Gooch, 2018)

Worldwide, gender inequality is an issue, but what about here in Britain and what issues did my participants, both male and female, raise when thinking about gender, equality and conflicted identities?

Globally, one in three women will be subjected to violence (UN Women, 2018). Over half of the women murdered will die at the hands of a partner (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018); 250 million women are likely to have been married before they were 15 and around half of girls aged 15-19 think it is acceptable for their husband use violence against them (UNICEF, 2014); there are 30 countries where female genital mutilation (FGM) has taken place (UNICEF, 2016). Worldwide, less than a quarter of those in any form of government are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017) and in four countries there are no women involved in national government (Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, 2017). In 2016 there were only 23% of women in parliaments world-wide (World Economic Forum, 2017) but when women are involved in peace talks, the peace agreement is much more likely to be successful, for longer (United Nations, 2015). Across the world, women earn less than men (The World Bank, 2015) but if both paid and non-paid work are taken into consideration, women work substantially longer hours than men (UN Statistics Division, 2015).

These statistics are alarming, but how many of these issues do girls face in Britain? It is illegal to get married at 15, we have had two women Prime Ministers and Britain has a high, although some would say inadequate, number of female Members of Parliament (Woman's Equality Party, 2018). It would be easy to think that the challenges for women globally outlined earlier are not issues that students in our schools need worry about. However, FGM and domestic violence are serious problems in British society. Data collated by National Health Service (NHS) England (2017) show that in the year to March 2016 more than 5,700 women who had undergone FGM presented themselves to the NHS for treatment for the first time. The Crime Survey for England and Wales and three other datasets were used to

compile statistics concerning domestic violence in England and Wales (ONS, 2017). These showed that there were an estimated two million incidents of domestic abuse in the year to March 2016; which accounted for one in ten of all crimes reported to the police. Most victims were women, with men accounting for around one in six cases. Other issues that affect young people today are those of cyber bullying, pornification and sexting which have been shown to affect identity formation online and offline and possibly lead to sexual violence (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011). Other researchers have found a strong link between cyber bullying, mental health issues and suicide (Kowalski et al., 2014). Whilst these problems are seen as mainly affecting women and girls and are presented by Ringrose and Barajas (2011) as gendered issues, these authors recognise that these matters can also affect boys and need more investigation.

2.12 Equality and diversity

Whilst the desire for equality is enshrined in international law (UN, 1948) and British law (Equalities Office, 2010; The Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016), questions pertaining to how the concepts of equality and diversity work together in practice show them to be sometimes nuanced and complex in nature. This is especially true where differing cultures, religions and worldviews are concerned.

If all people in Britain were similar, coming from the same cultural group and background, had the same sexuality, gender, age and marital status, if no-one was pregnant, if everyone had the same skin colour, practised the same religion or held the same worldview, and was as able as everyone else, then it could be argued that there would be little or no inequality. However, this is obviously impossible, Britain would be a very boring nation and, in reality, different characteristics would be found to 'other' people, i.e. make them feel other than the 'norm' or other than the dominant group (de Beauvoir, 1949). The white, heterosexual, middle-class girl from an atheist background who also wears glasses can often be found in the playground being bullied by her white, heterosexual, middle-class, atheist classmates.

Diversity is an expression of 'difference' and can be clearly witnessed everywhere; where there is any kind of diversity there is also space for equality or inequality, whether that relates to gender, age, sexuality, race, religion, financial status, social class or other categories. In their book *Diversity, Equality and Achievement in Education*, Knowles and Lander (2011) discuss many aspects of diversity and its relation to equality and inclusion in educational settings. Rather than focusing on only one area of equality, their work investigates ways in which various sorts of diversity can be accommodated in schools and offers practical answers to problems faced when trying to make sure that education is inclusive of and accommodating towards students from minority backgrounds, including often overlooked groups like 'looked after' and traveller children.

At first sight it might seem that to deal with equality and diversity within schools, all students should be treated exactly the same and this is generally true in as much as students should all have similar access to information and services; however, this can also raise a number of issues. To treat each student exactly the same in an RSE, or any, lesson could be detrimental to individual students. An example might be the decision to not reference family backgrounds so as not to stigmatise students from varying home circumstances. However, in truth various family backgrounds, including religious, same-sex parental backgrounds, single-parent households and multi-generational households, may all need to be referenced to make RSE more accessible and useful to the various groups in the class. Normally, it is expected that students attend RSE lessons; however, it may be cruel for a student who has undergone a recent abortion to be instructed to stay in a lesson concerning the ethics of abortion, if they do not want to.

The notion of treating students 'the same' can often actually be found to engender inequality, because it doesn't take account of student diversity. An example of how treating students differently can empower them can be found in Michelle Obama's autobiographical memoir *Becoming* (2018). Obama outlines how she arrived at Princeton University on a scholarship, during the summer with other minority ethnic students. This meant that she and other students of colour were familiar with the surroundings before the rest of the mainly white cohort arrived at the

beginning of term. As part of her scholarship, Michelle needed to work for a few hours a week in 'The Third World Center', which she described as "poorly named but well intentioned" (p. 73), as it was set up to support students of colour. Whilst Michelle described Princeton as "very white and male", the university made a real effort to support students from minority backgrounds in their establishment. These students were not treated the same as the others, but the students' equality of opportunity was enhanced, and arguably assisted Michelle to become the lawyer and then an inspirational woman and 'First Lady'.

2.13 Intersectionality

Intersectionality and Intersectionality Theory were terms coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in an attempt to enlighten policy makers, commentators and the judiciary in the USA. Crenshaw's argument was that some people, e.g. black women, were not only discriminated against because of their gender, but also because of their race and that this did not just increase their vulnerability to marginalisation or discrimination additively but compounded it. More than that, their identity and the way it gave rise to discrimination was hidden. The example she used in her TED talk, released in 2017, was that of Emma, a woman who had applied for a job at a car factory and was pursuing a discrimination claim. Emma told a court that she had been denied employment because she was a black woman; however, there were black men employed for manual jobs and white women employed for the secretarial work. The court held that because there was not discrimination against black people (black people being employed in manual jobs) and there was not discrimination against women (women being employed as secretaries), they did not have to look at the possibility of discrimination against a black woman. Crenshaw maintained that at this juncture any discrimination experienced by black women was hidden in the overlap of racial and gendered identities.

Since Crenshaw's pioneering work, other identities or characteristics have been understood as predictors for intersectionality and prejudice, factors causing an interlocking matrix of oppression, including disability (Liasidou, 2013), class,

sexuality and ethnicity, alongside race and gender (Collins, 2000). Religion is seldom considered in the narratives concerning intersectionality; as Weber (2014, p. 22) expresses it: "feminist [which seems to be a dominant discourse within the field of intersectionality] research has yet to adequately engage with the role of religion in intersectionality".

For those from religious backgrounds accessing relationships and sex education, the possibility of intersectionality is considerable and multifaceted. This is because the intersectional challenges can come from their own religious community due to strongly held tenets that may seem discriminatory and affect their access to RSE, as well as from the institution or organisation delivering the RSE if it seeks to ignore, disrespect or portray a limited or ill-informed version of the faith backgrounds of the students.

In so far as I have been able to ascertain, there is very little criticism of intersectionality; that which there is tends to concentrate on the way that intersectionality and the original concept adopted and proposed by Crenshaw, has been diluted or hijacked for political ends (Robertson, 2017).

For the students in this study, issues usefully conceptualised through an intersectional approach occurred concerning gender and religion where girls from some, mostly Muslim, backgrounds were treated differently to their brothers and in some cases expected to be 'protected' by limiting freedoms of association and travel, although it was difficult to say if this was influenced by religion or culture or a mixture of both. However, many of the boys from religious backgrounds, mostly Christian ones, were also compounded in their disadvantage concerning their access to RSE, as they seemed to have little information or education concerning relationships and sex from either school or home and what they did receive was concentrated around 'keeping safe' (whatever that meant) and condom use.

Schools and educationalists are in a position to decrease the intersectional disadvantage that students from faith backgrounds may experience, while at the same time seeking to address other aspects of intersectionality due to pre-existing systematic failure to deal holistically and equitably with issues of gender, sexuality,

disability, culture and 'race'. It is hoped that as intersectionality is named, noticed and addressed in the classroom, students will be more able to access good quality RSE more readily because of the student-sensitive nature (Section 5.2.2) of materials and teaching in schools.

2.14 The journal *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning: A framework for common discourses*

Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning (Sex Education) is perhaps the foremost journal for those in the field of relationships and sex education and relationship and sex education research. It is, therefore, important for me to include a critique and appreciation of some of its contents within the literature review. I have chosen to investigate the contents of a special issue of the journal published in May 2012 which discusses what other researchers have found to be the 'Obstacles to good quality sex education' (*Sex Education*, 2012, issue 4) as this gives an insight into the political nature of RSE and some of the dominant voices in the field. All contributors to the special issue, identified the need for 'good quality' sex education however, what is seen as 'good' RSE and who should decide what it may look like in the classroom, is open to question. I have also chosen to scrutinise all six issues published during 2014, as this was when I started my study, to explore the subject matter published in this one year, thereby evaluating the content and flavour of the research being undertaken in RSE, as circulated in this publication at the commencement of the research.

2.14.1 'Obstacles to good quality sex education': a special issue of *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*

Most of the writers in this special issue say that 'good' includes the need for more inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and other sexual identities (LGBT+) issues, taught in a more tolerant way, with a less hetero-centric approach in RSE. All but two papers seemed to imply that a feminist pedagogy was needed. Sherlock suggests that a: "network of queer-feminist educators and activists" (2012, p. 393) could be part of the process for change in Ireland and Sweden. Although feminist

voices are important in the search for what constitutes good quality RSE and its future directions, there would seem to be a partiality here. This may be due to some degree to the fact that the introduction and six of the seven articles were written by only women, the seventh article, from Spain, was written by a team that contained both women and men.

This issue of the journal should have been very interesting to me. However, working in the field and having read widely on the subject of what is 'good' sex education, I felt it to be a little limited in its scope. 'Good' means different things to different people, as expected, but the predominance of research concerning LGBT+ issues, queer theory and feminist discourses, whilst admirable and much needed, seems to drown out what could have been other, more diverse voices.

"Ingram (2005) has noted that sex and relationship education programmes are almost exclusively evaluated with attention to public health outcomes" (Svenden, 2012, p. 405). This may be true, but in this issue there were three papers outlining the need for more ready use of the 'pleasure and desire' approach to RSE (Allen & Carmody, 2012; Rasmussen, 2012; Svenden, 2012) whilst there was only one that talked explicitly about the need for SRE to perform a public health role, as a 'vaccine' against HIV/AIDS in Lesotho (Khan, 2012, p. 411).

There are other discourses such as the use of peer-led, comprehensive and evidence-based RSE and the inclusion of disabled or faith-sensitive RSE that could have found their way into this special edition, but these seemed either to have been ignored by researchers or overlooked by the editors. If contributions are restricted or partial in this way, then it is not surprising that incidents like that experienced by 'Mohammed' (Section 1.2.7) take place in classrooms.

Rasmussen's article in the special issue makes it clear that it is possible to moralise against moralising and that secular RSE often: "works to exclude religious perspectives from the definition of good quality sexuality education" (Rasmussen, 2012, p. 478). I agree; this is my experience; however, this need not be the case. Jones and Hillier (2012, p. 451), talk about the need to improve school life and RSE, in particular for LGBT+ pupils; they discuss the need for work to be initiated at

every level in secondary school. They also maintain that politicians, policy makers, educational hierarchies, teacher training institutions, schools, teachers, parents and students need to support future development. I would argue that if we want to make an improvement for the good of *all* pupils, these agencies need to work together with communities, however they are constituted, to bring an improvement in the teaching of all topics covered in RSE, including the needs of LGBT+ students and other marginalised groups, in a totally inclusive way. This must, of course, include those pupils who come from faith backgrounds.

If all those involved in RSE work together, give up being entrenched in, and limited by, political and ideological boundaries, include the views of young people and be determined to work with those we see as 'other', then together we can 'trouble' the concept of 'good' RSE to make sure that our offering of RSE to the next generation is fit for purpose and the lives lived by them, in 21st century Britain.

2.14.2 A year of the journal Sex Education

As well as spending time probing the discourses and principles evident in the 'Obstacles to Good Quality Sex Education special issue' (2012), an interrogation of the entire year's issues of the journal, namely volume 14, issues 1-6 inclusive, makes for very interesting reading. It shows that the special issue discussed previously is uncharacteristic of the normal content of the journal which is generally more varied, less political and more inclusive and representative of relationships and sex education, or its namesake, worldwide.

2.14.2.1 Countries

Of the 49 articles contained in volume 14, 17 were conducted in the USA, six in the UK, five in Australia, four in South Africa and two in Canada, while other countries were represented by one study each. These included China, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Uganda, as well as a number of other European countries.

2.14.2.2 Kirby

Issue number five in 2014 was a special issue in commemoration of, and tribute to, the work of Doug Kirby. Kirby strove to produce sound evidence on which to base 'good quality' RSE (Kirby et al., 2007). It is worth starting with this issue of the journal, as Kirby's writing is cited so often in other papers during the year that it helps put some of the other papers into context; many of the problems he highlighted in his research are picked up as issues by the contributors to *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning (Sex Education)* during 2014. His call for the contextualisation of RSE, co-operation with parents in the development of RSE programmes and for more effective teacher training in the subject are all reiterated by the other researchers and picked up later in this review.

Kirby researched sex education all over the world, mainly through the meticulous scrutiny of others' empirical data. He is well known for his critique of 'Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage' (AOUM) education in the USA (Kirby, 2008). The degree to which his work and opinions are valued by many in the field is reflected in the way this edition of *Sex Education* was dedicated to his work. His writing is often used by those seeking to criticise the concept of abstinence by practitioners and those influencing RSE policy in the UK (Blake & Frances, 2001), even though Kirby's critique was based on sex education programmes in the USA. Abstinence has probably always had a place in RSE, in Britain, but I am not aware of any situations where AOUM education has been implemented in any non-religious, state schools. It is the AOUM method of delivering RSE that has been so highly criticised because of the millions of dollars spent on it in the USA, prior to the Obama-led administration. The delivery of AOUM education in American schools and colleges, especially since the release of Kirby's findings in *Emerging Answers* (2007) and his paper on AOUM in 2008, has been reduced or halted in many states. Kirby's seminal works show that quality RSE should include discussions of abstinence alongside other topics like contraception and sexually transmitted infections and that this form of RSE can help to increase the age of first sex and help students to be more likely to use contraception when they do have sex. These findings are similar to other studies (Annang et al., 2014; Bourke et al., 2014; Santa Maria et al.,

2014), where parental attitude and monitoring, as well as RSE and religiosity can also contribute to the same outcomes, i.e. later first sex and better use of contraception when young people do have sex.

2.14.2.3 Common discourses

Using the articles in volume 14 of the journal, it is possible to create a framework to discuss the dialogues which take place in other literature too. Discussions that came to the fore during the exploration of these six issues of *Sex Education* have been prominent topics for researchers and writers for several years and have been included in a myriad of other publications. As long ago as the 1920s, practitioners were calling for more, good quality sex education (Board of Education, 1923) and in 1988, Carol Lee was arguing for a higher value to be put on relationships within the subject and better teacher training provision. All these needs are considered in the papers represented in volume 14 of *Sex Education*, demonstrating that some things, especially in RSE, are slow to change.

It is worth pointing out that current (2018) guidance from the Department for Education on SRE was produced in 2000. Ofsted delivered a report in 2013, *Not Yet Good Enough*, saying that changes were needed in SRE and an independent steering group delivered a damning report for the DfE in 2008 on the state of SRE in schools. Whilst some things have changed since Carol Lee's time (1988), much work needs to be done in the area of relationships and sex education. At the time of writing the Government has outlined its plans for RSE to become compulsory in English schools and it is hoped that this will lead to good quality RSE taking place in the classroom.

2.14.2.4 From comprehensive or abstinence-only to truly comprehensive RSE

On further examination of Kirby's writing it becomes evident that whilst he is clear about the lack of evidence that that AOUM education has any benefit for students, he also maintains that the advocacy of abstinence should form a part of the sexual health messages imparted by teachers, alongside other information and skills about relationships and sex. As he writes: "programs should both encourage youths to delay or refrain from intercourse and also encourage them to use contraceptives if

they initiate intercourse” (Kirby et al., 1994, p. 359) This is a view echoed by Francis and DePalma (2014, p. 90) who argued: “In fact, comprehensive sex education that emphasises the benefits of abstinence, while also teaching about contraception and disease protection methods, has been proven to reduce teen pregnancy rates of STD infection”.

Both the Kirby and the Francis and DePalma quotations seem to depoliticise the concept of abstinence education to argue that different strands in RSE can work together. This is in line with my understanding of a wider concept of ‘truly comprehensive RSE’.

2.14.2.5 Parents: the problem, or the solution to the problem?

Parents were seen as a problem in a number of the studies contained in this volume. Johnson et al. (2014) and Rose et al. (2014) reported that parental concerns about RSE, especially from those parents with religious backgrounds, can sap the confidence of educational institutions that seek to deliver comprehensive and inclusive RSE. Parents though are also seen by some as staunch allies (Brown et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2014; Santa Maria et al., 2014). Rose et al. (2014), who acknowledged both the positive and problematic influence of parents concerning RSE, found that working with parents and introducing the values held by families, can actually help with the sustainability of a programme of RSE. Annang et al. (2014) and Santa Maria et al. (2014) understand parental disapproval and monitoring of sexual activity as protective factors, which enable young people to delay sexual debut and be more likely to use contraception when they do become sexually active. Parents reading with their children (Dwisetyani et al., 2014) and being open about sexual matters in a supportive way (Brown et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2014) can positively contribute to the sexual health and emotional resilience of children and young people. For educators, who want to teach good quality RSE and aim to empower and inform young people with methods and approaches that give them agency and the capability to make intelligent, healthy choices concerning relationships, sexual health and sexual activity, parents can be either a problem or an asset. If a significant percentage of students would like to receive at least some

of their RSE from parents, it may be that schools and others teaching RSE are missing a trick. Engaging and possibly training parents to talk to their children concerning relationships and sex could encourage parents to be more readily supportive of schools, in this area of the curriculum, enabling parents to be an ally instead of being an obstacle to the delivery of comprehensive and inclusive RSE.

2.14.2.6 Contextualisation of RSE

A large number of papers published in the 2014 issues of *Sex Education* discussed the contextualisation of RSE (Carrion & Jensen, 2014; Coyle et al., 2014; Cushman et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2014; Lagone et al., 2014; McKee et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2014), maintaining that the content and pedagogy of lessons should be adapted to be more effectively delivered and appropriate to the setting in which the RSE is situated. This is in line with the opinions of those writing about religion, values and sex education (Reiss & Mabud, 1998; Blake & Katrak, 2002; Halstead & Reiss, 2003; Katrak & Scott, 2003; NASACRE, 2007; Yip & Page, 2013). According to the papers published in *Sex Education* during 2014, this seemed especially important where there were distinct cultures or religious groups involved. Making relationships and sex education as relevant as possible seems a common-sense approach, for example using hip hop music to reach young people (Hill et al., 2014). The concept of habitus and the role it plays in affecting social practice (Nash, 2009) or constraining/transforming individuals and groups of people (Reay, 2004) seems an important concept to bear in mind. In the light of the literature represented here, this seems a valid theme to pursue when planning the content of, or the policy behind, RSE.

2.14.2.7 Teacher training

Teacher training was an issue mentioned in six of the articles (Cushman et al., 2014; Huaynoca et al., 2014; Ioannou et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2014; Lagone et al., 2014; Rose et al., 2014;) and is clearly an ongoing problem as many teachers lack the confidence and knowledge to teach RSE well. Four articles in the 'Obstacles to good quality sex education' special issue (2012) also mentioned that lack of teacher training was a difficulty. This though, is not just a concern of those carrying out

research. In 2013 the Ofsted investigation into the delivery of SRE in schools said in its *Not Yet Good Enough* report that only teachers trained in SRE should teach the subject. Ofsted inspectors found that the teaching was 'poor' when delivered by form tutors. To change this situation would require considerable investment on behalf of the Government; in these times of relative austerity it seems likely that Ofsted will be delivering a similar report at some point in the future as historically the first call for better training of those teaching sex education was back in 1923 (Board of Education, 1923). It is hoped that the making of RSE statutory in English schools (DfE, 2017b), will mean improvements in the training of teachers for RSE, but it remains to be seen if this is the case.

2.14.2.8 'Safe sex'

'Safe sex' rather than 'safer sex' was advocated in five of the papers (Dudley et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2014; Huaynocha et al., 2014; McKee et al., 2014; Wilmot et al., 2014) in this special issue of *Sex Education*: (2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d) It is strange that such a limiting and misleading term can have been accepted, seemingly without question, by the editorial board for the journal in 2014. 'Safer sex' is the term that denotes condom use and possibly other contraceptive use within a sexual relationship. Condoms are extremely effective at protecting against certain sexually transmitted infections (STIs), namely HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhoea; however, condoms are on average 'only' 98% effective against pregnancy (Trussell, 2007), although the likelihood of failure is higher for inexperienced condom users. Condoms give less protection against STIs like genital warts, genital herpes or pubic lice. Even organisations that purport to offer high quality sexual health advice to young people, still talk about 'safe sex' (NHS Choices, 2010). Sex with a condom can certainly be 'safer', but not 'safe' (BASHH, 2015) and if educators suggest that using a condom makes a young person safe from pregnancy and STIs, then young people are being misled. The term 'safe sex' also takes no consideration of the emotional and safeguarding issues both of which need careful thought if teenage sex, even sex with a condom as physical protection, can be said to be 'safe'.

2.14.2.9 The relationship element to RSE

One US-based study (Coyle et al., 2014) contained in the 2014 volume of *Sex Education*, suggested that there should be more inclusion of teaching and learning to do with romantic relationships in sex education. Relationships, including romantic relationships, have been part of RSE provision in the United Kingdom for many years. Up until 2017, sex education was referred to by much of the UK educational establishment as 'sex and relationship education' (SRE) (DfE, 2000). However, in Northern Ireland and some local authorities, like Leicestershire, (Leicestershire Healthy Schools, 2015), important organisations like the Local Government Association (LGA, 2015) and young people's websites giving relationship and sexual health advice (FRYP, 2015), the term had already been changed to 'RSE'. This change of name and the intention to make the subject compulsory was only made for England after pressure from the Commons Education Committee (2015), a letter sent from the Education Committee signed too by members of four other select committees (Education Committee, 2016), parents' groups and children's charities (Barnardo's, 2017). Relationships are likely to take a more significant role as relationships education is taught to primary school children and the understanding grows about the link between healthy relationships, self-esteem and the protective qualities they engender in the battle against sexual exploitation. These relationship elements of RSE also serve to contextualise and enrich students' understanding of sexual relationships.

2.14.2.10 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBT+) issues

LGBT+ issues featured strongly in the content of the 49 articles, mostly from developed countries like the USA, UK, Canada and Australia. The issue of true equality in the delivery of RSE is important for all minority groups though this is a contentious issue as who is seen as 'other' is more about those who are doing the seeing, rather than those who are being seen. The law is very clear about equality in the UK. Same sex marriage is both legal and seen as constructive for society by many commentators (BBC, 2013). Homophobic acts and attitudes are highly

objectionable to most people, whatever their views on homosexuality (Goddard & Horrocks, 2012). The Asher's Baking Company case, where a bakery was unwilling to make a cake that supported same sex marriage, demonstrates that prejudice against LGBT+ groups, or the messages they want to put forward, is unacceptable in British society (McDonald, 2016). The classroom is an important place to address these issues, but it is imperative that all types of prejudice are addressed.

2.14.2.11 Improvement to RSE

All of the above themes and most of the studies in volume 14 of *Sex Education* add to the body of knowledge will help practitioners better understand obstacles to the delivery of 'good quality' RSE and how to make improvements to the content in and teaching of sex education for school-aged children worldwide. The diversity and complex nature of the cultures engaged in the positioning of various researchers and the topics covered, gives the volume and its readers a rich and enlightening understanding of the multifaceted intricacies faced when engaging with this subject. As such, I felt that the 2014 volume gave a holistic understanding of the approaches needed and the ways forward for RSE, both in the UK and also in other parts of the world.

2.15 Putting the needs of students first

Many issues studied in my research have been explored in this literature review and just as Walby (2005, p. 35) maintains that gender issues should be central to mainstream debates in politics and government, "not a separate field of study" I would also argue that faith, sexuality and student voices should be at the heart of mainstream debates concerning RSE. There is a need to put more emphasis on the needs of students, so that RSE does not purely serve society's desire to address public health issues like teen pregnancy and STI rates or to push a particular set of values, tropes and agendas.

3 Methodology and methods

Some researchers start with a theory and then complete a study to either validate or disprove that theory. A classic example of this is Pavlov's work with dogs, explained in Harré's (2009) *Pavlov's Dogs and Schrödinger's Cat*. Pavlov thought he had observed an interesting phenomenon in dogs in his laboratory; he then proposed the theory of classical conditioning and undertook a series of studies to investigate and refine this theory. In contrast, my research is better described as 'grounded', in that theory is being developed as the study progresses (Charmaz, 2014). The concept of 'faith-sensitive' relationships and sex education (RSE) is being investigated, rather than a theory being tested by the research. This investigation is supported by and nurtured within a cradle of my knowledge and experience, including a knowledge of the issues and the literature involved in the field, but the study is not dictated by the form of this 'cradle' (Figure 3.1). My design builds level by level, much the same as a distillation tower, where the crudest outputs come off first and then the most highly refined products are extracted at the top. So it is here, with each stage of the study being founded on the findings extracted from the previous stage's data collection.

3.1 Methodological stance

My research employs a mostly constructivist (Piaget, 1954) methodology and epistemology, using an applied and mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003), explained in more detail in the following sections. However, where a more positivist approach can give a better understanding of the data it has been employed (Chih Lin, 1998). Where quantitative data are being viewed and analysed, graphs and percentages are used to demonstrate the opinions of large numbers of students. However, the reasons for those opinions are expressed more effectively through the qualitative data. My work reflects a pragmatist viewpoint (Dewey, 1909) and draws on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Charmaz, 2014) with the study being viewed through a practitioner's lens. I recognise the value of other methodological stances but chose grounded theory as the basis for my work because I wanted to start at grass roots level and work

upwards. I use student voices to build theory from the ideas, life experiences and understandings of students rather than starting with an initial theory and endeavouring to prove or disprove it by the analysis of the data.

3.1.1 Constructivism

When discussing and researching issues involving the lives, values and beliefs of young people there is typically a constructivist emphasis to the work. Each student's experiences and values are complex and, in some way, 'constructed' (Vygotsky, 1934; Bruner, 1986; Kincheloe, 2005) by the young person themselves and where and how they are situated. In other words, their lives are built (developed) by a myriad of experiences and influences, including their background, the environment and their beliefs and values. This means that the study is heavily skewed, out of necessity, towards an interpretivist (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) approach. Even some of the quantitative data manifest an element of interpretation, e.g. 34% of the pupils in the study adopted a Muslim label for themselves, but it is likely that there will be a range of understandings of what it is to be a Muslim (Modood, 2003).

3.1.2 Grounded theory

'Grounded theory' is a phrase first coined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to describe a research approach that uses research data to formulate theory in an iterative way and doesn't try to align data with a pre-existing theory.

Glaser and Strauss' early approach to grounded theory considered that the researcher should not have any influence on the findings of the study. Glaser's grounded theory ideas were strict; the decontextualised data were seen as paramount in importance and the researcher was expected to be neutral and objective. Strauss, with Corbin (1997), went on to further refine the approach, realising that researchers cannot totally remove their influence from their research and cannot completely shed themselves of any prior knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Many other people have used and written about grounded theory, including Kathy Charmaz (2014) who took grounded theory in a

different direction and named her version of grounded theory 'constructivist grounded theory'. Charmaz recognised that any data and thus any findings from a study would be 'situated' in some way and as such would have a certain amount of 'construction' within the data and analysis, due to the humanity and the lives of the participants and the researcher. However, Glaser (2002, p. 1) argued that "Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) is a misnomer" as he felt that the constructivist element within grounded theory would detract from the objectivity he sought to bring to qualitative research.

I adopted a 'constructivist grounded theory' approach to my research because I wanted the voices of students to be heard and the data to take centre stage in the study, whilst acknowledging that the variety of views, ideas and life aspirations of the students involved would be affected and possibly dictated by varying aspects of where and how they lived and what was important to them. A grounded theory approach has been used to ensure that the data dictate the research and not vice versa. This approach builds, not simply tests, theoretical ideas. At each stage of study, the data were open-coded and then the codes were put into groups which fed into axial codes, whilst memos were written during the analysis to inform future analysis and identify themes emerging from the coding.

It is important to identify the possible bias that can be inherent in any research and exercise reflexivity to mitigate possible partiality in the data analysis. As Charmaz (2014, p. 340) argues: "Grounded theory methods enhance possibilities for you to transform knowledge [...] When you bring passion, curiosity, openness and care to your work, novel experiences will ensue, and your ideas will emerge. As you move from data through analysis to writing and the research report, your journey through grounded theory may transform you". I presume that all researchers and not just grounded theorists would argue that their work is carried out with passion, curiosity and openness. I believe that my knowledge of the literature has been further refined, enlightened and transformed by the views and the experiences of the lives lived, and challenges faced, by the participants who are given voice in this study.

3.1.3 *Theoretical framework or cradle and lens*

Many researchers plan their theoretical framework at the beginning of their study and normally well before data collection – a framework that supports, scaffolds and contains their research. What constitutes a theoretical framework within research and especially in the field of grounded theory research is contested (Elliott & Higgins, 2012). It may be possible that theoretical frameworks already used in other research (e.g. critical race theory), are a good place to start (Solozano & Yosso, 2002) when designing a research project, but some argue that a theoretical framework can actually work to limit the scope of a study (Mitchell, 2014) and so should be viewed with scepticism. Whilst many scholars assume that without a strong theoretical framework a study is lacking and unstructured (Lederman & Lederman, 2015, p. 593), Lederman and Lederman also argue that there can sometimes be too “narrow a conception of what constitutes a theoretical framework” and that this is especially a problem for those conducting a grounded theory research project. In my study, the theoretical framework is seen as a ‘lens’ in the same way as Creswell et al. (2003, p. 160) refer to a number of possible theoretical frameworks as lenses:

[...] social science researchers bring to their inquiries a formal lens by which they view their topics, including gendered perspectives (e.g. feminist theory), cultural perspectives (e.g. racial/ethnic theory), lifestyle orientation (e.g. queer theory), critical theory perspectives, and class and social status views.

The lens through which I view my research and most of my interactions within the realm of RSE is that of the ‘practitioner’s lens’ (McKernan, 2005). The motivation, methodology, data and findings are viewed through this lens as this doesn’t limit or constrain the data but nurtures them towards producing outcomes that benefit the quality and scope of RSE in the future. This practitioner’s lens is used to give value to the individuals involved in the research, offering students a voice and giving them agency. It is also a lens and understanding that enabled me, once all the data have been collected, analysed and findings produced, to continue to use

those findings to produce recommendations, useful and practical tools and guidance for those who are working in the field of RSE.

As a practitioner in the field of RSE myself, I was able to construct the cradle for the research, which includes my experiences and young people's voices together with a 'constructivist grounded theory' approach and the relevant literature. It is the use of grounded theory within this study that liberated the data gathering methods, the data themselves and the findings to say what the students wanted and needed to say concerning RSE and faith, but also gave a freedom to say much more. The grounded theory approach complemented the practitioner's lens, to stop the study being constrained by a more rigid theoretical framework determined in advance of data collection.

This does not mean that the study undertaken is rudderless or undirected. Grounded theory provides a clear set of procedures that were followed to engage with the data to explore what students saw as both good quality and faith-sensitive RSE, which in turn led to notions of what the students understood to be LGBT+-sensitive and then student-sensitive RSE. The initial elements, which provide the cradle for the research, were developed with the needs of the study and students in mind, with not just a practitioner's lens, but also arguably a practitioner's heart. The research methods, questions asked in the questionnaires and scenarios used were devised in partnership with the students involved in the foundational semi-structured focus groups during the first round of data gathering and form the basis of the research, in line with grounded theory, giving those young people the role of co-researchers.

3.1.4 A cradle for development of findings that work towards theory

Whilst drawing on grounded theory, this work is based on years of experience, both mine and others', and a body of literature (including Lee, 1988; Reiss & Mabud, 1998; Blake & Frances, 2001; Blake & Katrak, 2002; Ofsted, 2002; Halstead & Reiss 2003; Halstead & Waite, 2003; Riches, 2004; Yip et al., 2011; House of Commons, 2015) which, although seldom a total 'fit' for my research, informed its development, gave basis to and helped situate the study. The initial findings from

the formative, semi-structured focus groups formed the foundation for, gave direction to and helped form the approach of my research study. I now see my experience, the literature and methodology as a 'cradle' for the ideas and views of participants in the study (Figure 3.1).

It is a cradle that protects. A place of nurture and growth, where findings make themselves heard and are not dictated by outside influences. The body of literature, my familiarity with the issues, information and policy, as well as the challenges faced by young people and those developing policy in RSE helped me understand and analyse the data. However, none of these directs the findings. The 'cradle' has supported and underpinned the work. The findings from the focus groups were the foundation on which the development of the model rested while it progressed, but for any recommendations or possible theory to gain sustainability, integrity and independence, it needed to develop its own form over the course of the study.

In the words of Alsem Strauss in Corbin, 2015, p. 1):

Qualitative research is not meant to have a lot of structure or rigid approach to analysis, it is interpretive, very dynamic, a free-flowing process, and unless researchers understand the basis of what they are trying to do, they lose these aspects of analysis. Their research becomes superficial and fails to prove the novel insights into human behaviour that give qualitative research its dynamic edge.

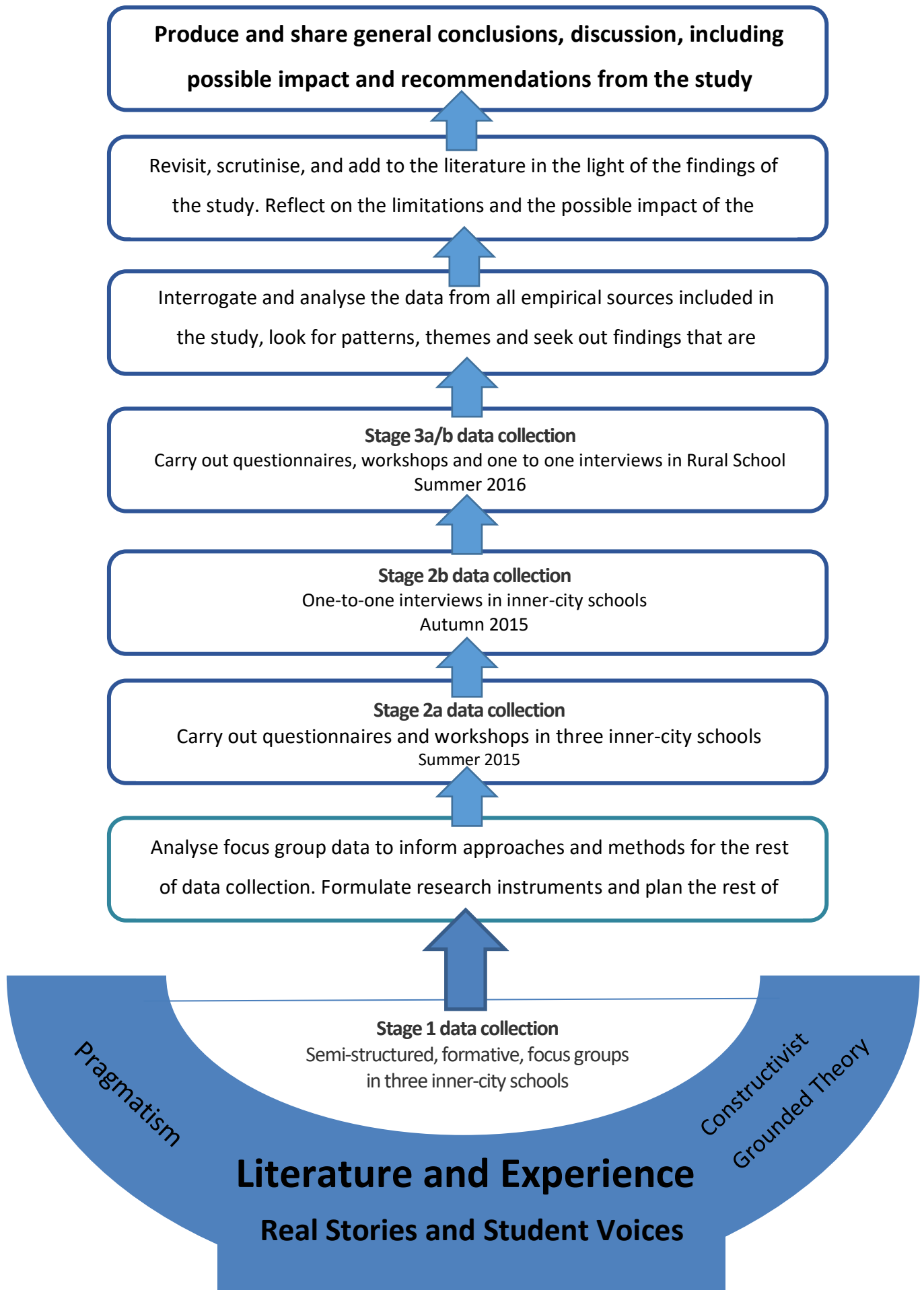


Figure 3.1 A cradle for the development of research findings (Sell)

3.1.5 *Pragmatism in the study*

Many researchers adhere to certain theories about research, as for example Roy Bhaskar does in respect of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 2008), but 'adhere to' is not a term I would readily identify as part of my research approach. Having considered the various methodologies available to me as a researcher, such as phenomenology (Husserl, 1936/1954), grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000), intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2011) and narrative research (Labov, 1982; Riessman, 2013)), I realise that I am a methodological and philosophical opportunist, happy to draw on the methods, schools of thought and theories that best suit the needs of this study, and the young people it seeks to serve. I find myself a Dewey-style pragmatist (Dewey, 1909). I also stand shoulder to shoulder with Silverman (2006, p. 379), a respected academic, who: "would aim to clear our heads of the babble that sometimes passes as intellectual argument, in order to look at the world afresh". My research and the practical applications it may have were the prime focus of this study; various academic arguments and theories have only been used where they best served that cause.

Taking a lead from the focus groups undertaken in autumn 2014, a methodologically pluralistic (Creswell, 2003) approach was employed. This included questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2011) with both closed and open questions and one-to-one student interviews (Oppenheim, 1992; Seale et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2011). Since only one student suggested, early on, that I might interview adults and as the data gained from the students was so enlightening and informative, I felt that adding an adult perspective might detract from the richness of the students' voices. This, however, does not mean that there are no questions to be asked of some of the adults involved in the lives of these young people. The findings show that there are many enquiries to be made of teachers, parents, policy makers and faith leaders, but those explorations may need to form the basis of another study.

Members of the focus groups suggested the use of workshops as part of a mixed methods approach. Although I had not seen workshops used as a data collection

method in any of the literature, the workshops conducted as part of this study gave an insight into the views of different groups of students and formed a particularly valuable and interesting element of the findings. I am glad I chose to listen to the young people and include workshops alongside the more orthodox methods of data collection like questionnaires and interviews.

3.2 Methods and methods used

3.2.1 Sampling methods

Random sampling is often seen as the gold standard of sampling techniques in research studies as it more easily leads to the possibility of generalisability for research (Arber, 1993). However, random sampling was not possible, practical or appropriate for my study. A number of decisions were required and aims set for the research that would give voice to the students participating in the data gathering. Purposive sampling (Silverman, 2000; Tonco, 2007) was employed in the selection of schools for the study. The complexities, difficulties and conflicts experienced in relationships and sex education (RSE) in areas of high religious observance and ethnic diversity was the focus of the research. I therefore decided to find a number of diverse schools within one inner-city area, where those complexities may be experienced by the students. A girls' state school with mainly Muslim students (which I call Snelgrove School), a voluntary aided boys' school predominantly Christian in nature (St Joseph's School) and one mixed state school with a combination of religions and cultures (Fitzgerald School) were selected. This election helped to provide participants whose views and experiences were likely to inform the study. I also decided to carry out the same data gathering (except the initial focus groups and pilot) in a rural state school (Rural School) to compare and contrast results and to further contextualise the study by providing a wider perspective on the inner-city results. This helped to triangulate findings from the inner-city schools, demonstrating both similarities and divergence in aspects of the data as well as giving further insight including collaborative and conflicting evidence with regard to aspects of the findings from the inner-city-schools.

The study employed Year 10 students throughout, even though the data collection took place over three years, so that there was a similar maturity across the sample. The only exception to this was where students, who had submitted Year 10 questionnaires, had moved on to Year 11 before being interviewed.

Within the confines of the timetables, characteristics and demography of the schools, the samples were as random as possible; all groups – both focus groups and those used for the workshops and questionnaires – were of mixed ability and background.

Selective or purposive sampling, also known as theoretical sampling (Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007; Charmaz, 2014), was used to decide which students would be invited back for interview. Selective, because only those chosen by myself were invited back for interview, purposive, because there was a purpose behind my choice of students for interview and theoretical, because those students who had something to add to the emerging themes in the data were invited for further consultation. Students invited for interview represented a range of different religious, cultural and social views; at the same time an equal gender mix was sought. All students asked back for interview had engaged fully with the study at the questionnaire stage and were felt able to represent more clearly the views expressed less articulately by other students. A number of these students also provided distinctive perspectives on some of the issues that emerged from the questionnaire data. An example of this was a girl in Rural School whom I will call 'Sandy'. Sandy felt, like others, that there ought to be a greater emphasis on LGBT+ issues within RSE, but also took on a unique, within the participants, minority religious view as someone who followed a Wicca or Pagan belief system. At interview Sandy also turned out to be the only participant, who was open about having a same sex partner and an LGBT+ identity

The use of selective, purposive and theoretical sampling limits the generalisability of some aspects of the study but does ensure that the research concentrates on a high number of participants who encounter the intersection between religion,

society, sex and education as a possible tension in their lives, an issue that emerged from the data which has direct implications for the teaching of faith-sensitive RSE.

3.2.2 *Data collection methods*

3.2.2.1 Semi-structured 'formative' focus groups (Summer 2014)

Semi-structured focus groups are utilised frequently in the field of social and medical sciences but, in so far as I have been able to ascertain, focus groups are seldom described as semi-structured in the research methodology literature, although semi-structured interviews and focus groups in general are written about extensively (Kruegar, 2009; Longhurst 2016). I would argue that the very nature of focus groups mean that they are almost inevitably semi-structured. Once a conversation or discussion is in 'full swing' it is likely, and probably reasonably desirable, for the conversation to go in a somewhat different direction from that anticipated by the researcher, and the fluidity of this form of data collection is what makes it so useful. The groups selected for this research were also described as 'formative' because they helped to form the study, in that the further stages of the research were built on ideas that emerged from them. At the start of my study, semi-structured focus groups gave me the depth and wide-ranging findings that were needed to continue to develop the direction and methodology for the study. These initial focus groups met in three inner-city schools: Snelgrove School, Fitzgerald School and St Joseph's School. All participants were in Year 10 (14-15 years old).

3.2.2.2 Questionnaires

(Summer 2015, inner-city schools and summer 2016 Rural School)

Questionnaires (De Vaus, 2002) were identified by the formative focus groups as a data collection method for the second phase of data collection, on the ground that they gave more pupils the opportunity to have their voice heard. The surveys, made up of closed and open-ended questions, provided quantitative data that could be analysed statistically alongside 'thick' qualitative data. As part of the questionnaire, students were asked to give reasons for their "yes" or "no" answers. The

explanations given demonstrated that there were often various reasons for the same answer, depending on the student. An example of this was where two students said they didn't have any conflict between the way they lived their lives and their religion or belief system. One was agnostic and wrote: "I have my own views and I am not religious"; the other, a highly religious student, explained: "It is my duty to obey God's word. There isn't any conflict with anything to do with my religion". These two students gave the same answer but for very different reasons, giving a greater insight into the real lives of those taking part in the study.

Pilot sessions with draft questionnaires were held in all three urban schools. Changes were made in line with the difficulties encountered and suggestions received from students during the pilot group meetings. Some students stated that the questionnaire numbering should be changed so that the questions followed on from one another more clearly; others suggested the rewording of some questions. The pilot groups also provided the scenarios that were used in the workshops (Appendix 1).

Most of the simple questions suggested by the focus groups for inclusion in the questionnaires, e.g. 'Do you think that relationships and sex education should be compulsory in school?', which asks for a yes/no/maybe response, included the follow up question 'Please give reasons for your answer'. Geertz's work on 'thick description' (1973) suggests that by contextualising the data collected, researchers are able to give better, richer, 'thicker' and more valid explanations for the reasoning behind responses from research participants. This in turn allows for more effective data analysis. Introducing an open-ended element to the questions helped students offer an expansion to, and a validation of, the preceding response. Three classes in each of the four schools involved in the study completed questionnaires under quasi-examination conditions, to ensure each student's voice was heard without the chance of discussion leading to homogenisation of responses.

3.2.2.3 Workshops

(Autumn 2015, inner-city schools and summer 2016, Rural School)

Workshops were a form of data gathering suggested by the formative focus groups. Whilst Cohen et al. mention 'role play' in their book *Research Methods in Education* (2011), workshops seem to be an unusual form of data collection. These one-hour scenario discussion sessions proved to be a stimulating and insightful method of data collection but needed an innovative approach to data analysis and required transcription and categorisation of findings to investigate the issues which surfaced.

Workshops were carried out in one class (between 20-30 students) in each of the participating schools. Each student was given a set of scenarios containing real life situations (Appendix 2). Their views and advice for the young people involved in the scenarios was requested, firstly, on a simple form, given to all students. Then the classes were split into at least three small groups, in which students showing a similar level of religious observance as identified on the 'religious importance scale' (Section 3.2.6.1) were clustered together. The groups then carried out the activity again, but they had to come to a consensus within the group. The workshops helped to evaluate if and how religious views affect the way participants understand situations, see the problems and work through the issues. The content of the scenarios was determined by the students in the formative focus groups and the pilot groups for the questionnaires.

These workshops worked well in the inner-city schools because there was a wide range of religious observance. However, in Rural School no one in the class selected for the workshop identified themselves as religious, so the workshops proved less useful when analysing religious responses to issues but helped to balance the responses of the inner-city students.

The workshops produced further understanding of the interactions between faith, values and student attitudes towards relationships, sexual health and sexual practice. The workshops also showed the wide range of responses that are evident, even in groups of a similar religiosity, and how an individual's views can be lost, changed or ignored once in a group.

3.2.2.4 One-to-one interviews

(Autumn 2015, inner-city schools and summer 2016 Rural School)

One-to-one interviews followed the questionnaires and workshops serving to expand, explain and clarify the findings of the surveys. A small number of students, between five and seven from each school, giving a total of 25 students, were selected for one-to-one interviews, based on their questionnaire answers. I felt that the responses from those chosen for interview were particularly pertinent to the study due to their interesting views on religion and RSE and the interactions of the two or because they were representative of some, or many, of the other participants (Merton & Kendal, 1946; Cohen et al., 2011). These interviews helped to shed light on the findings revealed by the questionnaires.

3.2.3 *Difficulties encountered during data collection*

Minor difficulties were encountered during data collection. On one of the three days that I was in St Joseph's School, I had to move rooms during one set of interviews with three students because the first room proved to be too noisy to record the interviews; unfortunately, this meant that I had to use the Head Teacher's office, who was away from the school leaving his office free. It may be coincidence, but the length of the interviews and the willingness of the students to discuss issues seemed diminished by using the Head Teacher's room, even though confidentiality was assured and maintained.

Difficulty in recruiting schools to take part in my research was experienced in one school. This particular school in the countryside had given permission for me to carry out the research six months previously but cancelled just a week before the agreed date for data collection. The head teacher had been offered a promotion to manage a number of schools in the area and, it seemed, was unsure about hosting research that involved the issues of religion and sex so close to his departure. A similar replacement school was found about 20 miles away from the original school due to staff contacts at University College London and a university based close to the initial countryside school. This delayed rural data collection by two terms but

meant that the students at the replacement countryside school [Rural School] were of a similar age to the participants in the inner-city schools, namely, term three of Year ten at secondary school. Rural School, like the inner-city schools, was most accommodating and a pleasure to work with.

3.2.4 *Data analysis methods*

3.2.4.1 Introduction: immersion or puddle splashing

As a critical researcher, I cannot help questioning the “oppression [that] is legitimatised via dominant ideology” (Harvey, 1990, p. 24). This is true of both religious dogma and liberal dogma alike. It is natural for me to interrogate these warring discourses, as I see their entrenchment as a cause for concern. That is not to say that there are only warring discourses within RSE; many of those involved in policy and the delivery of RSE seek to moderate opposing stances, but ideologies and ignorance on both sides of this divide only serve to create an atmosphere of animosity and conflict (Measor, 2000; Luker, 2006). This hostility prevents those who profess an interest in what is ‘best’ for young people from actually listening to students’ real needs. Respect for the time and effort invested by my participants was critical to the data analysis, encouraging me to make sure their voices were heard as truly as is possible through the conclusions I draw at the end of this thesis. Every endeavour has been made to represent accurately the views, and aspirations for the study, of the participants when analysing data.

When undertaking analysis various writers maintain that a researcher needs to ‘immerse’ themselves in their data. Braun and Clarke’s much cited article (2006, p. 87) suggests that: “immersion usually involves ‘repeated reading’ of the data, and reading the data in an active way, searching for meanings, patterns and so on”. I agree with Braun and Clarke’s assertions, but would not use the verb ‘immerse’ as I find that engaging with the data is both problematic and difficult, tricky and an actively vigorous activity. The word ‘immerse’ conjures up, for me, a vision of a swimming pool, where it is possible to slide leisurely, smoothly and gently into the water (data) and you become immediately wet, enjoying your ‘immersion’ in a relaxed way, an easy way. I see the data as a large puddle, one you can stand in

with your welly boots and rain mac on and never really get wet. As a researcher investigating student voices, it becomes my responsibility to take off my boots of preconceived ideas and coat of adult understanding and to splash about, making a real effort to experience the contexts, patterns and meanings within the data; the views, ideas and beliefs of the participants, splashing about so that the concepts contained in the data penetrate my clothing of academic appreciation drop by drop, until they saturate my understanding and writing. Viewed in this way it is clearer how much effort and thinking must go into the perception and interpretation of the data.

For this 'immersion', or 'puddle splashing', to take place in a useful way it must start with valuing the young people in the study. I remember some of their faces as they bent over their questionnaires and recall the way in which some of them shared their struggles and desires for the future as I interviewed them. I remember too how they became quiet and engrossed when listening to how this research might be used in the future to improve RSE for other pupils. It is these recollections that will remind me of my duty of care to see that their offering to this area of study is well invested. It is with this vision that I carefully evaluated the different possible methods of analysis.

Only data that could be recorded verbatim was input and transcribed by others, all reading of transcripts and coding was carried out by me aiding my 'closeness' to the data and the messages it contained.

3.2.4.2 Analysis methods explored

When analysing qualitative data, it is especially important to investigate various possible methods for analysis and select the tools that best support and give most effective voice to the information provided by participants. I designed my research to have the views, ideas, struggles and opinions of young people at the heart of its findings. It is my responsibility to analyse the data in such a way that I give clear expression to these young people in the most successful way possible.

Data need to be contextualised as well as interrogated for meaning, both theoretical and practical. Integrity demands that the nature of the findings be analysed and ideas about how they may be applied in the classroom evaluated in a way that generates 'rich understanding' (Reeves et al., 2008) and not just surface knowledge. Quality qualitative analysis needs to complement and add depth to the analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaires. There is an imperative here to delve deep into the real-life complexity encountered by those taking part in my study.

Whilst grounded theory was my chosen method of data collection and it may be intuitive to use this as an analytical tool too, I decided to look at various analysis methods and evaluate their suitability for use within this study and to assess whether it was appropriate to carry on with grounded theory as an analytical tool.

3.2.4.2.1 Phenomenological psychology

The phenomenological approach to research analysis was developed largely by Edmund Husserl (1936, 1954). He studied what is experienced and how. The researcher using this approach is expected to ignore any knowledge they may have and concentrate on the phenomenon being investigated. They are also expected to ignore themselves, investigating and reflecting on the subject, without judgement, recognising and analysing the rational links between I (ego) and the world in which the participant is situated, identifying and exploring any interactions that may occur. Husserl saw phenomenological psychology as almost a pre-stage to investigation, more a way of thinking. This approach has been used to investigate several different topics including patient choices about chemotherapy and emotions about changing schools (Pietkiewics & Smith, 2014). In a similar way to that in which Strauss and Corbin (1997), and later Charmaz (2014), questioned if it was possible for a researcher to ignore themselves, their own knowledge or experience when using grounded theory, I too would question if it is possible for any researcher totally to ignore themselves when carrying out research. It may be better to acknowledge any possible influence or bias arising from the researcher and then mitigate that influence or bias.

Giorgi (1975, 1985, 2009) decided that to make phenomenological analysis more accountable in research terms, he would divide his analysis into four protocols or stages:

1. Initial reading to get an overall sense of what the data are saying;
2. Dividing the data into 'meaning units' – these can be any size;
3. Reflecting on the importance of each unit. Each question posed by the research would be asked of each meaning unit;
4. Attempting to gain understanding by reflecting on the data. Once these reflections are refined, they can be presented as findings.

Whilst this method of analysis was not used per se, aspects of it crept into the way that grounded theory was used as the themes emerged from the data and were linked with one another and the situations and contexts of the participants.

3.2.4.2.2 Discourse analysis

Discursive or discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000) seeks out the conversations or parts of stories within the information, either written or given orally by the participants, in an effort to analyse the meaning behind the words. Material can be viewed through the lens of feminism, race, gender, class, age or religion, to name a few, and can be used by researchers from varying epistemological positions.

Words are studied in their own right and not just seen as a vehicle to carry and express intentioned meaning. Discourse is seen as a performance (McMullen, 2011) to be scrutinised. This form of analysis can have its disadvantages as it may take the words and the discourses away from the context where they were generated or the person (and all that means) who expressed them. The researcher can, if they want to, see the words in the same way as someone who is given a piece of chocolate. They can analyse the constituent parts, explain that it is a colloidal system (or is it an emulsion?) made of dairy products, sugar and cocoa, but still not understand its origin as an Easter egg which would have originally come with a foil wrapper and a pretty box, giving the chocolate a particular and symbolic meaning.

The idea that within discursive analysis: "Contradiction became, then, something expected and worthy of study, rather than a problem to be explained away"

(McMullen, 2011, p. 206) was enticing, because I was very aware that the material I would encounter was likely, in places, to be contradictory in nature. However, for me, the reasons behind and context of the given information are central to the analysis of the data. I did not want simply to analyse the words themselves, by taking them out of context, where it is possible to build meaning from words that could be far away from that intended by the students. I knew I wanted to keep my interpretation of young people's words to a minimum and didn't want to present a hypothesis that could 'highjack meaning'. It was expected that the views of the students would, at least to a certain extent, speak for themselves.

3.2.4.2.3 Narrative research

Narrative research is where the stories told within the data are put under scrutiny. There are different narrative approaches: thematic, structural, interactional and performative are the main ones, although they can often overlap and have merged boundaries during their use in the field of research. According to Reissman (2005), narratives still need the interpretation of the researcher to give them meaning.

Narrative analysis is said by Josselson (2011, p. 228) to be a: "Gaining of understanding of the whole until we arrive at a holistic understanding that best encompasses the meaning of the parts [...] These iterative readings continue until we develop a 'good Gestalt' that encompasses contradictions. The different themes make sensible patterns and enter into a coherent unity". Narrative analysis would therefore seem to seek to 'knock the corners off' the data until the data fit into a coherent unity (Josselson, 2011). Looking at the qualitative data I have collected, it seems that to try to make these data coherent or unified, even within the individual student's contribution, would be too simplistic. The point of some of the data collected is the juxtaposed and conflicting nature of the opinions, ideas and views expressed, even by one participant. At this point in adolescence it is the confusion, tension and pressure young people feel that makes for the enthralling character of the data. To unify that in any way may reduce the importance of the views expressed.

3.2.4.2.4 Intuitive inquiry

Intuitive inquiry is more complex and 'slippery' in nature than the other forms of analysis discussed above, as it seems to rely more on the intuition of the researcher. Whilst all analysis is undertaken through and with the lens or lenses of the person carrying out the study, this method seems to rely on a far heavier set of spectacles on the part of researcher than other analytical tools. It would also seem that the field of intuitive inquiry is not well populated by experts in the area. In her chapter in *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis* (Wertz et al., 2011), Rosemarie Anderson (2011) has to reference her own writing a great deal, as it would seem that there is not a substantial amount of literature to back her arguments for the use of intuitive inquiry as an important method of analysis.

Intuitive inquiry relies on five cycles of interpretation (Anderson & Braud, 2011). There is an expectation that the data will have an impact on the personal life of the researcher (Anderson, 2011). Intuitive inquiry is based on hermeneutics and overlaps with phenomenological and heuristic research. Its use of words like mystical, joy and wellness suggests that it would never be described as positivist (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) or scientific in nature (Popper, 1959). However, Anderson (2011, p. 245) maintains that "Intuition is related to scientific insight" and it may have a great deal to offer in the interpretation of data, reaching spiritual and intuitive levels of understanding that are absent in other methods.

This inductive method demands the researcher employs a deliberate spiritual lens, with more perceptions than figures and interpretation than declared opinions. This method is at odds with the stated aim for my research to hear and maximise student voices and minimise my own voice. An intuitive overlay or filter may distort the student articulation of opinions sought by this study, even though it might allow a deeper understanding of the nature of the studied phenomenon.

3.2.4.2.5 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is a data-driven tool and uses coding and memo writing to analyse the data presented. Each datum is given a code, a code dictated by the data and not

by preconceived ideas or predetermined coding frames that make assumptions of what the content of the data may show. Grounded theory relies on the researcher having an interactive and intimate relationship with sources of the data – in this study the questionnaire and workshop scripts and interview transcripts. Codes help to untangle the spoken words and writings of the individuals taking part to give these more meaning and to allow puzzles and enigmas thrown up by the data to be more easily scrutinised and made sense of. Whilst these codes were being applied by me, memos were written alongside to ‘catch’ any thoughts, ideas or questions that became obvious or interesting along the way. Further information was collected to try to explain any surprises, as well as the more typical content in the data. In the original, strict version of grounded theory, previous knowledge is disregarded and literature on the subject ignored in an attempt to ‘listen’ only to the data.

‘Grounded theory’ was a concept first employed by Glaser and Strauss (1967); it was later developed by Strauss and Corbin (1996), moving from a positivist to a post-positivist approach. Since then, others have moved the theory, and its use, on, acknowledging that it is impossible to remove all previous knowledge from the ‘field of enquiry’ (Charmaz, 2011, p. 169).

Indeed, if ‘field of inquiry’ is likened to a ‘field of play’, it is possible, though like any analogy this can be pushed too far. To envisage Glaser’s strategy of data collection and analysis as a football match where the team plays, making its own decisions on the pitch, with the silent coach watching from the stands, simply keeping the score, giving no direction once the game has started. Some scholars, however, acknowledge that there is always going to be some influence exerted by the researcher and that the knowledge and understanding they bring to the ‘game’ is invaluable in trying to discover answers to their questions. This is more akin to a football match with an active coach on the touch-line, who is part of the action and brings expertise, support and direction to the players, but only when it is needed. It is the team on the pitch that is of prime importance, as it is the team that plays the game; the coach is there to bring encouragement and structure to enable the team to play well, but the coach does not actually appear on the field of play.

Academics such as Anthony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (Bryant, 2002; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014) make the distinction between classic grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and more contemporary forms obvious by their writing and the coining of the term 'Constructivist Grounded Theory' (CGT) which "seeks interpretivist understanding" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 168).

3.2.5 Discussion of methods of quantitative analysis

I have investigated a range of different approaches to analysis to see how best to glean the most relevant findings from the data I have. Given the various methods of collection, i.e. focus groups, questionnaires, workshops and interviews, and given the range of themes that emerged from the data, it would seem that the most appropriate way to analyse the content of the qualitative data is using coding. There are various methods of analysis that use coding; however, phenomenological analysis and CGT in particular also demand reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Phenomenological analysis relies heavily on the views, ideas and understanding of the researcher whereas grounded theory because it is only by being highly reflexive that the researcher can truly 'ground' analysis and findings in the data and not in their own desires and aspirations for the study, it more suited to use for the study. Some methods of analysis, such as discourse analysis, work from looking into the data from the outside, whilst others, such as intuitive inquiry and CGT, take an inside-out view, trying to analyse with an empathy for the individual participants. These methods of analysis also develop an understanding of context: "Classic grounded theory goes around the phenomenon; constructivist grounded theory, attempts to go inside it" (Kathy Chamaz (2011, p. 292) in Wertz et al.

Having studied a range of possible methods of analysis and taking into account my data collection methods and epistemological standpoint, I chose to use a pragmatic CGT (Charmaz, 2014) approach as my primary form of analysis. Pragmatic, because occasionally other forms of analysis were used where more useful; constructivist, because the contexts and backgrounds of the study participants formed an important part of the data collection and analysis; grounded theory, because any theory was produced by and grounded in the data. I chose this method because of

the way the context and perspective of the participants is valued and accounted for by using this method of analysis, which in turn leads to the voices of my students being heard above my own opinions and preconceptions as the researcher. I did occasionally depart from this method to employ others where the material dictated. Narrative analysis was used to explore aspects of the data that may have lain 'hidden', but where words seemed to mean more than was actually said, as in the case of 'Shani' (Section 4.9).

Kathy Charmaz makes much of the fact that phenomenological and intuitive researchers carry out analysis with love; whilst she would maintain that CGT practitioners would be expected to take an empathetic view of the participants, she would not go as far as calling it love (Wertz et al., 2011). In February 2016 as I neared the end of data collection I sensed as I looked into the jaws of analysis that once I entered the analysis stage of my inquiry, even as a constructivist grounded theorist, love would play its part. I felt no love for the data itself, but for the participants whose stories and opinions told of conflicted values and confused identities. As a mother and teacher as well as a researcher, these student voices were always going to be poignant and I knew it would be impossible to stay unmoved by them. In the event I found some of the stories analysed more moving and, at times, more heart-breaking or heart-warming than I had ever imagined.

3.2.6 Procedures for data analysis

Where numerical data were collected, e.g. how many pupils are of a particular religion, analysis was approached in a statistical manner and presented descriptively in the form of graphs or charts using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Comments have been evaluated, reported, coded and analysed qualitatively. Any interview data have been transcribed and then coded (Seale et al., 2004; Chamaz, 2014) by me, through initial codes, of which there were 338 originally, refined in to XX axial codes and then developed into focused or thematic coding, using the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo10. 'Memos' were written as ideas came to mind whilst preparing for

and analysing the data to inform and record the direction of the inquiry and any 'light bulb' (Charmaz, 2014) moments or understandings that developed.

Data storage systems and analytical tools can be open to difficulties as technologies are changed and updated constantly. Whilst the use of technological tools may make the researcher's tasks easier, it is possible that some analysis can be dictated by program features. It may nowadays be easier to find, retrieve and group data, identify similarities and differences in participants' responses and annotate them, but it is also possible for data analysis to be skewed or limited by computer data analysis tools (Corbin, 2015). This possible bias is understood and mitigated in the analysis. NVivo10 was selected to assist with handling qualitative data and SPSS for the statistical data. These software packages have been chosen as tools to help organise the files and to code data, thus allowing cross referencing, the identification of themes and comparisons amongst the data. It is my thinking and analysis, however, that direct the use of the programs and not vice versa.

This study is 'plastered' with context and so while the formation and methodology of the study as well as its findings were grounded in the data, some of those data contextualise other aspects of the data content. All my students were Year 10s in secondary schools, but they were from differing ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, male and female, and from two very different areas of the country. These aspects of the students' lives were used to categorise their ideas, opinions and experiences, enabling more detailed analysis to take place. Although I was clear at the outset of the study that I wanted to investigate the concept of 'good quality, faith-sensitive RSE', the ideas for and direction, form and methods used in the research were crafted using the views of students consulted during the initial formative semi-structured focus groups in summer 2014. Further data collection, in the form of workshops, questionnaires and interviews, was carried out in line with the direction indicated by, and findings from, those focus groups. By reading and listening to the views, values and aspirations of young people, the CGT approach has helped create a more in-depth understanding of the issues involved not only in making RSE faith sensitive, but also in revealing what young people see as 'good quality' RSE – and more besides.

3.2.6.1 Scale of religious observance as an analytical tool

An important part of the data collection and analysis has been understanding the degree of religious observance of the participants, as this could, and some would suggest should, affect the answers of the participants. At the beginning of the questionnaire (Appendix 3) the students indicated what they understood their religion or belief system to be. It was also desirable to understand if faith-sensitive RSE could benefit those who do not see themselves as religious. The focus groups helped to refine this scale and make it more useful in the analysis. Originally the focus groups were asked to grade themselves on a scale of 1-10 with one being not very religious and 10 being very religious (Figure 3.2).

How important is your religion to you?

Not very 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very religious/important

Figure 3.2 Scale of religious importance used for focus groups

It was clear from the focus groups that using this many numbers on a scale was too confusing and that a smaller range would be helpful to make choices easier for students. Following the focus groups, a new 'Likert' style scale (Likert, 1932) was developed for use in the study (Figure 3.3).

How important is your faith, religion or belief system to you?

(Please circle your answer)

Very important. (It influences everything I do)	Reasonably important	Moderately important	Not very important	Not at all important
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Figure 3.3 Question 6: Scale of religious importance remodelled and used for questionnaires

This scale of religious observance was used when analysing data. Those students who wrote that their religion was ‘very important’ and ‘influences everything I do’ were identified as ‘highly religious’ students when analysing the differing attitudes, values and views of students contained in the findings chapter of this study. Those students who self-identified as agnostics or atheists were categorised as ‘non-religious’ enabling simple comparisons to be made between these two groups of students.

Whilst the pilot groups were happy to identify themselves on this new scale of religious observance, and found it easy to use, there were some discrepancies where the students felt they were religious only because of their family background. ‘Abida’ was a Muslim in a pilot group:

I wouldn’t say I am that religious, but religion is important to me. I think because, in a way, my family is pretty religious, but I am not, but because it’s in the family it is important to me, because I have been brought up with it and it’s in my family.

Question 7 was added to the questionnaire the light of Abida’s comment and serves to better contextualise student responses to question six concerning religiosity:

7. Is your faith, religion or belief system important to? (Please circle your answer)

Your family Yourself Both Neither

Figure 3.4: Who is your faith or belief system important to?

3.3 Ethical Issues

Ethical clearance was obtained before any work was undertaken in schools. The gatekeepers, i.e. the head teachers and school staff involved in providing access to the students as participants, were aware and supportive of the study. In one of the schools I had an interview with the head teacher before permission was granted for the study to take place. There was an understanding from schools that students

would be asked about their experience of RSE and two schools asked for confidential feedback to help them improve their RSE.

Every endeavour has been made to ensure that there is no pressure on students to adopt a particular approach to the questionnaires and interviews and that they do not feel the need to represent themselves as more or less religious, or more or less sexually experienced, than they are. Whilst it must be acknowledged that the context of every type of data collection is likely to affect individual participant's responses, in this case school settings, every effort has been made to minimise this effect (Tong et al., 2007). To help mitigate bias in their answers, no questionnaire responses were obtained in Religious Education lessons, as this might have affected the way in which the pupils responded, given the religious nature of the lesson. I considered that, where possible, sociology lessons provided the most appropriate context for the questionnaires and workshops to take place, as there was a 'pay back' (Donavan & Hanney, 2011) for the students. Sociology students needed to understand about research for their GCSE examinations and it was felt that being part of a live research project would help with their understanding of that section of their curriculum. It was possible to use sociology groups in Fitzgerald and Snelgrove Schools, for the focus groups, questionnaires and interviews. It was possible to use sociology students for the focus groups in St Joseph's, but not possible in St Joseph's and Rural School for the questionnaires and interviews because of the time constraints and the small numbers of students taking sociology GCSE. St Joseph's school provided year 10 pupils who were taken off timetable for an hour, on a random basis according to a year list, because by using different classes at different times they could not guarantee non-duplication of participants. Rural School sent participants based on form classes, as this best fitted into the organisation of their timetable and ensured non-duplication of pupils.

Child protection procedures were followed in accordance with school, BERA and UCL policies and procedures. I had to present my Disclosure and Barring Service check before I was given access to students for the first stage of data collection, as the focus groups needed to be confidential and so no staff member was present, as was also the case for the one-to-one interviews. Staff were at hand in all the

schools during the time spent gathering questionnaire data. When researching relationships and sex in a school setting, it is important that the students participating, who are mostly under the age of consent, do not sense that they are assumed to be sexually active. At no time during their participation were students asked about their sexual practices (even though the formative focus groups suggested this as a possible line of questioning for the questionnaires). It was felt that to do so might imply a presumption of sexual activity (however this is precisely defined), which in turn might exert pressure on those who are not sexually active to become so.

Parental permissions were not sought for the questionnaire stage of the data collection as this was seen as part of the normal school day, the questionnaire data were anonymised, and school staff were on hand, however parental permission was a prerequisite for the interviews, as students were questioned on a 'one-to-one' basis.

One ethical dilemma, that needed careful handling, was the negative feedback from some of the students concerning the RSE they received in their schools. Had I left the demographic labels normally attached to the student responses, e.g. 'Muslim boy' or 'Christian girl', given that one school was a boys' school and one a girls' school, it may have led to wrong assumptions being made about the quality of RSE in certain schools or types of schools. This would have been unfair to individual schools and could also have been seen as a breach of trust by some of the schools. I therefore decided that instead of using just the pseudonyms for the schools, numbers would be used in this section of the findings, to enable comparisons between schools without revealing the nature or demography of the school in question.

3.3.1 Access and field relations

Whilst my study is not an educational ethnography, in that it doesn't "involve the researcher participating in people's daily lives for an extended period of time" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3), some of the issues discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson concerning access to students and field relations are still pertinent. As

discussed above, the 'gate keepers' were both helpful and enthusiastic about the study, except for the one head teacher who withdrew his school from the study just before fieldwork was about to commence (Section 3.2.3). This school was replaced by Rural School and this school was found to be very accommodating.

Having secured access to the participants, field relations could have been more problematic if my relationships with students had turned out to be weak or if effective buy in on behalf of the students was not forthcoming. Had the students decided they did not want to engage with the research, the data and the findings, based on the data, would have been of poor quality. My age together with the fact that I probably came across as a teacher to the students was an advantage, in that it made classroom management straightforward. This led to the students having high expectations of each of the sessions; however, my teacher status may have affected the students' openness with me as I could have been seen as a person in an official position, possibly causing the students to tailor their answers to fall into line with what they thought was expected. I always used my first name and wore casual, but not scruffy, clothing to try to distance myself a little from the teacher image as part of my impression management (Goffman, 1956), which is explained in more detail as part of the discussion concerning student sensitivity (Section 5.4.3.1).

Any possible fears students might have had about confidentiality and the reason for the study were outlined at the start of each session to try to allay any concerns and help students to understand why their participation was both important and valued. Below is a typical introduction to data collection sessions; in this case a questionnaire phase, intended to help inform the students about the research and why their contribution would be so useful:

OK; let me explain a bit of what I'm doing. My name is Jo. I am a Research Student at the Institute of Education, which is part of University College London, UCL. I am carrying out some research into relationships and sex education in schools and I am asking you to help me with it, if that's OK. I want to see what young people think makes good quality relationships and sex

education and if young people feel that RSE should be sensitive to faith, especially in areas where there are high levels of religious observance. I am not going to talk to adults; there is lots of research that includes the views of adults and they often argue about relationships and sex education, so I just want to hear from young people. It seems to me that adults don't listen enough to young people.

The questionnaires are being undertaken in four schools and always in quasi-examination conditions. That means pretend examination conditions so that any ideas you have are just yours, so no talking to share ideas or distract others. This is not an exam or a test; no-one cares about your spelling, but please write so it is easy to read if you can.

Please write your name across the corner of the paper. Once I have read the questionnaires the name will be snipped off so no-one, except me, will see them with your name on. Your responses will be totally anonymous, only I will know what any one student has written and the name is only going to be used to help me to call some students back in for interview, nothing else. If while you are filling out the questionnaire you have any questions, please put your hand up and I will come and answer any questions you may have. If there is something you are not sure about then please ask, that is what I am here for.

I have already used some of the information gathered from the focus groups to inform the teacher training I do. The questionnaire you complete today is valued by me and may affect and inform the teaching of relationships and sex education in the future. Any questions?

I hope that this explanation, the encouragement given to students to understand the importance of their participation and how their involvement might impact RSE in the future, helped the students to feel an affinity with the research and aid field relations. Several students thanked me, at the end of the sessions, for their involvement.

I do not entirely agree with Cohen et al. (2011, p. 15) when they state that: “behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their [the participants’] frame of reference”. I would argue that researchers cannot fully understand any frame of reference held by a participant. Each participant is an individual with his or her own set of lenses on life. Even if the researcher has been brought up in the same way, they would still not fully understand the ‘frame of reference’, even of their identical twin. However, by striving to understand, through asking targeted and carefully constructed questions and listening with reflexivity and respect, by using best endeavours, I hoped to get close enough to understanding participants’ frame of reference, for the purpose of the study. It is important to acknowledge that a researcher’s understanding of their participants’ frame of reference is imperfect, partial and limited by the boundaries of the research.

It has been important for me to remain constantly reflexive (Woolgar, 1988), critical and alert to my own possible preconceptions and feelings of authority when researching this subject. As a woman of faith, an RSE specialist teacher, founder member of an organisation and website to support professionals, faith groups and young people of faith to grapple with the delicate issues at the intersection of religion and sex, it was important that my knowledge and understanding were not used to direct the findings inappropriately. I believe though that this knowledge and understanding better equipped me to gather and interpret the data more deeply. I do not believe that any researcher can be totally devoid of partiality, but I think that a clear understanding of that possibility has enabled me to be more reflexive and mitigate bias in the data collection instruments and analysis.

3.3.2 Pseudonyms and anonymity

Anonymity for participants was very important, especially as some of them answered questions in a way that their community might find disagreeable. All data that had not yet been anonymised were kept in a locked cabinet and not shared with others. Interviews were audio-recorded except for one student who did not want this; for his interview contemporaneous notes were taken as verbatim as

possible, to provide a record of the contents of the interview. All the other interviews were then transcribed. Participants, when quoted, to a great extent in this thesis, are given culturally and religiously relevant pseudonyms. One student, who identified as coming from a Christian Bangladeshi background, was at pains to point out that, if quoted, he wanted his pseudonym to reflect his Christian identity as many Bangladeshi boys would be Muslim and would have Muslim names. He gave me some ideas as to what names might be appropriate.

Questionnaires had a section for the participant's name at the top right-hand corner; these sections were removed once they had been read by myself. The names were only required so that candidates for one-to-one interviews could be selected. No pseudonym given was the same as the name of any participant in the study, to make sure that any quotes were not attributed, rightly or wrongly, to any participant(s). The schools were all given pseudonyms too for reasons of confidentiality.

Those students who took part in more than one round of data generation kept the same pseudonym, unlike the Yip and Page (2013) study, where participants could be given various pseudonyms, suggesting sometimes that one view or understanding could be held by three different people, when only one individual was represented.

3.4 Research questions

In 2014, when I began the data-collection phase, only research questions one and two were expected to be answered during the study; however, during the data analysis, from all four schools, it became clear that students thought RSE should be inclusive of, and sensitive to, other minority groups rather than only those from religious backgrounds and so question three was added as a research question in 2016.

1. What is seen by participants as good quality Relationships and Sex Education?

2. Is there a place for faith-sensitive Relationships and Sex Education as part of what is understood to be good quality RSE in mainstream schools, and can faith-sensitive RSE be taught to the benefit of all students?
3. Is there a need for RSE to be more inclusive of and sensitive to other minority groups of students?

4 Findings

4.1 Semi-structured focus groups

Semi-structured focus groups were carried out in three inner-city schools in the summer of 2014, Fitzgerald School, Snelgrove School and St Joseph's School. Two groups of around six students, in each school, took part. In line with CGT, the students' comments, ideas and opinions, the themes that emerged and useful or innovative ideas contained in the transcripts of these groups were used to inform the direction and methodology of the subsequent stages of the research.

Semi-structured focus groups were chosen as the initial, formative and foundational data collection method for the study. I felt that focus groups such as these would stimulate a flow of ideas and facilitate discussions, wide ranging and free enough, to allow participants to help structure the research to be undertaken. The groups allowed students to express their own ideas for the study and their desires for relationships and sex education in schools. Students were certainly fertile ground for investigating the area of RSE and have thrown up additional issues relevant to the design, methodology and focus of the data collection, for example the seeming focus on condoms when discussing contraception. The limited knowledge of boys was picked up as an issue by one of the girls later in the study (Section 4.7.2.3).

The semi-structures focus groups informed and directed the type of data collection methods used in the research as well as the content of the questionnaires and ideas for scenarios used in the workshops. Those students participating in focus groups were all taking Sociology GCSE and so had some understanding of the research methods typically used in social science research, which helped them to articulate their ideas.

Not all suggestions put forward by the students were used in the further phases of the research, as not everything the students said was suitable or appropriate for the study. I had to make judgements about the suitability of the ideas put forward (Appendix 1) Due to the fast-moving nature of the focus groups and the use of

audio not video recordings it was difficult to attribute all the quotes and hence religious affiliations to individual students, so many of the quotes are given the name of the schools only.

4.1.1 Areas of interest for the study

As an initial question, all participants were asked if they could describe one good lesson they had encountered in RSE in their school. They were also asked what they thought could be improved in their school SRE (which is what it was called in schools at the time.) they had experienced. Participants were free to choose what they thought was 'good' and no guidance was given. This was done to ensure that their responses were not influenced by researcher bias. Discussions, in these semi-structures focus groups were quite extensive, with some students choosing to miss break so spend longer talking together. Once the flood gates were opened, the pupils were eager to discuss what they considered to be the issues with RSE in schools.

4.1.2 Experiences of RSE in school

The pupils' responses gave an overall view of what was important to them and several topics that arose during these semi-structures focus groups were particularly relevant to the direction of my research. In Fitzgerald School RSE had been delivered in the form of a full day of workshops and lessons about relationships and sex, where the year group was taken off normal timetable (drop-down day). Generally, the students were very positive about the information they received during the day, but there was disagreement about the role played by two of the agencies taking part. One was a local sexual health provider (LSHP), who delivered a lesson on contraception, the other was someone (Mr Smith) from an unknown agency who talked about sexually transmitted infections, but who also talked about the advantages of abstinence.

One student felt that Mr Smith was too strident in his delivery, another felt it was good to balance the content of the LSHP, who had talked about contraceptive

services being open to all, and a third pupil felt that Mr Smith was reinforcing an important point.

Girl 1: I think when the local sexual health providers (LSHP) came in and they taught us, they explained everything really well and the demonstrations they gave were really, really good.

Girl 2: And also, before that, there was another guy that came in and he was talking more about abstinence. The day wasn't, biased, it wasn't too one side, so we could see both sides.

Girl 3: The whole, like, how he kept reinforcing, like, abstinence, abstinence. I think I felt more comfortable with LSHP because they were sort of [pause]. I dunno they were giving like alternatives.

Girl 4: I think the way how he [Mr Smith] approached it was a bit better because like he was showing us the consequences of not using contraception properly and, like, not using contraception at all, but I think that the way how he kept on like enforcing abstinence was a little bit too much.

Girl 2: [With] the LSHP people there was more of contraception, what do you do in a situation. Whereas with the guy that came in, it was more about how to avoid the situation.

Boy: Well the thing is, like, with some people it might just slip out of their head because they are not getting the point across, but when you actually keep repeating yourself and get the point across that's when people start thinking about it.

This exchange of views is particularly interesting, as there are those delivering RSE in our schools who maintain that abstinence should not be taught as part of RSE due to research undertaken in the USA into AOUM education, and the arguments developed by people working in the field of RSE in the light of that research (Blake & Frances, 2001; Kirby, 2008). However, these students, in Fitzgerald School a very mixed school, in terms of gender, religion and ethnicity saw the benefit of

abstinence messages although it would seem from the discussion that they also want to know about everything else too.

In Snelgrove School the participants were positive about their school experience of RSE:

I think a positive thing is that you go more into steps about [relationships and] sex education, you know some people didn't feel comfortable talking about it before and once you've had that talk, you feel more that you can talk about it and you don't feel that uncomfortable.

There wasn't really any negative experiences, but I think we should learn more about STIs and things because we didn't really go over that bit and that's a really important topic to learn about.

I can't explain it, when you bring experiences of other people, but you don't obviously expose their names or anything and, like, that actually helps you understand and if you are having problems at home then you know like how to deal with that.

It was helpful, when they taught us about certain things that were obviously quite sensitive, but then we had to see if it was going to happen, we would have to know, what we would have to do to overcome that situation and where we could go for help.

At St Joseph's School, most of the boys in the focus group had obviously spoken to their parents about sex and some of the boys had also been told about condoms and how important it was to use them when having sex, but little else appears to have been discussed.

4.1.3 Ways to improve RSE in school

There wasn't much talk about negative experiences, but one participant in Fitzgerald School made this comment:

Girl 5: I wouldn't say this was negative, but you did ask if there was something we wish we could have known. I think with the LSHP they were focusing a lot on sorts of condoms, but I think it would have been better to know more about, like, other forms of contraception and gone into detail about it, because we had practical demonstrations of putting a condom on, but we weren't told much about birth control or morning after etc.

One Snelgrove School girl thought that because most students were Muslim, often RSE was biased towards Islam and she felt they wanted to know about other religions too.

Some of the pupils felt that there should be women teachers to teach the girls and men to teach the boys, they also argued that boys may need more RSE than the girls.

I feel like maybe boys should have like a little bit more education on it because they don't really answer a lot of the questions. They don't really know a lot of the stuff. *Fitzgerald School*

4.1.4 What should faith-sensitive RSE be like and what questions should be asked to find out what young people want?

The question of what faith-sensitive RSE should be like when student-informed is explored briefly here by drawing on focus group data but addressed more substantively during the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data.

The beginning of the following conversation between two girls in Fitzgerald School offers one example of where students thought that for a lesson to be considered 'faith sensitive' it needed to be respectful to and inclusive of those from different faiths and that explanation of what different religions teach about sex and relationships might also be needed.

Girl 7: Making it like suitable so different religions can like get the gist of it [RSE] so that it won't like, offend them.

Girl 8: I think when it comes to faith and sex I think that we should be taught what the main faiths believe in so you should have the contraception and you should have like someone from a church to come and talk and some religious leaders from the mosque come and talk about it, someone from gurdwara and from different backgrounds to come in and talk about it so that it's not like one generic sort of tailored to one kind of pupil.

Whilst the idea of having various faith leaders in school all explaining what their different religion teaches may be an ideal, it is not possible for many schools and getting appropriate and confident people from faith communities to talk about relationships, sexual health and sexuality is not always easy, however having teachers that have at least a basic knowledge of what different faiths belief could fulfil the need to talk about different faiths as explained by this student.

Generally, students from all three schools involved in the focus groups said that faith-sensitive RSE was important for schools without a strong faith adherence amongst its pupils because, according to one student from Snelgrove School: "We live in a community where we are used to the different faiths and we know something about them, but in communities where the people aren't very religious, they wouldn't know if they are offending another person's religion or not". The need for respect and have knowledge concerning religion, relationships and sexual health was a view re-iterated two years later by students from Rural School in their questionnaires.

One student at Fitzgerald School felt that all pupils ought to be given the same RSE, but that they should be able to leave if they were awkward with what was taught; others felt that no-one should be "pulled out" of lessons:

No-one should be pulled out of it [RSE] because everyone needs to learn. Say if they didn't know anything about it at all and then they go into their future thinking, what the hell do I do here? Although it's not useful for them at this point of time, it might be useful to them in the future.

Some students felt that they should be told about sex at home; some considered that what different faiths taught about sex should be delivered in Religious Education.

In Snelgrove School the girls' personal social and health education (PSHE) lessons covered relationships in Year 10, including sessions on domestic violence and forced marriage. In Year 11 they discussed sexually transmitted infections, contraception, HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancy choices and parenting. The Year 10 drama group had also experienced a workshop on HIV/AIDS, but that was not open to the whole year group. The girls who attended felt the lesson to be a very positive experience.

Snelgrove School students also felt that in Year 10 they started to learn about things they already knew about, "but in more detail". They said they didn't think that their lessons in RSE included anything about faith overtly, rather that it had been "hidden" in the lessons. Overall, however, they considered that lessons had been sensitive to their faith background. These students wanted to be aware of what faiths thought about relationships and sex. They also said that people from those faiths should respect people's culture if they chose to have sex outside of marriage. Without clearly articulating it, by the way the majority of Snelgrove School girls spoke, they seemed to view those who thought sex outside of marriage was OK, as 'other', there seemed to be an understanding that sex only within marriage was what was expected of them. As most of the girls were from Muslim backgrounds, it is also possible that the girls who thought 'differently' did not want to be judged negatively by their peers for having views that did not align with the accepted Muslim stance on sex outside of marriage.

Pupils saw that questions concerning the tension between lives lived (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yip & Page, 2013) and what religions said about relationships and sex were important. They proposed questions like: "How do they respond to what their faith says, because even if their faith says that (only having sex in marriage), they may not follow that?" (Fitzgerald School). The fact that not all people of faith or from faith backgrounds follow religious or cultural teaching about relationships and

sex in practice, was an important point for me to bear in mind when building the research questionnaires. Questions to explore the concept of the differences between belief and practise further, were incorporated into the questionnaires and interviews.

None of the Snelgrove School girls in the focus groups wanted to hear about sex and relationships from their parents, whilst many of the St Joseph's School boys had discussed issues to do with relationships and sex with their parents in some depth already. Some of the girls claimed that they would rather be taught by their friends and other family members, e.g. cousins and sisters. Many students from all three urban schools said they "picked up stuff", whilst others said that they would prefer having the information from teachers: "But if you learn it in school it is just less awkward and its part of school" (Snelgrove School). Although Snelgrove School was a girls' school and St Joseph's School a boys' school, I felt, talking to those two groups, that the difference in emphasis, the girls wanting to learn mainly from school and the boys generally gaining advice and information from their parents was more a cultural difference than a contrast due to gender, as the girls were from mostly Muslim backgrounds and talking about sex can be seen as 'taboo' (Dudhwala, 2008).

One dialogue was particularly interesting. It demonstrated there can be a head-in-the-sand approach to RSE, even among young people, where they feel that they don't need to be taught about sex because unplanned pregnancy isn't a problem or part of their current experience and so they don't need to know about it. Both girls in the following extract are from South Asian backgrounds:

Researcher: If at the end of this I can write a paper which gives recommendations to schools about relationships and sex education and how it might be possible to make it faith sensitive, what questions should I ask of young people or what questions should I ask of anyone?

Girl 5: What they think about sex education and what they think should be taught in schools. That's quite important. Sometimes we feel like we don't want to learn about stuff and it is required for us.

Researcher: So what sort of things do you think you might not want to learn?

Girl 6: I don't know, it's just kind of awkward because I get we are in Year 10 and we are like quite mature, but it is still quite weird for us to learn about the whole principle of sex and stuff like that and unplanned pregnancies because it is so uncommon around here, but it could be common around other areas and it is just weird learning about that.

Researcher: There is a charity in the area that supports women and girls who have unplanned pregnancies. Often people that go there are from very religious backgrounds.

Girl 9: That is quite surprising, round here you just tend to think that because families are so strict about religion and relationships it is quite uncommon. It is just weird because you don't see it so often when you are going outside, and everyone says you are not meant to do that.

Girl 10: I don't think so. I don't believe that, I think it is just really common around this area. I think it is common everywhere. It happens, and we don't know about it. If something that is obviously unplanned you wouldn't want to tell everyone. It is dependent on how the community handles it.

Girl 9 is partially right, the post code in which the school is situated has a lower teen pregnancy rate than other areas close by and there is research to endorse the idea that lower teen pregnancy rates may be affected by demographic change as people from South Asian backgrounds are more likely to have fewer partners and start to have sex at a later age (Lemos, 2009; Girma & Paton 2014).

A few pupils in the focus groups thought it might be useful to use parents as participants and ask them what they thought about RSE in schools, whilst for others talking about RSE with parents was thought to be "awkward, depending on the parents". There was disagreement between the groups about talking to their faith leaders about relationships and sex with the idea of talking to faith leaders being an anathema to many of those from faith backgrounds. To simplify responses and concentrate on student voice I decided to stay focused on the needs and views of

young people. Only students, therefore, were utilised as participants for the rest of the study.

There were a number of possible areas of enquiry raised by the conversations in these focus groups that lent themselves to greater exploration in the main data collection for the study. One was that of conflict between beliefs and practice, which is also an area investigated by Yip and Page (2013, p. 121) when arguing that: “Her struggles illustrate the tension and confusion generated by the intersection of incompatible religious, sexual and cultural identities”.

Participants in several focus groups felt it important for respect and understanding of different religions, belief and value systems to be encouraged by discussing these issues in RSE. The young people made it clear that they wanted more than the “don’t do it before you are married” message, but also that they wanted that view respected at the same time, as one boy at St Joseph’s School explained:

I know that because of my faith, it is about sex after marriage, so for me the thought of having sex before then, it doesn’t cross my mind, so it doesn’t interest me, like. In this moment of time for the use of, like, contraception. Yeah, I think it’s still useful for me to know about it.

4.1.5 Mismatch and conflict between beliefs and practice

Several of the interviews demonstrated that for some students there was a real conflict between what their religion says about sexual practice and what happens in their ‘lived lives’; for others, they showed considerable ignorance about what their faith taught about relationships and sex. One of the students from St Joseph’s school demonstrated this ambivalence:

Marvin: I don’t think that there is a conflict between my actions and my religion and what I do. There is more of a harmony. I try to do everything in line with my religion (Catholic), I am still under my parents’ control, so I will listen to them. No matter if I like it or not, and like I said before my parents always say only “go in” (have penetrative sex) with protection.

Marvin was unaware and could not understand the stance of some of the other pupils who felt that sex was for inside of marriage and had no idea that the official teaching of Catholicism not only assumes sex inside marriage as the ideal, but also says that any type of contraceptives other than natural family planning shouldn't be used. Whilst Marvin did not seem to understand the teachings of his faith tradition on matters of sex and relationships, especially around the use of contraception, Jasmina from Fitzgerald School understood the predicament for young people of faith, when they do understand the mainstream teachings of their faith groups, but their lived experience does not match the values espoused by their faith community:

Jasmina: Also, how do they respond to what their faith says? Because even if their faith says something they may not follow that.

Other internal conflicts were expressed over abortion:

Errol: If someone has an abortion in our faith, then they are going against the faith, if they have an abortion, but if they have a baby they have wasted their life.

4.1.6 Listening enables insight into the views of and respect for others

Listening to others helped the pupils learn from each other and respect each other's differing ideas; it also helped pupils gain a perspective on relationship issues that they may not have had before. At the beginning of his discussion group, David, a Christian who said that his religion was reasonably important to him, explained that he knew quite a lot about his religion's doctrine about sex, but said:

A lot of people don't listen to the Bible, some say it is a metaphorical book and that everything is a metaphor, so they may think that sex in a secure relationship is OK.

David had had sex, with his parents' blessing, and his Dad had bought his condoms for him.

Justin who was a Christian who felt he understood what the Bible said about sex and relationships and wanted to live his life according to the Bible said:

I attend church and I can ask questions and instead of seeing the Bible as the opposition and the enemy, they teach you how to use it as a friend and a guide. No, I don't see a conflict between my religion and the way I live.

As soon as Justin had finished speaking David started to giggle loudly, closely followed by many of the others. However, later in the session, and after some of the other pupils had said they felt the same as Justin, David seemed to have a change of heart:

When you hear other people's opinions it makes your opinions feel more special. It gives you insights into other people's lives. It can help you. Before I came here I used to think that having sex before marriage was completely fine, but now I have heard of other people's opinions I think things should be tighter, err more secure, because, erm, say like, before I didn't really mind, I thought if you knew the person and you were both cool and ready it is alright, but now I think that sex is a special and intimate thing and you shouldn't mess around with it.

This move in David's thinking may be short-lived and his practice may still be different to his expressed view, but he has been given the chance to hear a different opinion and has come to respect the religiously-based moral stance of some of his peers a little more.

4.1.7 Young people want (and need) to know more than 'just don't do it'

The semi-structured focus groups were asked: "What would you like to know about relationships and sex in Year 10 or Year 11?" This conversation between some boys was interesting:

Marvin: Everyone here knows about it [sex] cos they have either experienced it or a friend has experienced it. So, they already know. They should be able to say if it is right or wrong to have sex before marriage. They should be able to

give their opinions, not be so factual, it has to be relevant to your students. Relate to their students and they can feel comfortable about it, instead of feeling awkward about it.

David: There is a taboo about it. They talk about it as if it is an issue, not like it is a part of life.

Marvin: We should be taught how to maintain a healthy sexual relationship, how a married couple have their intimacy through sex, also use of protections, cos pregnancy is a problem, if you become like a father then your life is, [trailed off] and you should be taught about protection, condoms.

Junior: They should cover social aspects of relationships in general.

It seemed from these students' comments that they had a largely positive attitude to relationships and sex and some very strident views about what should be taught. Young people's desires for school-based RSE were explored by the questionnaire and in more depth in some of the interviews carried out subsequently all of which were based on the ideas of these focus groups.

4.1.8 Constructing a scale for religious observance

When collecting data concerning religion, it was insufficient to just find out what religion students identified with, but also how important that religion was to them, their family and their everyday lives, as this could, and did, have a profound effect on some of the responses recorded in the data collection. I developed a scale to try to find out how religious the students felt they were and to test the scale of religious observance before the main body of data was collected (Section 3.2.6.1). The focus groups were very useful in the development of this scale to help assess levels of religious observance in students taking part in the study. It was obvious that a scale of one to ten which was used in the focus groups was too confusing for students. One student's 5 seemed to be another student's 8 or 9. A student who graded himself as a 9, whilst talking in the focus group showed he had little understanding of his religion and little religious observance, whereas other students who went to a place of worship and understood their religion to be a

motivator of what they did and thought important, also viewed themselves as a 9. This demonstrated that data analysis might be difficult with so many possible responses available to students. By the time the scale was used a year later for the workshop, questionnaire and interview stages of data collection it had been simplified using a 'Likert' type scale (Likert, 1932) as well as adding an extra question to help understand if religious affiliation was important to the student, their family or both, as outlined in Section 3.2.6.1.

4.1.9 Ideas for data collection

These switched-on, articulate young people used sociological language and concepts to give ideas as to methods of data collection. They were realistic about the need to use questionnaires to get a large number of responses but felt that these should be backed up by one-to-one interviews. Students understood that interviews would be appropriate: "because you can talk, and it is more detailed than stuff like questionnaires because you don't really get all explanation from people, but in interviews you are face to face and it is more reliable, because they can give their response in more detail. Innocent questions can be taken completely the wrong way". For the interviews and questionnaires random sampling was suggested, as was snowballing.

I decided not to use either of these methods of sampling, as random sampling would need a far larger pool of students than it was possible to enrol for this study or would result in a much smaller number of participants. Snowballing was not appropriate because that would mean that very similar students would be selected. It was decided therefore to use the students who were made available by the participating schools for data collection in the questionnaires, interviews and workshops.

Participants in the focus groups made the point that it might be necessary to select interviewees carefully, to get a range of understandings, which would better represent the whole community, rather than reflect the strong bias toward any one religion that may be predominant in a school. The interviews were expected, by them, to provide more in-depth understanding of the questionnaire responses.

Interview students were selected to provide a more focused and detailed explanation for the content of the questionnaires.

Students were also extremely innovative and creative in their ideas. One boy suggested that role-play workshops might be used to gain insight into the wishes, culture, understanding and needs of various participants:

Fabian: I personally don't like questionnaires, I don't think people take them seriously, I do the questionnaire for the sake of the grade, not for the sake of getting the answers they want. I think you should workshop the ideas. Not only are you engaging with them, but you have them on their toes. You should split the group up and it might be time consuming, but you would get what you want. Split the group up and come up with different scenarios to do with your research.

Whilst many creative ideas were discussed in lectures and in the research literature studied concerning data collection, including video and art projects, workshops were not a research method I had heard of before, but the potential of this kind of methodology was rather exciting. This workshop approach was used in all four schools and provided some interesting insights into the practical outworking of the students' faith identity and value systems.

4.1.10 Questions for the questionnaire

The students provided a list of almost 60 different questions they felt should be asked as part of the questionnaire used in the next stage of data collection (Appendix 1). The students gave some great ideas, though some were too vague to use or were not appropriate, but most of them were developed, clarified, put into clear English and incorporated into the questionnaire that was developed for stages 2a and 3a of the data collection, and given to the Year 10 students in the three inner-city schools in 2015 and Rural School in 2016.

A selection of the questions proposed by the students and information about whether or not they were incorporated into the questionnaire are discussed here to indicate the reasoning used for choosing the questions for the next stage of data

collection. Similar questions were grouped together. Where questions came up a number of times they formed a more prominent part of the study, e.g. how young people view their religion's teaching on relationships and sex. This gave a clearer perspective on the students' views. It could be claimed that a number of the questions were leading in nature. For example, question 20 in the questionnaire asks: "Would you happily have a serious relationship with someone from a different faith or belief system to your own?" This could be read as suggesting a problem with this kind of relationship; however, the questions included in the questionnaire were designed to reflect the tone and emphasis of the questions suggested by students in the focus groups. These students were interested to understand if this kind of relationships was a problem for young people. It was clear from their comments that several of the students thought it would be a problem, so the tone of the question was retained. It is unclear how far this may have 'led' the students in their answers.

An example of how questions were selected and edited for inclusion in the questionnaire can be seen in the suggested questions below. They were all similar and yet subtly different and so the idea of how religion might affect views or practices related to relationships and sex was incorporated in a number of places in the questionnaire.

Questions suggested by students were:

Does your religion impact your views on sex and relationships?

Does your faith/religion affect your view on sex?

Although you may have a different point of view, do you agree with the religious sexual intercourse rules?

Does faith restrict or guide you in being in relationships?

Is sex an issue in your faith? For example, some say the Bible says that sex is forbidden before marriage, but quite a lot of people don't listen to that. Is there a conflict between your morals and your religion? It is a conflict

between the moral and religious. It is because the Bible says you shouldn't have sex before marriage?

Some students brought up the issue of speaking to parents about relationships and sex. How comfortable parents are to talk to their teens and how that is received by the young people were questions asked as part of the questionnaire and discussed in a number of the interviews. They posed questions like:

Have your parents spoken to you about sex and relationships? If so how much detail did they go into?

Do your parents talk to you regularly about sex?

Some questions suggested were too abstract and vague: "How do you feel about sex?" was an example of this, but during the reading of the completed questionnaires and the associated interviews it was possible to get an idea of the students' ideas concerning sex and relationships.

Some questions the students wanted asked like: "Have you been exposed to sex?" were felt to be too intrusive and somewhat lacking in clarity. I also understood that asking about the participants' sexual experiences might cause those who were not sexually experienced to assume they were expected to have engaged in sexual intercourse, thus putting them under additional pressure to become sexually active. While some of those in the focus groups were more than willing to share information about their sexual behaviour, it seemed that this question could give rise to more questions than answers, in part because it was not clear what exactly was being asked. Some of the questions suggested by students could have opened a safeguarding minefield. Finally, whilst young people's exposure to and experience of sexual activity might be a good research subject, it seemed somewhat outside of the remit of this research study.

The focus groups also suggested a selection of scenarios that were used in the workshops later in the study.

4.2 Pilot study for questionnaires and the scenarios to be used for the workshops

The pilot study was carried out in several different Year 10 classes in Snelgrove School. Ideally, the pilot would have been conducted in more and varied educational establishments; however, due to difficult timetabling arrangements at the schools being used in the study, only students at Snelgrove School were available for the pilot study.

Each participant in the pilot was given a draft questionnaire and asked to read all the questions. They were instructed to complete the tick boxes in any of the questions and discuss the quality of the open-ended questions. The students' feedback was used to improve the questionnaire. As a result of the pilot groups' experiences and recommendations, the questionnaire was adapted to make it more easily understood, this involved rewording some of the questions, adding a small number of questions to increase clarity, and re-numbering the questions to allow the questionnaire to flow in a more natural way. I also decided to print on only one side of the paper as this made the scripts easier to read.

When asking the pilot groups of students about their religion, it became evident that whilst most students identified readily with the proclaimed religion of their parents, this was not true for all students.

The pilot groups also looked at the range of scenarios that were initially suggested by the focus groups for use in the workshops, gave their opinions and suggested changes. Where appropriate, changes were implemented prior to the production of the scenarios for the workshop data collection phase. A list of scenarios produced with ideas from the formative semi-structured focus groups and pilot students is to be found in Appendix 2.

4.3 Workshop data and analysis

4.3.1 Introduction

The workshop method of data collection was suggested by the students in the focus groups which took place during 2014 in the three participating inner-city schools. While I had not come across the concept of workshops as a data collection method during lectures concerning research methods and methodology, it was my desire for and commitment to 'student voice' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004) and 'Constructivist Grounded Theory' (Charmaz, 2011) which caused me to entertain the idea. Those in the focus groups were encouraged to 'flesh out' how workshops could be used. Students suggested that the workshops could employ a set of scenarios which would test and seek to understand the decisions young people might make in various real-life situations and furthermore what advice they would give in each scenario. The students suggested that this should be done in small groups

The six foundational semi-structured focus groups (summer 2014) and two pilot groups (early summer 2015) of students were asked to propose ideas for the scenarios, as I wanted to explore what topics around relationships and sex were uppermost in their minds. Six scenarios were developed out of around 30 suggested by the students. Some of the scenarios used two or three ideas from students which were amalgamated into a single scenario, to clearly represent themes felt pertinent, to the research, by the students.

The focus and pilot groups all took place in the inner-city schools where religious affiliation was high; as a result, two out of the six scenarios utilised for the workshops included an element of religious and cultural tension and conflict. One of these involved a girl from a religious family who found herself pregnant and the other explored the friction there can be between religious values and homosexuality. A third scenario investigated the tension felt by a boy whose girlfriend was pregnant, but he wasn't ready to be a father. The other three scenarios were based around domestic violence and peer pressure, especially relating to sexual practice.

4.3.2 Methodology for workshops

There were four workshops, one in each of the schools used for data collection, they lasted an hour each. Workshops took place in classrooms that were familiar to the students, without a member of staff in the room, although staff were close by. A total of 77 students took part in the workshops, none of those who took part in the workshops completed the main questionnaire or were interviewed.

The first 15 minutes of the workshops were spent with the participants using a Personal Workshop Response Form (Appendix 4) which requested demographic information and outlined the six scenarios. This allowed the students to write very brief notes to indicate how they, as individuals, would respond to each scenario.

I reasoned that young people might be influenced in their responses if they went straight into small groups by those holding more strident views, having strong personalities, or with responsibility for scribing thereby holding sway in the written responses. Using the personal workshop response form facilitated more democratic feedback and enabled those students who take longer to process ideas to have the time to gather their personal thoughts before entering the group situation. On another practical note, it also enabled me to divide the class.

Small groups of four to six students were then formed, grouping together those who had a similar understanding of the importance of their religion or belief system, as indicated on the 'Likert' style scale on the personal workshop response form. The students then worked in these groups for the rest of the lesson, discussing and recording how they thought the young people represented in the scenarios should respond in their situations. Information was gathered on the Group Workshop Response Form (Appendix 5) which articulated the small groups' written advice to those in the scenarios.

4.3.3 Findings

Of the 77 students who took part in the workshops, 45 were female, 22 identified themselves as agnostic or atheist, 24 as Muslim and 21 as Christian, nine of whom

more specifically saw themselves as Catholic. Those remaining were from other religious groups and two students did not answer the religious identity question.

Over half of the participants, mostly those from the inner-city Snelgrove, Fitzgerald and St Joseph's Schools felt their religion was very important (influenced everything they do) or reasonably important to them. Just over a third of participants in the workshops considered religion as 'not very important' or 'not at all important'. Those who decided that religion was not important were primarily from Rural School.

I analysed the personal workshop response forms from various angles in order to:

- a. ascertain the general views of students on each scenario.
- b. discover whether each student's religiosity seemed to affect their views or the advice they would give to the young people in the scenarios.
- c. understand the dilemmas that may be evident in responses, especially dilemmas that included religion and spirituality.

I interrogated the data to identify the thought-provoking or contradictory themes that emerged, which pointed to fertile areas for discussion or further research. The opinions of the participants were coded to reflect ranges of views that could generally be clustered together enabling easier investigation and analysis of the participants' attitudes. In Scenario 1, where a boy finds out his girlfriend is pregnant and he doesn't feel ready to be a dad, the code "talk and sort out a way ahead" includes responses from workshop attendees such as "Tell his parents", "Talk to her and tell her how he feels, she may not be ready either", "Talk to her and come to a conclusion" and "Tell her how he feels and help out how he can".

All results given are based on the total numbers of actual responses, i.e. excluding those who did not answer the question. Where there are significant numbers of participants not giving answers to the questions, this is mentioned and explored in the findings for each scenario.

4.3.3.1 Scenarios: Individual responses

1. Jay has just found out that his girlfriend is eight weeks pregnant. He likes her but doesn't feel they will be together long term. He is not ready to be a Dad.

Over half of the 77 participants said that the boy should: "talk to someone and try to sort out a way ahead". Most of these participants felt that he should be talking to his girlfriend, but others suggested his own parents or his friends as a good source of advice and support. It was not clear how many of those who felt that talking should be the first action would then have gone on to suggest abortion, adoption or keeping the baby as their preferred choice as to "a way ahead". Eight participants suggested abortion straight away, with an additional small number suggesting adoption or abortion. Around one in six wrote that Jay should face his responsibilities, "Man up and take responsibility". Six students said that Jay should stay in the relationship and become a Dad, three that he should continue being a Dad to the child even if he didn't stay with his girlfriend and two students said that Jay should just leave the relationship and his responsibilities altogether.

When asked why they had given the answers they had, students provided a range of responses. The highest number, most of whom had said that the issues should be talked through, suggested that the issues could be sorted out, although what was meant by "sorting things out" was not specified. A high number signified Jay should become a Dad, either in or out of the relationship, as it was his responsibility. Most who suggested adoption or abortion in the first instance felt that the problem would go away if this course of action was followed.

2. Chantelle has been going out with her boyfriend for about two months. They expect to go to university in eighteen months' time. Chantelle's boyfriend keeps asking her to have sex with him. She doesn't want to as she would rather wait a bit, but she doesn't want to lose him.

What should she do?

Sixty four of the 77 students advised that Chantelle should stand firm and not give into what the boyfriend was expecting. Around half of those said she should leave

the relationship, talk to an 'important other' like a parent or focus on her studies as she was going to university. One boy said that if she spoke to the boyfriend he would understand "because it is up to her as well as him". Four individuals said that she should have sex if she didn't want to lose him. They were all boys and said that their religion was important or very important to them. Two identified as Christian and two as Muslim.

Whilst these four only represent around 5% of the total number of students taking part in the workshop phase of the data collection, the fact that they were all religious boys is worrying to me as a woman of faith. Whilst many of the boys who saw themselves as religious demonstrated care and respect for women, these four boys obviously thought differently. Whilst it is difficult to say exactly why the boys responded as they did, there are, as far as I can see, a few possible reasons for this reaction:

1. They saw the pressure on girls to have sex as a societal norm and so expressed that in their responses.
2. They have a limited understanding of their religions and assume it gives them the 'green light', as boys, to expect sex if they ask for it and that a girl's wishes do not have to be respected.
3. They don't much care for the teachings concerning relationships and sex given by their religion and think that their desires are more important.
4. They exist with models of hypocrisy within their experienced religion, suggesting that the double standards they observe become the norm for them as Christians or Muslims.

A former president of the USA, Jimmy Carter, summed up some of the problems concerning religion in the following excerpt from his speech to the Parliament of the World's Religions (Carter, 2009):

The truth is that male religious leaders have had – and still have – an option to interpret holy teachings either to exalt or subjugate women. They have for their own selfish ends, overwhelmingly chosen the latter. Their continuing choice provides the foundation or justification for much of the pervasive persecution and abuse of women throughout the world. This is in

clear violation not just of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also the teachings of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, Moses and the prophets, Muhammad and the founders of other world religions – all of whom have called for proper and equitable treatment of all the children of God. It is time we had the courage to challenge these views and set a new course.

The possibility of peer pressure on girls, and probably boys too, to have sex was born out by some of the girls at interview, when they spoke about the pressure on girls to have sex and how some girls were ridiculed because they hadn't had sex. Judging by other responses in the data it is possible that this might be a more widespread pressure than is indicated by just these four boys.

Most students felt that if the boyfriend loved or respected Chantelle he would wait and that it was her right to say no to his requests for sex. The boys who thought she should have sex said that she should have sex to keep the boyfriend and just because he had asked for it. Whilst this statement would go against what most of us would want to see going on with school children, much research has been done into how girls try to please boys in relationships (Bongardt et al., 2014; Orenstein, 2016) and the practice of giving the boy what he wants may be more widespread in this age group than is obvious from my workshop data. One boy who said Chantelle should leave the relationship, gave his reason as: "Because in the long term, he would leave her, because he had got what he wanted from her". One girl who had advised Chantelle not to have sex assumed it would be OK once she knew if it was a long-term relationship.

The third scenario probed identity issues (insert a brief intro).

3. Marcus is almost 17. He has a group of friends who talk about their sexual activity all the time. They asked him if he had had sex. When he told them that he hadn't, they laughed at him. Since then they keep teasing him and ask him if he is gay. He doesn't want to cope with their jokes anymore.

What should he do?

Again, students overwhelmingly thought that Marcus should not give in to peer pressure although slightly fewer than had said Chantelle should stand up for what she thought was right. Out of the four boys who said Chantelle should have sex, three also said that Marcus should have sex, to “shut his friends up” and one said he should just lie to them and say that he has had sex. Two other students also suggested he lie to “stop the bullying”. A third 25 of participants believed that he should stand up to his friends by leaving the friendship group. Eight said that he should get support from others by talking to someone. The reasons given for him standing up for himself were: “So he wouldn’t be bullied anymore”, but there was also a high expectation among students, especially those who suggested he left the friendship group, that: “real friends don’t do that [bullying]”.

4. Raj and Isaac both have a personal faith and come from very religious families. They are in the third year at university. They are very attracted to each other. Both have close friends that are girls and Isaac had a girlfriend for a short time, but they have both known for a while now that they are only attracted to people of the same sex. Their families have made it very clear that a homosexual relationship would be unacceptable, and they love and respect their parents.

It should be noted that thirteen students did not answer this question, some because they didn’t finish the scenarios in the time allotted; others though gave their opinions about scenarios following this and so I assume that they chose not to give answers to Scenario 4 either because they were uncomfortable with the topic of homosexuality or because they weren’t sure what to write.

- a. What are the issues they face?

Some students felt that that Raj and Isaac would face internal struggles about the situation. A Christian boy said: “Because they love and respect their parents it will be hard for them to disobey them, even though they love each other” while a Muslim girl wrote: “Losing their family, losing their faith, losing each other”. The large majority felt they would face negative pressure from family, society and religion, for example: “Homophobia, getting kicked out of home, family neglect”. A

few students felt they would face both internal and external pressures. Other comments included: “Going out with people they aren’t really interested in and staying unhappy for the rest of your life” (Christian girl) and “Religion, social stigma, boredom, confused and depressed” (Muslim boy).

b. What should they do and why?

There seemed to be a clear understanding of the issues faced by Raj and Isaac as expressed in section ‘a’ of this scenario, yet when it came to giving advice to Raj and Isaac, responses seemed more reticent and even more students declined to answer part ‘b’, even though they had answered part a.

Over half of the students in the workshops, felt that Raj and Isaac should be honest with their families and friends, but their reasons for doing so were varied. Some felt that it would work out OK in the end: “Being honest is the best way your family will love you no matter what” (Atheist girl) and “So that they can help their parents understand that being homosexual is not a bad thing and they [the parents] should be supportive of their decision [to be in a relationship]” (Muslim girl). Others felt that Raj and Isaac owed it to their family to be honest with them: “Keeping a secret is going to hurt them [the parents] more” (Christian boy). Some felt they should be honest because they should be able to be themselves regardless of what other people saw as acceptable: “They can’t help being gay and hiding it won’t help” (Hindu girl) and “If parents are homophobic they can sue them and put them [the parents] in jail” (Atheist boy) and also “The possibility of love is more important than a family’s anger” (Christian girl).

There were other minority voices in the workshops that suggested that Raj and Isaac should either lie about their homosexuality or go out with girls; this was suggested mainly by those whose faith is not important to them. Most of those who suggested that Raj and Isaac lie or go out with girls to cover for their homosexuality felt that it was the family ties that were most important, rather than religious teaching on homosexual relationships. Four students also mentioned that they thought that family was more important than a homosexual relationship. Whilst family values that frown on homosexual activity are likely to be based on perceived

religious ideals, it would seem that the students were more interested in and worried about the familial ties than religious values. A few individuals expressed views that were interesting because of the way they included religious belief, prayer and what seem to be a more developed sense of who God is into their thinking. One individual, a Christian girl whose religion was very important to her, suggested that Raj and Isaac might: “pray and that God would provide a way for them”. Another Christian girl felt that they should do what they want, because: “only God can judge”.

5. Magdalena has been living with her boyfriend for around a year. Her family disapprove of them living together. The first three months were lovely, but then one night she burned the dinner, he threw the saucepan across the kitchen only just missing her. Since then he has become more aggressive, checks her phone and won't let her see her friends. Last night he forced her to have sex with him. This is not what Magdalena had expected. She still loves him, but she wants the abusive behaviour to stop. She feels her family will not be very understanding.

What should she do?

Over half the students suggested Magdalena talk to someone outside the relationship for help and support; some suggested counselling and others that the police should be involved. Almost a fifth of participants said she should get out of the relationship either straight away or if things don't change. Most of the participants acknowledged that this was an unhealthy relationship, but around one in ten felt her boyfriend might change: “If he does love her she can ask him to change” (Christian boy). A large number felt that it might get worse: “There is a constant awareness that he could end up killing her” (Atheist girl).

6. Sam has just found out that she is pregnant. She is expected to be a virgin when she gets married and feels very worried about the shame she may bring on her family. She thinks that her boyfriend is finding it very difficult and is not sure that he will stay around.

a. What are the issues they face?

All students saw that Sam would face difficulties either because of her partner leaving or because of various social, religious and family difficulties. Many suggested that she might face both. Some expressed the view that she has some difficult choices ahead and that she may become a one-parent family.

b. What should she do?

Around two thirds, or 50, of the students said that Sam should talk to someone and try to get support. Some suggested specialist agencies and others that she should talk to her parents and her boyfriend. Of the quarter of participants who felt confident to decide on the choices open to Sam, the highest number indicated they felt Sam should have an abortion, almost as many that she should keep the baby and a very small proportion that she should offer the baby for adoption. One student suggested praying and another that she should: "Do whatever she wants, it is up to her". This last quotation could be taken to be uncaring, but it could also be interpreted as be pragmatic or non-directive. The same atheist boy who suggested that Raj and Isaac might: "sue their parents", proposed that Sam should: "Move out, get a life, so she doesn't have to deal with such idiotic and ancient traditions". It is hard to know if this is a serious suggestion or just the disquiet of a student who was having to deal, uncomfortably, with issues of religion.

When asked why they had given the advice to Sam that they had, most said that she needed support; almost a quarter of the participants felt that her family would help out once they knew: "Go to her family, for support, financial help and help her decide what to do" (Atheist girl) and "They [the family] should know and be there to support her" (Muslim girl). All those who said they felt the family might help were girls. This may be significant and there may be several explanations for such a gender difference. It could be that girls are generally closer to their family; it may also point to girls being more able to empathise with Sam's vulnerability and see the family as the logical place to go for support. Those who suggested adoption or abortion all felt that that was the best decision to make because it would be too hard to go forward with the pregnancy.

4.3.3.2 Scenarios: Group workshop responses

Following the collection of the individual responses, students were put into small groups. These were made up of students who declared a similar religious importance on their individual forms. Many of the group responses were the same as, or similar to, those given by the individual students. However, there were a number of interesting aspects of the groups outside the remit of this research yet worthy of investigation in terms of group dynamics and how opinions may change or be subsumed once individuals enter a group. These observations are briefly discussed below.

Having explored the data I have realised that the responses from the groups seem to fall into four categories. The first I will call 'democratic' responses. These are answers to questions that took the ideas put forward by individual students and offered them all as possible ways forward for the individuals in the scenarios. The second type of response were 'authoritarian' answers to the scenarios. In these groups, only one voice seems to be heard while others were lost and subservient to that voice. The third set of responses were 'creative' responses. These groups not only came up with the ideas that they had when they were working alone, but also new ones, sparked by the discussion. The fourth category of responses were 'deviator-less' responses. In these, a person who may deviate from the rest of the group's understandings of the issues does not have their opinions included in the group feedback.

4.3.3.2.1 Democratic response

One group in Rural School when coming together to understand the issues faced by Raj and Isaac in Scenario 4 brought all the ideas from the individuals and added them to the group workshop response form.

4a: What are the issues they face?

Rejection/shame from their families.

Marriage consent issues.

Guilty for bringing shame upon their families.

Blame themselves.

4b: What should they do?

Be honest and proud.

Don't let religion get in the way.

4c: Why?

Can't help their sexuality and who they fall in love with.

4.3.3.2.2 Authoritarian response

Members of a St Joseph's School group who understood their religion to be moderately important to them, all boys from Christian backgrounds, had three of the four members of their group write on their individual forms that Chantelle in Scenario 2 should not be pressured into sex, arguing: "Wait until the time is right, because both people need to feel ready"; "Stick to her choice, because if he loved her he would wait"; and "Tell him and see what happens, no-one should be forced to do something they don't want to do". One student, however, suggested that Chantelle should: "Have sex, (safe sex) because her boyfriend keeps nagging". The idea from the group emerged as: "She [Chantelle] should use a condom. So she is safe, and she doesn't get an STI or a pregnancy". Looking back on the original forms it was obvious from the handwriting that the student filling in the form for the group was the same boy who had said that Chantelle should have sex. He had totally ignored the views of the others in his group and only recorded his own views as the group response.

4.3.3.2.3 Creative response

One small group was creative in its assessment of the situation faced by Sam in Scenario 6. This was a group of girls who felt that their religion was reasonably important to them. They had all suggested in their individual workshop response forms that Sam should get help from her parents as they could support her. However, once in a small group their responses had grown and changed. All the girls still said that Sam should talk to her parents and in answer to why they said:

She can get support in case she becomes a single mother. We think that Sam and Jay shouldn't consider abortion because if their parents are religious they would be against abortion, so we think that they should discuss further plans such as getting married or having a stable home for the three of them and they shouldn't be bothered about their parents' opinion because they are gonna live their life together in the future without their parents.

They also went on as part of their response to Scenario 6 to write additionally about Chantelle from Scenario 2 and Marcus from Scenario 3. It seems that they assumed the scenarios were linked although no link was indicated (except by them) and said:

Marcus and Chantelle should discuss about what's bothering him to be so desperate for sex, so they can find out what's going on.

4.3.3.2.4 Deviator-less response

One small group in Fitzgerald School was made up of boys and girls of various religions, who thought that their religion was important or very important to them. In Scenario 1, all except one student felt that Jay should support his girlfriend and his child. One student, a Muslim girl, felt that Jay's girlfriend should get an abortion because then: "She and Jay don't have to worry about anything". The suggestion that the girl should get an abortion was not evident in the group response that read: "[Jay] should support the child. Keep the baby as it may bring the relationship closer together and mature. He should have used protection. He is the father and he should have been smarter, sexually. He needs now to [take] responsibility and keep the baby regardless". It is hard to say if the Muslim girl who had suggested that Jay's girlfriend have an abortion was over-ruled by the group and had her opinions ignored or if, having spoken with the rest of the students, she changed her mind or decided not to express her views.

4.3.3.3 Discussion

When confronted with the dilemmas outlined in the scenarios the default position for many of the students, was to recommend talking about the issues, either with the person involved or with an important other, for example a parent or counsellor,

and then to work through the issues. However, a large number were prepared to give their opinion on a course of action for those in the scenarios straight away. Some of those prepared to give their views were cautious in their judgement of the situation or advice, whilst others were more forthright in their views.

Possibly stimulated by the way the scenario was written, one group of atheist and agnostic students from Rural School readily identified the problems for Sam and were one of only two small groups to talk about how her loss of virginity might be a factor in her choices. Some of their comments were a projection of their understanding of religious teaching, when dealing with relationships and sex, onto those whose predicament the young people found outlined in front of them: “[Sam would face] becoming a single mum, her parents wouldn’t agree. Abortion? But it would not get her virginity back”.

One male student, Solomon, embraced a Catholic religious identity and saw his religion as being very important to him. However, he seemed to want his cake and eat it. When responding to Scenario 1, Solomon felt that Jay should tell his girlfriend to go and find another boyfriend, because that way: “he wouldn’t be forced [into becoming a father] and the child will not be killed”. This seemed to demonstrate a rather interesting way of solving the problem whilst maintaining the strong pro-life stance offered by mainstream Catholicism. As a researcher, I was intrigued to learn what his opinion was when asked to give advice to a girl in similar circumstances. In Scenario 6 (where a girl finds she is pregnant) he felt that Sam should put pressure on her boyfriend to: “stay with the child and get married” and called on the girl to “show courage”. In the boy’s ‘shoes’ he displayed a temptation to run away from the problem, yet when seeing a similar situation from the girl’s point of view he felt the boyfriend should stay, to: “become a father and husband”. This suggests one of three things:

- It may be that in Scenarios 1 and 6 Solomon tried to follow a path that would be best for himself in the role of protagonist in each scenario.
- That seeing the situation from the girl’s point of view he recognised her need for help and so changed his mind.

- It may be that because there was a religious aspect to Sam's story in Scenario 6, he felt it was more important for them to stay together.

It is possible, had he been asked to answer Scenario 1 a second time, that he might have answered differently. Either way his religiosity affected his belief that the unborn child should "not be killed", whilst it may not stretch to him taking responsibility for the child as outlined in Scenario 1.

Another boy, Raashid, was a Bangladeshi Muslim who understood his religion to be very important to him. When writing advice for Jay, Raashid wrote: "He [Jay] should stay with the mother and become a father. He must make a commitment as it is his child. Abortion is unethical". He assumed that the right thing to do was to face the responsibilities of fatherhood. However, when giving advice to Sam in Scenario 6 his advice and his stance were very different. He thought Sam would face a number of difficulties: "She may lose her place in the family, social stigma, when she gets married her husband will not be happy", and said Sam should "abort" the pregnancy, because: "Regardless of abortion being unethical, it would bring great shame, plus her boyfriend will not share the responsibility". Given his responses it seemed obvious that his views were very different to those of Solomon.

Raashid saw his religion as being very important but did not mention religion in his responses, although where he says that "abortion is unethical" it is very possible that such a view may have a religious foundation. When it comes to "bringing great shame", Raashid makes it clear that what his community feels and the effect on the family are more important than following the mainstream Islamic view that abortion is haram (not allowed) (Syed, 2016). He sees that it is better to abort the pregnancy rather than cope with the shame. This is just one example, from my data, where ties to cultural and expected norms in a community seem to outweigh the importance of a religiously-based morality. Considering that strong family ties are often seen as a result of religious affiliation (Abbot et al., 1990), it may be that at some point Raashid's family norms were also religious norms, but things seem to be changing and Raashid's attitude to this situation could be a demonstration of apparent virtue being more important than actual virtue, showing a fracturing of religious and cultural values. It is not clear if Raashid had an understanding of the

double standards he seemed to be representing. One iman with whom I have worked in the past, once said to me: “Abortion is a sin to cover a sin”. He found it sad that often young people, especially those from religious backgrounds, found it difficult to be honest about a pregnancy where they feel it may bring shame on them or their family, especially their parents, who are likely to be disappointed in them.

Young people with an unplanned pregnancy in some religious communities face two choices: being honest with the family and coping with the consequences in a community that frowns on sex outside of marriage; or having an abortion, where outwardly it is as if it never happened – the sex, the pregnancy, the abortion. Acceptance in the community seems, as illustrated here at least, to be paramount and seemingly ‘trumps’ following what your religion says is acceptable to God. Raashid’s differing responses to two similar situations may also demonstrate an inequality in expectation, an issue that also appears in the questionnaire and interview data, where girls are expected to be chaste but male sexuality is expected to be demonstrated (Peterson, 2015).

The issue of family arose again when Raashid gave his opinions about a way forward for Raj and Isaac. He felt that they would face: “Religious and social stigma, [and] family breakdown” and that “They should not be together” because “it is against their families’ will”, reinforcing the importance of the family, rather than religious doctrine, when making moral decisions, although they may be seen as the same in this instance. Reviewing all the individual and focus group responses showed that religion was mentioned 42 times, God once, prayer six times and family 179 times, which could possibly underline the way that young people, even those who say they are religious, understand family and community to be more important than religious teachings.

The way in which family seems to be more important than belief or religion opens a discussion about the young people’s understanding of the nature and abilities of their god, as well as their attitudes toward their god. If god or gods are omniscient, as many religions teach (Grudem & Grudem, 2005; Sarwar, 2006; Epstein, 2013), a

'being' who knows everything about everyone and gives guidance or laws to followers, how does understanding this manifest itself in the responses in the workshops? The workshops appear to demonstrate that students can face a dilemma when making decisions on moral issues. Do they be honest or keep hidden what they perceive as wrongdoing? Do they please their family, prevent disappointment and the shame, or do they follow religious teaching and please a god whose rules or guidance they feel they may have broken, or are about to break?

Part of my professional occupation over the last ten years has been working in schools teaching relationships and sex education. One of my standard lessons deals with issues around unintended pregnancy. During this lesson the students look at the options available to someone facing an unintended pregnancy at an early age. Students discuss a way forward for those involved. After in-depth deliberation, normally around half the class will consider adoption to be the best decision for a teen, with over a third seeing keeping the child as the most appropriate option and a very few admitting to seeing abortion as the best way forward. Most students understand the problems having a child at a young age brings, especially those who have high hopes for their own academic life. The idea of abortion is difficult for them to consider, for ethical, moral or religious reasons.

At the same time as working in schools I was also involved with a pregnancy advice centre, a safe place for those who needed to make a 'real' decision about an unintended pregnancy. Abortion tended to be the preferred option for the girls or couples I encountered because there was less chance of having to face their often religious community with an unplanned pregnancy or the disappointment of their family. In reality, adoptions are far harder to arrange and a pregnancy far harder to hide. What this shows is that often 'real life' makes decisions more complex and difficult to make than discussing scenarios in a classroom.

Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), argued that the important parts of religion were social, rather than spiritual. It could be argued that some of my data, an example of which is outlined above in Raashid's opinions,

corroborates this theory in as much as some participants have shown that they would rather please their community and family than obey accepted religious tenets. I would also claim, however, that some of my participants show from their responses that their spirituality is seemingly more important to them than their acceptance by their community. Adé, a Nigerian Christian girl who felt that her religion was very important to her, demonstrated this through her responses to Scenarios 4 and 6, both of which had a religious dilemma for the protagonists. Adé took quite a spiritual standpoint and related her answers to God, but not to her family or community. Her advice to Raj and Isaac was that they should: “Pray about their ongoing battle” and that “He [God] will provide the answer/solution”. Adé could see that Sam may end up: “Losing her boyfriend and her family disowning her”. Her advice for Sam was to: “Pray to God” as “He will provide light in her darkest hours/days”. It wasn’t that Adé had a weaker tie with her community, which created opportunities for her spirituality to be more important, in fact the opposite. Unlike other students who saw their personal, national and cultural identities to be partially British or totally British, even though their parents may have come from Africa, Adé took her community identity very seriously, defining her present, as well as family, nationality as Nigerian, but also writing what tribe she belonged to. Another student from a similar background wrote advice to Raj and Isaac saying that: “Only God can judge” and that Sam should: “Keep the baby and tell her family” because “it would be a bigger sin to abort the child”.

It seemed that students often wrote advice that they thought was right and in line with their understanding of religious guidance, where appropriate, however it is possible that students may be reticent to take their own counsel if they found themselves in these situations in real life. When giving advice to Marcus, when his friends were trying to pressure him into having sex, three quarters of the participants said that he should deal with the issues with his friends, through speaking to them, ignoring them or leaving the friendship group, but how many students would actually find it that easy to do (Pappas, 2010)? Over half of the students said that Magdalena should talk to someone else about the abuse she was suffering, and many said she should leave the relationship. However, in reality, many

people, not just women, stay in abusive relationships, sometimes with disastrous consequences (Herbert, et al., 1991; Campbell, et al., 2003). Pupils seemed to write what they want to be the case, but this may not be a realistic depiction of their likely actions in 'real' circumstances. How many students have already been pressured into having sex (Thompson, 2010), stayed in a friendship group even though they have been bullied (Rigby, 2007) or would choose to have an abortion rather than face their community with an unplanned pregnancy (Alizadeh et al., 2011)? Abortion rates in the inner-city area where the main data collection took place are over 50% for under-18-year-old girls, even though it has a very high percentage of people understanding themselves to be religious (ONS, 2012). The highest religious populations of this area identify as Christians or Muslims; both religions have negative attitudes to abortion.

My findings indicate that there are many areas of possible conflict for young people when considering issues of relationships, sex, moral and value-based decision-making and how religious faith may impact those decisions. Often cultural values and norms are seen as being more important than religious values, although the relationship between the two is multifaceted, intricate and often messily entwined.

I would never have thought on my own of using workshops to collect data in this research, so I thank the young people in the formative focus groups for suggesting this innovative idea. The attitudes and ideas that have been revealed by this form of data collection have been enlightening and unexpected. The workshops have opened a whole new window onto young people's lives that would not have been explored by the other research methods employed in this study.

The focus group workshops may not give an accurate indication of the actions young people are likely to make in real-life situations in the future, but what they do is shed light on young people's attitudes and give a snap shot of some of the compromises and complexities they are already thinking about.

4.4 Questionnaires and interviews

4.4.1 Introduction

The findings in this section of the thesis were based on questionnaires completed by 291 Year 10 students, from three inner-city schools and one rural school in England. Twenty-five of those students were then chosen to return for interview and asked questions based on the content of their questionnaires.

Whilst this study concentrates on faith-sensitive teaching in RSE because of the current dearth of studies at the juncture of RSE, faith and religion, it is not possible to evaluate what the characteristics of faith-sensitive RSE might be without first finding out what the participants see as 'good quality' RSE. Participants in this study have demonstrated that whilst they want RSE to be sensitive to and respectful of faith they also want faith-sensitive RSE to be of good quality. Simply talking about faith in RSE doesn't make it high quality. Faith sensitivity is by no means the only important issue for those making policy decisions concerning RSE, but it is an issue that is often shied away from or glossed over by academics and practitioners alike and needs further study. I would argue too that RSE cannot be good quality if faith is ignored by those who make policy or teach RSE.

4.4.2 Demography: Gender, age, ethnicity and religious identities of questionnaire and interview participants

At the beginning of the questionnaires (Appendix 3), participants were asked some demographic questions enabling me to investigate the dynamics and subtleties, similarities and differences between various groups. The open-ended questions about nationality and religion allowed the students to reveal how they saw themselves and what identities they adopted; their answers proved to be both interesting and intricate, sometimes set and sometimes changeable.

The notion of identity and the multiple identities with which people each align (Stets & Burke, 2000) is not an easy phenomenon to explain or analyse, but when trying to grapple with the self-perceptions of students it is important to understand that their perceptions should take priority over the researcher's or the teacher's

wish to categorise students in an attempt to simplify their own interaction with the data or the individual. This is especially important when trying to unpack what is needed to equip students for a life of relationships and, probably, sex through RSE. RSE provision should be designed to inform, empower and assist students to gain agency in and contentment with their relationships, including sexual ones.

Some participants in the study communicated that they had conflicts with aspects of their identities. Sometimes these conflicts stemmed from the different value systems between their religious and cultural backgrounds and those of the prevailing values held by many in British society. Even those participants from a more mainstream British background, who didn't have the same type of conflicts due to culture or religion, often still felt pressure from the media and their peers concerning who or what they should be, how they should act and what they should look like or how they should behave.

National heritage was clearly indicated as an issue by participants in the study and recorded during the questionnaire stage of data collection. It seems the students were happy to adopt national heritage labels for themselves in response to the questions asked, but it is important to understand that these identities are already changing for many and are likely to change again during their maturation as students and probably also in their adult life.

The demographic questions within the questionnaire are shown in Figure 4.1.

1. What age are you (in years)?
2. Male Female (Please circle your answer)
3. What is your faith, religion or belief system? E.g. Hindu, Atheist etc.
4. What is your original family nationality?
5. What is your nationality?

Figure 4.1 Demographic questions in the questionnaire

4.4.3 Demographic questions

I decided to insert a question about the gender of students, so that responses to questions could be compared across gender groups. There was no option for the students to register a non-binary gender identity. When doing similar research in the future I would leave the question 'open-ended', in the same way as the religion and nationality questions were, e.g. What gender are you? Then students would be free to choose their own gender identity and express it in any way they were comfortable with. Had this been done it would have made the analysis less straightforward but may also have enriched the data content.

The students were asked how old they were; in the end, this question was not as important as it first seemed it might be as all participants in the workshop and questionnaire stages of the study were in their final term of Year 10. This meant that most participants were the same age in years.

The demographic data around ethnicity and religion registered by the young people in the questionnaire were diverse and helped to identify trends within the data. Students adopted a range of distinctive and sometimes precise labels for themselves. Participants were not given a matrix to complete and so were free to say how they saw themselves, both ethnically and religiously.

Question 3 purposefully used the terms 'faith', 'religion' and 'belief system' to give each student the scope to label themselves in a way that would best describe how they saw themselves and their religious beliefs or their worldview. Belief system was added alongside religion in question three to be inclusive of those students who may not see themselves as belonging to a religion, but who may feel that they have a set of values by which they live. Before the questionnaires were handed out, an explanation of atheism and agnosticism was given, this was presented in an 'ad lib' way so as to be sensitive to the needs of the participants in each school. The explanation was given so that those who were rather unsure of what words to use about their beliefs or how they viewed religion had some ideas of what they could put on the form. This was especially important in Rural School where there were significantly lower levels of religious observance. In the inner-city schools the

participants were far clearer about their religion or belief system. Most students, in these urban communities, readily took on an externally expressed belief system or religious identity, demonstrating their adherence to faith either by clothing, e.g. hijab, turban or by verbal expression. Many of the inner-city pupils talked freely about their religion and were happy talking in religious language and about religious topics. Some of these students, however, even though they were quick to adopt a strong religious identity when completing the questionnaire, or at interview were more reticent about the religious aspects of their lives. One participant, who in the questionnaire described herself as Muslim, at interview said she was an 'agnostic Muslim'. Many students at interview were more critical or questioning about their religion than was apparent from their questionnaires. Hindu and atheist were used as examples of religion or belief systems on the questionnaire because there were not many Hindus in the inner-city schools and atheism, whilst it may be seen as a too simplistic label, was a convenient 'hanger' for those who didn't want to be seen as religious or have a belief in a god.

Question 4 on 'original family nationality' was discussed with the semi-structured focus groups and trialled during the pilot. Nationality was chosen as a description for the participants to align with, as it was more easily understood within the focus groups than the terms race or ethnicity.

Question 5 was included so that students could assume an ethnic identity for themselves that was not necessarily the same as their family's ethnic background. Many students freely took on a British label for themselves, sometimes linked to their family's background, e.g. British Asian; however, a large number of students assumed a purely British identity even when they, their parents or grandparents were born abroad, and they saw their family heritage to be from somewhere other than Britain.

4.4.4 Demographic findings

There were slightly more male students (52%) in the study than female (48%).

Most participants were aged 15, with only around one in six aged 14. There was one participant (out of a total of 291) who gave an age of 16. All students were in the last term (summer term) of Year 10 when they completed the research questionnaire. Interviews were carried out with a selection of those students, either in the same term or in their first term (autumn term) of Year 11.

Across the four schools, just over a third of students considered themselves Christian, or Christian-Catholic, just less than a third Muslim, and around a quarter atheist or agnostic. Less than a tenth of participants came from other religious groups or worldviews including Hindus, Sikhs and pagans. The numbers of different religious backgrounds varied greatly from school to school. St Joseph's, a church school, was almost totally Christian, whilst Snelgrove School, an all-girls' school, was mostly Muslim, but in Rural School most students self-embraced a non-religious label. The school with students from the most varied religious backgrounds was Fitzgerald School, a mixed comprehensive school in an inner-city area, where religion was still seen as an important aspect of many of the students' identities. Approximately half of the students in Fitzgerald School saw themselves as Muslim, just over a quarter as Christian, under a fifth identified as not being religious and the remainder were split between other religions including Hinduism and Sikhism as seen in Figure 4.2.

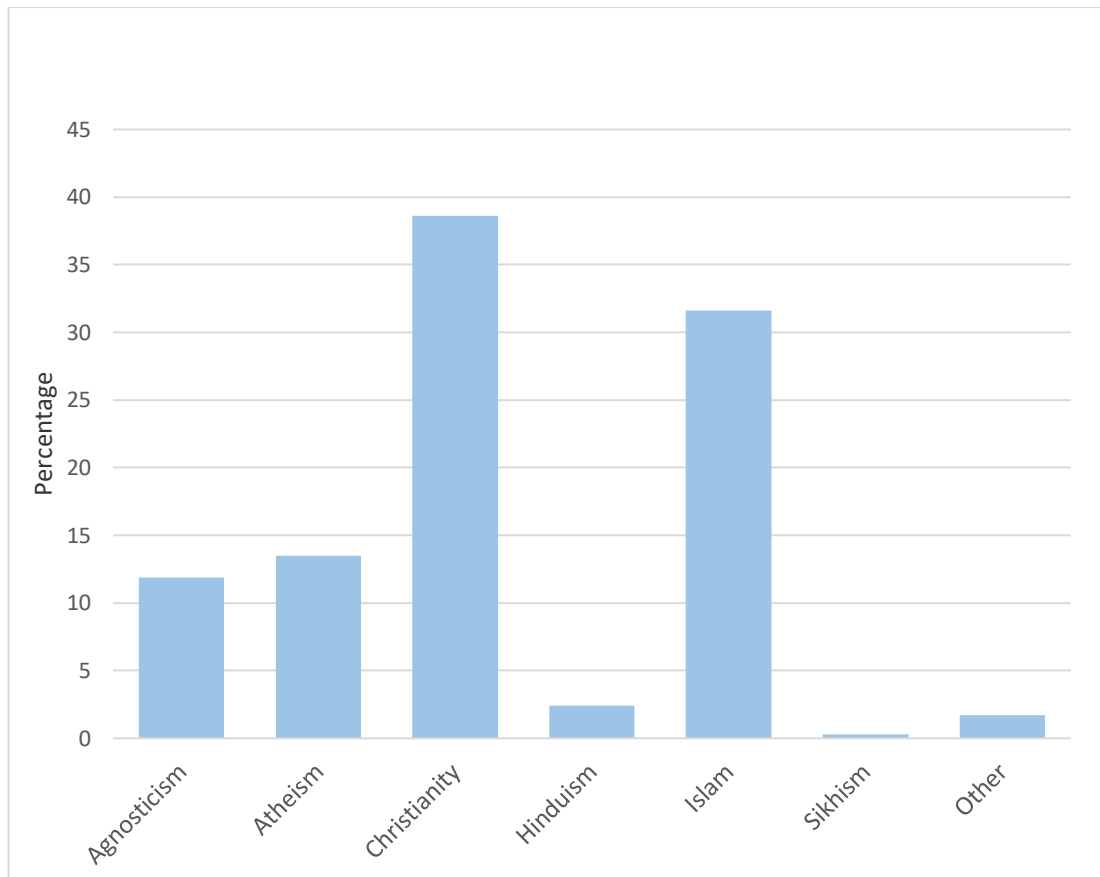


Figure 4.2 Religion or belief system of participants

Questions concerning original family nationality and what the participants understood to be their own nationality, contained no examples that would lead a student to respond in a particular way, so it is likely that students responded authentically.

Students' original family nationality, as shown in Figure 4.3, was expressed in various ways. Some saw themselves as being from African or Asian backgrounds, whilst the majority of students pinpointed their original family nationality more precisely, e.g. Pakistani or Polish. When constructing the categories of national identity for the graphs, it was necessary to amalgamate some differing responses into joint ethnic groups such as African or European (non-British), as there were small numbers of students (sometimes only one) from a plethora of various family nationalities and, although not ideal, it was necessary to aggregate some of the data. Students from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds were added as

separate nationalities because of the large numbers of students who saw their family heritage as coming from those three countries.

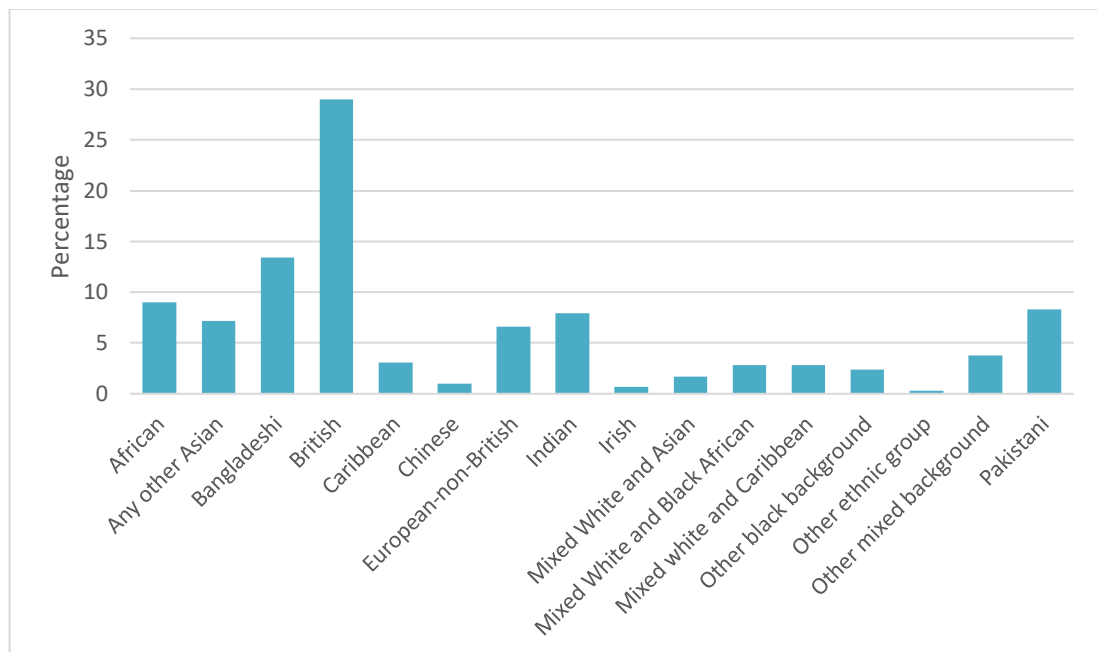


Figure 4.3 Original family nationality

Findings from the national identity section of the questionnaire were extremely hard to analyse in a way that did justice to the richness of the data and could be the subject of another research study. The participants went on to express what they saw as their 'own', individual, national identity. There were expected identity shifts, in that many students saw their family background as African, Asian, Afro-Caribbean or mixed heritage, but understood themselves to be British as well as the nationality that related to their family background, or only British. The number of students who identified as European went up slightly because of a small number of students who, whilst seeing their family heritage as non-European, e.g. African, adopted a European (non-British) nationality for themselves as their families had settled in other European countries, before coming to Britain. The complexity and multifaceted nature of the students' own identity is indicated in Figure 4.4.

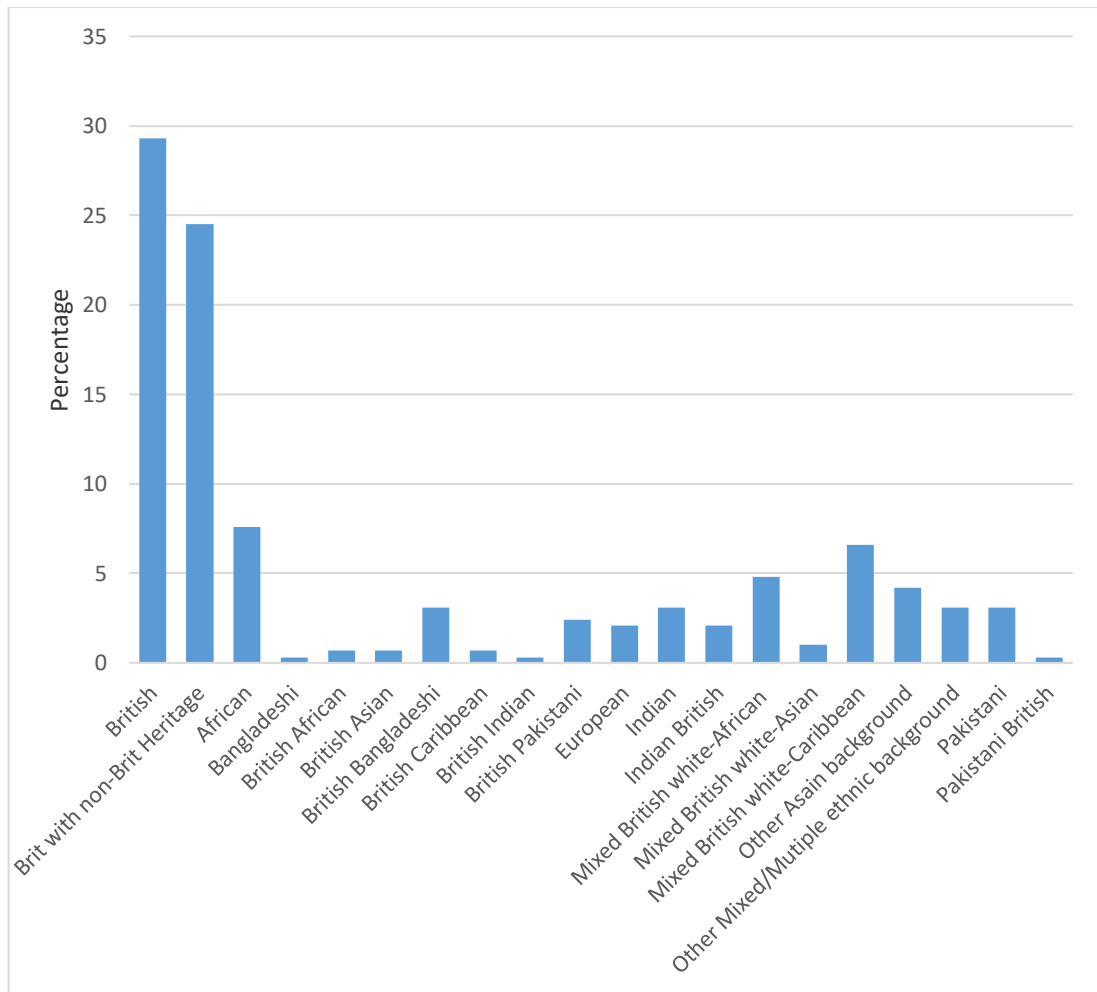


Figure 4.4 Participants' self-elected national identities

Of the 83 students who stated that their family heritage was British, none chose a different national identity for themselves, but a similar number chose a simple 'British' identity even though the family background was non-British. Some students wanted to be known as British but also retain their non-British heritage, e.g. British Pakistani. Some students described themselves as British-Asian or British-African in creating a label for themselves. These were not students of mixed heritage, but ones with both parents coming from the same national background; however, the students understood their identity to be part British whilst also partly retaining their original family national identity. Other participants were more particular and wanted to preserve a greater link with the specific country from where they, their parents or grandparents originated and so described themselves,

for example, as 'Indian British' or 'Nigerian British' (Figure 4.5). Other students retained only their original family national identity.

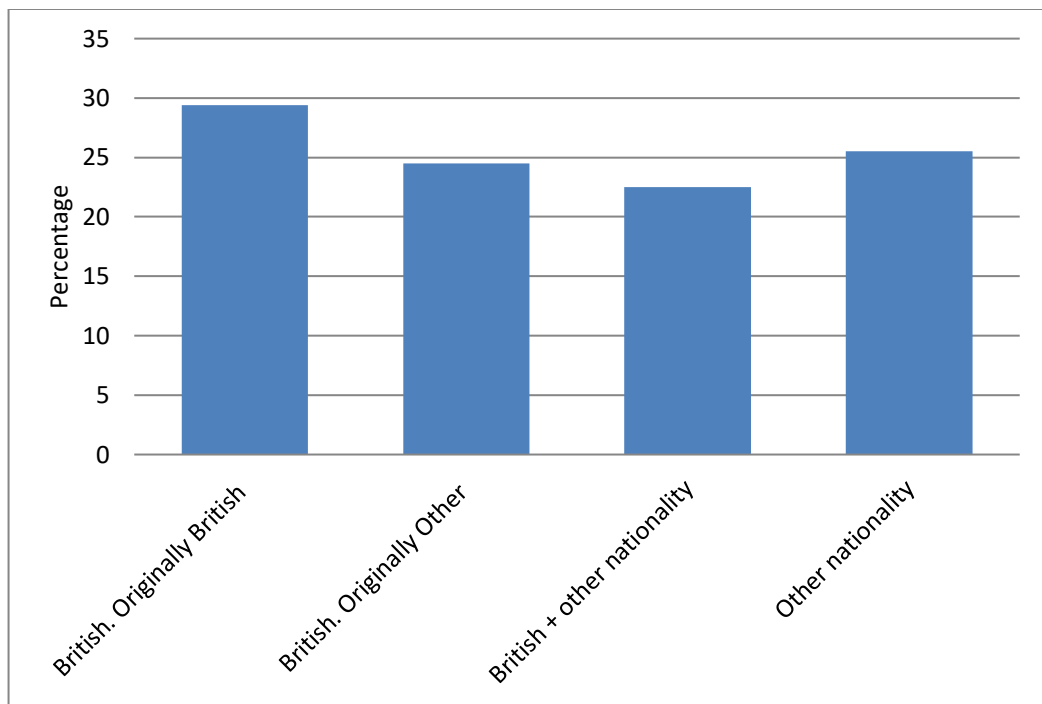


Figure 4.5 Perceived 'Britishness' of participants

4.4.4.1 Demography, identity, self

The simple demographic statistics belie the huge complexity and diversity of identities represented by the figures. At the interview stage of the research it became clear that simple statistics did not illustrate the shifting of identities, and confusions that were taking place within some participants in my study.

4.4.4.2 Gender

The statistics for boys and girls were straightforward enough, there were slightly more boys (52%) than girls (48%) who took part in the study, but the interaction with the world and how students saw themselves as 'male' and 'female', how they thought they should fit in and perform gender stereotypes for society's double standards, based on their gender was far more complex.

At interview the girls expressed being upset, frustrated and annoyed with what was expected of them. Some students felt that boys, including their brothers, were treated very differently, with more freedom and less family responsibility than the girls who would be required to stay at home and help around the house. In some households, the girls were not allowed out with their friends or to meet with boys. Some of my participants who went to an all-girls' school, seldom spent any time with males apart from close relatives.

Hamidah, a Muslim girl who has taken on a purely British identity for herself yet was born 'back home' [India], had this to say:

I also don't want there to be a difference between me and my brother. I feel like there already is a lot of difference in how he is treated like he's allowed to go out whenever he wants, he is allowed to be with his friends and hang out and I am not. He can go on like long-term trips and I am allowed to only go on one-day trips. These are small things and they irk you, but they are like norms in our household.

Some female students expressed that they were being pressured from outside: to be a certain way; think a certain way; and behave or look a certain way. The pressure from family and faith communities was generally stronger for the students from a South Asian background, whilst those from white British or European backgrounds seemed to feel pressure more keenly from social media, online content, their peers and the more traditional forms of the British media, to be a certain kind of female. Christina, a white British atheist felt that peer pressure was very strong for her and her peers especially the girls:

Well, people on social media like Facebook they are always posting these things like your relationship should be like this or this and it's making you think you have to do this, you have to do that, you have to be like this, but not all people can be like that and it's almost downgrading the other people that aren't like that, that physically for some reason cannot look like that, whether it is a disability or anxiety or anything. They [girls] have been made like they have to [have sex] through social media. When people come to school it's the thing to

talk about. It's like everyone right now is going through the stage that they are all experimenting and things like that and they come in, they're all happy about it, so the people are almost feeling pressured into doing the same thing.

However, the peer pressure was not only felt by the girls. Geoff, one of the boys from a British Christian background, felt that people pressured him into talking about things that he would rather have not got involved with and said:

Talking about, I don't know, maybe talking about smoking or drugs or sex. I feel uncomfortable when people talk about that.

Some of the boys felt that they should come over as macho and that there was pressure for boys not to come across as weak, that they needed to 'fit in' in the same way as the girls, but for the boys they needed to fulfil a different stereotype. Rosario a Christian Pakistani boy who felt that his religion was reasonably important to him said:

Oh, it's just like you know they don't want to be seen as weak or different from others. They want to be just like everyone else, being the top, not being downgraded.

4.4.4.3 Age

All students, except one, were less than a year apart in age which does not mean that they were all at the same developmental level as was pointed out by students taking part, with one saying: "different pupils mature at different stages". Some of the students thought that young people were mature enough to learn about sex at primary school or early in secondary school, others that Year 10 or 11 was the appropriate age and one girl felt that young people would only be mature enough once they were at college, whilst another girl wrote that some aspects should not be taught until even later, or not at all. Some of this variance may have been attributable to the participants' maturity themselves; however, the responses in the interviews (Appendix 6) seemed to point to this difference of opinion being more likely due to the cultural or religious norms concerning sex and the age at which parents talk about these matters at home:

You only really do it [RSE] in Year 7 and Year 8 and I think then we are too immature to learn about it, like it wouldn't be taken seriously. *White British Atheist girl*

Puberty and stuff 11, but about actual sexual intercourse I would say 17, 18. *Pakistani Muslim girl*

4.4.4.4 Religion

It became clear from the data that people from certain countries were more likely to say they belonged to particular religions. All but four of the 63 individuals from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds saw themselves as Muslims; those of Caribbean culture were mostly Christians; students identifying as being of African heritage were Christians or Muslims. Students who identified themselves as coming from British or other European backgrounds were likely to see themselves as Christians, atheists or agnostic. The original family background which manifested the greatest levels of diversity of religion was India, with a mix of Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Sikh students.

The links between nationality and religion are not surprising. If world history is explored, the reasons for this phenomenon become more evident. Christianity came to Britain in about 180 CE (Thomas, 1981) and over the centuries flourished until Britain was known as a 'Christian' country, with laws largely based on Christian values (Barnett, 2015). While the numbers attending church have diminished over the last 150 years or so, many of those who think of themselves as British also consider themselves to be Christian (ONS, 2012), even if they don't go to church, or even believe in God. One person who has espoused a strong atheist identity is Richard Dawkins who has been described as a 'new atheist', and referred to as one of the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse', whom Davie (2015, p. 191) says understands: "religion [...] [as] toxic; this is not a question of live and let live but of active campaigning to expose both the falsity of religious argument and the damage that ensues"). Yet, despite this animosity toward religion, Dawkins describes himself as a 'cultural Christian' (Dawkins, 2011). Culture may be understood as 'the way things are done here', but this version of so-called cultural Christianity is

unlikely to be seen as Christianity by people who consider that being a Christian includes following the teachings of Jesus:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, love your neighbour as yourself”. (Matthew 22 v 37-38, New International Version)

However, the ‘cultural Christianity’ described by Dawkins (2011) may well be the type of relationship engaged in by many with Christianity in Britain today, especially those from traditional British backgrounds.

When Europeans took over large parts of the world (Wallerstein, 2011), Christian missionaries followed (MacCulloch, 2010), which explains why large parts of Africa, the Caribbean (Smith, 1950) and the Americas have Christianity as their primary religion. The partition of India in 1947, into East Pakistan, West Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and India, created the new countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh which were designated as being countries for mostly Muslim people, with India (Khan, 2007) being mostly populated by Hindus and other religious minority groups. It is therefore unsurprising that most of the participants with a Pakistani or Bangladeshi background were Muslims, while those from India were from a greater mix of religions.

4.4.4.5 Nationality and Britishness

An investigation into the sample of participants who understood themselves to come from an Indian background helps us to appreciate the varying degrees of Britishness that a student from a non-British background may adopt. The students with an Indian heritage chose to express their personal national identity in four different ways. Of the 22 students who identified their family’s national heritage as Indian, five continued to describe themselves as only Indian, two chose to identify as Indian-British, nine as British-Indian and six as purely British. It would seem that these students and possibly many others too, embraced differing levels of Britishness as part of their national identities. Similar to the Indian students, the

sample of Pakistani students followed a comparable progression in their declared identity and levels of Britishness.

There are multifarious, complex and subtle shifts in the identities adopted by participants, from what they see as their own identity as opposed to the original national identity of their families. One pupil who stated that he was from a Bangladeshi background, saw himself as Italian even though he lived in Britain. I assumed that this was because he had spent time in Italy before coming to Britain and so identified with that country even though his family was of Bangladeshi origin. Another who had one Polish and one Pakistani parent chose to call himself “just British”.

Given that at this time (2018), in Britain, the Department for Education and the UK Government are putting great store in the need for British values to be promoted (Department for Education, 2014) in schools it is worth exploring Britishness a little further. Many young people in the study embraced Britishness as an important part of their identity. All who identified their family background as British retained a British identity for themselves. The ethnic group with non-British heritage that kept hold of their original family national identities more often than most, was composed of students from other European ethnic backgrounds. It is possible that this desire to identify with their original country was due to most families from Europe being only first-generation migrants to Britain, or possibly be due to the free travel of people across European borders, meaning their family’s time here could be temporary, with the likelihood of returning to their home country, unless they came to Britain as refugees. Those families from other ethnic backgrounds in Africa, the Caribbean or Asia may have been living in Britain for several generations, fled conflict, or come for economic reasons and so there is a reduced chance, or desire, to go back to a ‘home’ country, long-term.

National backgrounds and identities were multifarious, but not conflicted to the same extent as other elements of student identities. Many students felt comfortable with dual or even multiple national or racial identities. A significant number of students were glad to take on a ‘British’ identity even though their

family came from Africa, Asia, or other parts of the world. These emerging national identities seem straightforward and expected with many families, having settled in Britain, being holders of British passports. Some students demonstrated a strong attachment to their family’s original national background, although a high proportion of students from non-British backgrounds took on a British or part-British identity.

For some students though there seemed to be a conflict between being a westerner and someone with an eastern heritage (if such a divide is possible to identify). Given that I have already discussed how much of religion could be social and cultural, it is sometimes hard to know if the students are experiencing spiritual conflicts, cultural ones or both. Unpicking the facts here may be too tricky with my data. Whilst not the focus of this study, delving into the difference between the social, cultural and spiritual conflicts encountered by young people, especially young people of faith, could certainly be the focus of a future study.

4.4.4.6 Levels of religiosity

Students participants were asked how religious they thought they were based on a choice of five levels of religiosity. They were also asked if religion was important to just them or their families. This gave me the opportunity to explore possible links between background, culture and religious affiliation. Religiosity questions appeared in the questionnaire as in Figure 4.6.

6. How important is your faith, religion or belief system to you? (Please circle your answer)

Very important. (It influences everything I do)	Reasonably important	Moderately important	Not very important	Not at all important
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7. Is your faith, religion or belief system important to? (Please circle your answer)

Your family Yourself Both Neither

Figure 4.6 Questionnaire extract: levels of religious importance

Over a quarter of students said that their faith/religion/belief system was: “very important” to them and that it “influences everything I do”. Such students, together with those students who indicated that their religion was reasonably important to them, constituted over half of the students as shown in Figure 4.7.

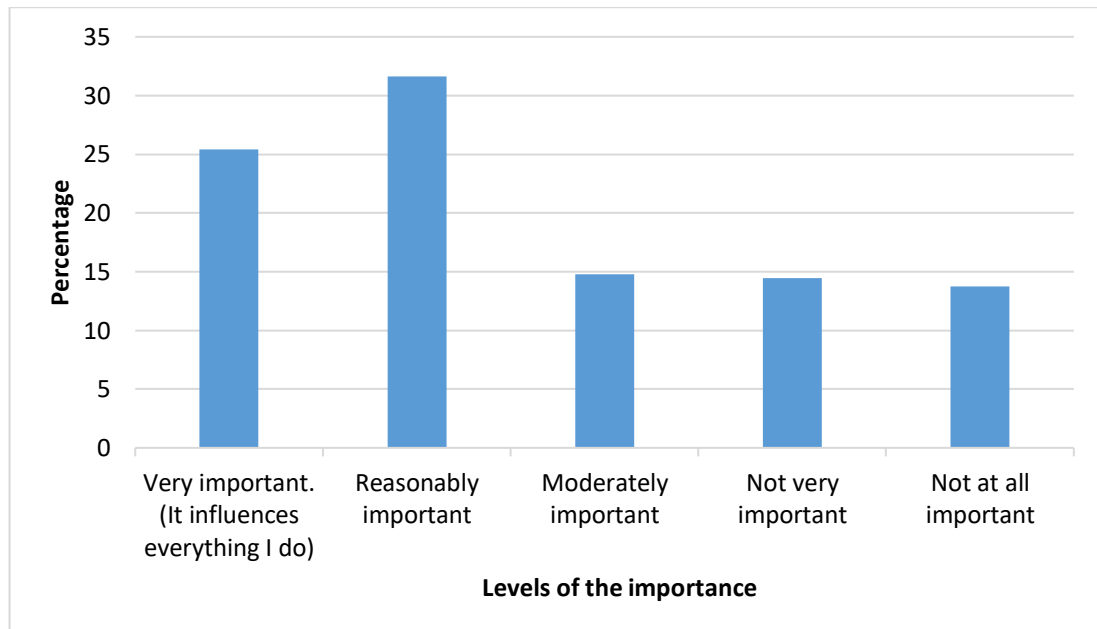


Figure 4.7 Levels of importance of religion or belief systems in the lives of participants

4.4.4.7 Importance of religion or belief system and its effect on participants’ questionnaire responses

Of the participants who were highly religious, having written that their religion was “very important” to them, Muslims formed the largest group at 60%, while just over 30% were Christians and the rest, 10%, were from other religions or belief systems. Three participants described themselves as agnostic or atheist, illustrating that not being sure about God or actively disagreeing that God exists was of significance to them, as shown in Figure 4.8.

It is important to give voice to students with an agnostic or atheist belief system, who say that what they believe “influences everything I do”, so they have been included in Figure 4.8. However, for the rest of the data analysis the phrase ‘highly religious’ is linked only to those students from faith backgrounds who stated that their faith or belief system was very important to them in that it “influences

everything I do”. This demarcation avoids confusion between the views of students who are religious and those who self-identify as agnostic or atheist and therefore could be described as non-religious.

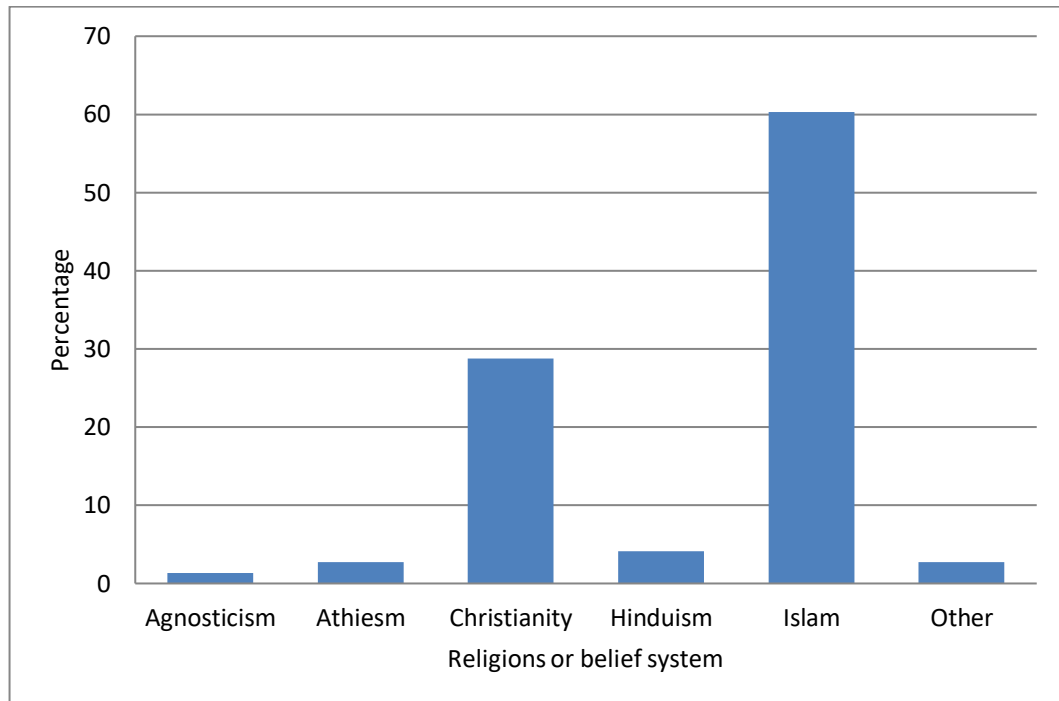


Figure 4.8 Students whose religion or belief system “influences everything they do”

The most interesting information about the effects of religiosity was gathered when investigating how it influences and sheds light on answers to other questions in the questionnaire or interview. Not everyone’s religiosity was demonstrated in a similar consistent manner. It would be wrong to think that those students who hold comparable levels of religiosity, as written in the answer to the question 6 in the questionnaire, react to life experiences or answer questions in the same way or embrace the same or even similar values. An example of this is when students were asked if they felt that the media had a positive, negative or neutral effect on young people. Of the group of highly religious students some stated that the media had a positive influence, others a negative influence and some thought that the media either didn’t have any effect or had both negative and positive effects on young people.

I expected that those students who described their religion as ‘very important’ to them and said it “influences everything I do” would be more likely to have a

conservative stance when answering questions about sex and sexuality in the questionnaire and at interview. This was true to a point. While these 'highly religious' students were no more likely to say that they didn't want some topics covered in RSE, like LGBT issues and abuse and domestic violence, a higher proportion of them said that they did not want to discuss unintended pregnancy choices and contraception. Most of the students in the 'highly religious' group did not explain why they thought some topics should not be covered in RSE. The few that did, wrote things like:

Abortion should not be taught in schools, because it is wrong. *Christian-Catholic boy*

Sex itself [should not be taught], because it makes me feel uncomfortable. *Muslim boy*

However, not all 'highly religious' students who felt that topics should not be taught gave religious reasons for their opinions:

How to do sex [should not be taught in school] because it is something that teenagers know already. *Muslim boy*

Sex is something we do [cover] in biology. *Muslim girl*

Three percent of the 'highly religious' students said they were unsure if they should learn about all topics in RSE, 44% of them said that there were things that they didn't want to be taught in RSE whilst 53% said that they wanted to learn everything because:

All information may be useful. *Muslim girl*

You need everything the teacher has to teach you. *Christian boy*

Across all the students, 72% said they wanted to learn everything in RSE; this compares to 53% of the 'highly religious' students, demonstrating that there may be different preferences concerning topics covered in RSE dependent on the strength of religious affiliation. Of the 'highly religious' students 97% agreed or

totally agreed with the statement ‘My religion gives me a code to live by’ while the remaining 3% were not sure. Forty three percent agreed or totally agreed that it is “sometimes hard to live by that code”, whilst 40% disagreed or totally disagreed. The rest of the ‘highly religious’ students were not sure. By analysing the answers of individual students to questions in the rest of the questionnaire, it seemed that those who recognised that they found their religious teachings harder to live by were likely to be more mature, or in a relationship. Those students who were not yet really thinking about relationships were more likely to say that they “totally disagreed” or “disagreed” that they sometimes found it hard to live by the code their religion gave them.

One example of this was provided by Afia. Afia was a British Muslim girl from a Bangladeshi background, who said that her religion was very important to her; she believed that her religion gave her a code by which to live and totally disagreed that she found it difficult to live by that code. Afia wanted to live by: “the teaching of my religion it is how I should live my life”. She also felt that people should have sex for the first time in their: “late twenties, because I think that they will be ready and mature”. She wrote that Islam’s three most important guidelines on relationships or sex were:

- a. You shouldn’t even be in a relationship.
- b. Not to have sex before marriage as it would be sinful.
- c. Love someone who is a believer.

Afia said that she wanted to live her life according to these guidelines. The answers she gave in other sections in her questionnaire indicated that a romantic relationship was not a likely to be a part of her life at that moment.

4.4.4.8 “Age at which it would be OK for someone to have sex for the first time”: What this tells us about students and the effects of religiosity, gender and culture

The statistic in the research that varied most between different groups of students was the age at which students felt it was “OK to have sex for the first time”. Answers ranged from 13 to 25 years of age, although some students also gave

flexible answers like: “When they are married” or “When they are ready”. Figure 4.9 clarifies how various groups expressed very varied answers to this question.

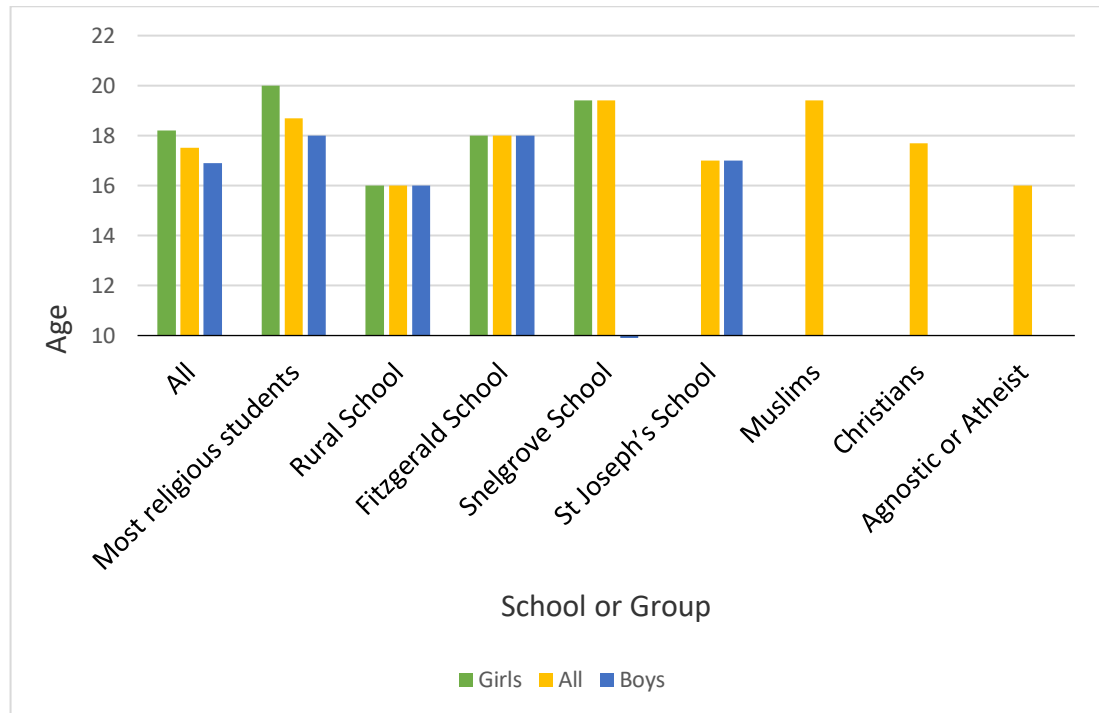


Figure 4.9 Age at which it is “Ok to have sex for the first time”

Religiosity seems to have been the main factor determining students’ answers to the question about the age at which it is acceptable to have sex for the first time. However, in the three inner-city schools, where the general levels of religiosity were higher, gender or school factors may have been also a significant factor. The girls in Snelgrove School were mostly Muslims, mainly from South Asian backgrounds, and the boys in St Joseph’s School were mostly Christians from mixed ethnic backgrounds, including many of African and Caribbean heritage. Which or how many of these factors influenced the variation in responses to the question concerning the age at which “it is OK to have sex for the first time” is hard to untangle. Highly religious girls had the highest average age at which they considered it “OK to have sex for the first time”, at 20 years, while the responses of the most religious boys averaged 18 years.

Across all the students, the girls' responses produced an average age of 18.2 years for the initiation of sex, while the boys averaged 16.8 years. Some students considered that sex should only happen when the person or couple 'were ready'. In the most religious group of students, 6% felt that a person could have sex for the first time when they were ready, compared with 5% for all students. Thirteen per cent of the most religious group, those who said that their religion influenced everything they do, said that they felt that someone should be married before they had sex compared with 6% of the whole group.

Whatever the answer to the thorny question of what influences young people's views and attitudes most about topics concerning relationships and sex, whether it is gender, faith, culture, maturity, experience or a host of other possibilities, all these factors go to make up and affect young people's identities and sense of self. There are questions to be asked in the light of these findings. If these students' opinions are reflected in other areas across the country, and that is debatable of course, then what are the ramifications for the teaching of RSE, especially in areas of high religious observance?

4.5 What is good quality RSE?

The answer to the question "What is good quality RSE?" permeates the findings of this study. In the questionnaire phase of data collection, two questions were asked of the students who completed questionnaires. First, students were asked what they "found helpful in RSE" and, secondly, how they thought that "RSE could be improved" in their school. Following the completion of the questionnaires, 25 students attended one-to-one interviews. They were invited to explain their wishes for RSE in schools when asked: "Imagine you had a younger brother or sister, what kind of RSE would be best for them?"

The questionnaire data enabled analysis of how RSE, in the four different schools using differing educational approaches, was viewed by students. The interviews concentrated more on RSE in general, rather than the student's individual experiences of RSE in their school. Some student responses, however, were

stimulated by their personal experiences, though such responses were not predominantly concerned with school experiences. Due to this difference, these two datasets were analysed and are discussed separately.

In the questionnaire feedback, some students were very positive about the RSE they had received, whilst others were scathing about the lack of RSE encountered due to the policy or approach adopted by their school for the teaching of RSE. Generalisations or judgements made by reading the findings could be detrimental or unfair to the types of schools taking part in the study. For this reason, when presenting findings and discussing what constitutes 'good quality' RSE, schools will be identified only by numbers and not by type or name. This system will enable differences between the schools to be discussed but will not allow the school or type of school to be revealed. It is important that those interested in my study understand the stated needs of young people and that these young people are given a voice, but students in this section are not identified by gender or other demographic labels. As one school contains predominantly Christian boys and one predominantly Muslim girls, it is possible that assumptions would be made concerning the type of school attended by any particular student, if students were identified by gender or other demographic labels.

4.5.1 Questionnaire data

4.5.1.1 School One

4.5.1.1.1 What was 'helpful' in school RSE?

School One had varied responses to the question of what might be 'helpful' in RSE. A few students said that they had received little or no RSE:

I didn't receive much sex ed.

Nothing.

Most students, however, wrote that they had received RSE and that it had been 'helpful'. They indicated that they had not just learned facts and figures about relationships and sex, but that the curriculum had built, or attempted to build,

resilience and sought to empower them to take responsibility for their own actions and not to give in to pressure:

Learning to say no, as this increases confidence in the way I want to lead my life.

The fact that you make your own decisions because you should not let anyone else dictate how you should live your life.

They talk about pregnancy and how to say 'no' if someone is pressuring you into sex and all the bad things that happen, because I know that I should not engage in sex before I'm ready.

The school also, according to the students, taught a wide range of topics in RSE. These were found 'helpful' by the students who wrote:

Learning about safe[r] sex, puberty, how the body works. It allows us to stay safe and not feel worried when our bodies change.

All of the different sexual infections you could get if you don't use protection etc.

It makes me think about how dangerous sex could be if it is not protected and if it isn't with the right person.

They have given me a brief understanding of the science behind it and how it all works. It has set up a guideline for how I should go about things when in a relationship.

I concluded from an informal conversation I had with the teacher in charge of RSE, at the time of the research, that staff were not very confident about the RSE offered to students. Despite the uncertainty felt by teachers, the feedback concerning what had been helpful to students was very positive.

4.5.1.1.2 What could be improved in school RSE

However positive responses were from School One participants, there were ways in which they felt that RSE could be improved in their school. One of their suggestions was to teach more and more often:

I think teachers need to dwell on the topic more and have lessons for it. In today's society knowing about sex and relationships are vital.

They don't teach us everything that needs to be taught – there are gaps in the teaching, it needs to be improved, teach us more!

The content of the curriculum in School One was questioned by pupils who thought there should be more teaching about certain topics than they were receiving at present:

Most people go through heartbreak, and they don't deal with it so well and I think coping should be [part of RSE] because they [the school] say if you are gonna say no to things or you don't want to be with them, just say no and walk off but that doesn't necessarily always go as well as planned it's like you get abusive relationships but they don't touch upon that much, they just say "just walk away" but what if you cannot?

I believe that if things such as homosexuality and other religions were mentioned, it could have improved. This is because many people are confused between themselves and their beliefs.

Educate us on the laws the government put in place about sex, relationships, and teach us about the risks.

Some of the students in School One considered that their school should be a place where decisions regarding sex were discussed and possibly a place where teachers could give moral guidance:

It is important that we understand that having serious relationships and sex at a young age is wrong.

Talking more about how friends can impact you and your morals. It's the stage in our life where peer pressure plays a role.

School One like others in the study concentrated much of their RSE into special 'off timetable' days, often referred to in schools as 'drop-down' days. Some students questioned the wisdom of this approach:

I think we should learn a bit more often instead of lots of information in a couple of hours, because it will be remembered and learned more easily.

If we learnt more about it not just once a year it would be more beneficial.

We have had two workshops in 4 years that kept avoiding the point. Do it more often and later in the school life because that is the age when students get into relationships.

Some students also gave ideas for ways in which they felt lessons could be changed to improve RSE in their school:

Use more video resources or presentations on sex education, to learn and understand rather than just reading.

Not force it [RSE] on the students who don't want to do it and minimise how much people feel uncomfortable, because the students' feelings should come before anything else.

This last comment is problematic for the teaching of RSE, but is a view that is reflected in other students' responses throughout the study, especially when investigating the student replies to the question "Should students have the right to take themselves out of RSE?" (Section 4.7.2.3). For many students, RSE can be an 'uncomfortable' or 'embarrassing' lesson. Whilst this may not be a good enough reason for students to remove themselves from RSE, this difficulty with the subject matter which needs to be taken into account when devising a curriculum and choosing materials and pedagogy for use in RSE in schools is discussed towards the end of this section (Section 4.5.2.4).

4.5.1.2 School Two

4.5.1.2.1 What was 'helpful' in school RSE?

Participants in School Two, when asked what they thought had been 'helpful' in the RSE in their school, responded in various ways. One student wrote: "Haven't really learnt that much in school", but then went on to say: "learnt some stuff in Year 5, 7 and 9". Many students understood the 'helpful' things taught in school to include lessons highlighting relationships and how to manage them:

Domestic violence. This has made me take my "rose-coloured spectacles" off and see the world of abuse that I never knew about in relationships; this info has made me aware of the reality of relationships.

I have found how to deal with different types of relationships.

Learning about puberty and changes in your body, but also how to realise if the relationship is healthy/abusive or not. If I didn't learn about puberty, then I would have never known what it is and what to do.

This school has forged strong relationships with outside agencies which come into school on a regular basis. At the time the research was carried out, the school did not employ 'drop-down' days in RSE but had weekly sessions of RSE for around half a term in each year group. There seemed to be a theme of safety and guarding against abusive relationships within the content of School Two's RSE, including where to get advice and support:

There are many places to help with teenage pregnancy and what factors to prioritise in a relationship. It clears some thoughts of mine and gives a sense of security.

It's helped me prepare for the future, because when I am older. I will be more aware of where to go if I ever need help.

The idea that there are people to help if you are in trouble. Sometimes, we might need a bit of guidance, where we feel more comfortable with anonymous people than our friends/family.

Relationships and where to gain support if needed were but two of the subjects taught in RSE; the students also learnt about STIs and sexual health:

I understand how to prevent STD or STI.

I have found it helpful to learn about contraception and abusive/forced marriages. If this ever happened to me I would know what to do, who to speak to and where to go.

I have general knowledge about sex education, and I know what I need to know. The teachers act mature about this topic, and they explain in a basic way to keep us thinking on the right track.

One student, the only one as far as I know within the study who had been removed from RSE by their parents, wrote: "Haven't been taught about sex and relationships [...] my parents did not want me to learn about it". Another participant wrote: "Found that learning true facts about relationships has helped me. There are many fairy tales that you hear, and officially learning about SRE solidifies the facts from the fakes". One student simply said that they had found: "Everything" helpful in RSE.

4.5.1.2.2 What could be improved in School RSE?

Students attending School Two seemed to have more RSE than those in the other schools, as they had had "a few weeks". However, some of the students, wanted more RSE:

More can be taught about it. As it helps teenagers to understand what happens when you do enter a relationship (sex).

In Year 10, we don't get taught much about sex education, so I think they should teach us more in this year. In Year 11 it's a lot more pressure learning about it, where our minds get more full of other things as well [exams].

The students proposed ideas regarding the improvement of RSE at their school. Those who commented on when RSE should be taught to students did not always agree:

It can be improved by starting the education earlier, because at that time lots of us have questions about relationships and sex.

Teach it in Year 11. It may not be appropriate for Year 9/10.

The students also had some excellent and practical ideas about how lessons could be made more interesting:

Have groups instead of a whole class to teach about sex education because many students like to giggle, and you lose your concentration.

It could be taught in a more 'free' way. For example, discussion, scenarios and not always a PowerPoint on the board. It engages us as students as we get bored easily.

Do more workshops where we learn about other people's opinion. I think it would be interesting and informative to learn about other people's relationships on sex.

Have real videos of people.

One student from School Two reinforced the opinions of students in School One who considered that RSE should be taught by adopting a more systematic and developmental scheme of work, where skills and knowledge could be built up through a gradual 'layering' process:

Introduce the topic slowly. I feel that the topic is all of a sudden thrown at the students making it uncomfortable.

When discussing the findings from the questionnaire concerning LGBT+ issues, the term LGBT may also be used if referring directly to the wording of the questionnaire, which was LGBT not LGBT+, or when quoting students who normally used the term LGBT in their responses.

Students in School Two mentioned the desire to learn more, apropos religion and LGBT+ issues:

They can talk about religion and what they say about [...] people having sex/relationships.

Talk more about other beliefs and topics on LGBT. To understand and respect others' beliefs and lifestyles.

Learn more on LGBT, because some people may be experiencing the feeling being gay, lesbian, etc. but doesn't know how to approach it.

Look at different religious views. So that students know different religious viewpoints on it [relationships and sex]. If we learn about what different religions, feel about so many other things then why not this [relationships and sex]?

One student wrote: "I don't think there is anything to be improved. It is done frequently, and the speakers are good. Taught at an appropriate age".

4.5.1.3 School Three

4.5.1.3.1 What was 'helpful' in school RSE?

Most of the participants in School Three didn't feel that they had actually received any RSE and those who said they had seemed to have been offered a rather sex-negative version of RSE. The majority of responses to the question: "What have you found helpful in RSE?" could be summed up by the student who voiced this opinion: "Nothing, because there was nothing"; other students agreed:

Never done a RSE class in school.

Have not received any.

Nothing; as they taught us early, I cannot remember what I've learned.

However, a few students felt that they had received some RSE and that it was helpful:

The fact that they explained what would happen to my body as I grew older. As it is happening now, I feel normal because it was addressed to me earlier on.

How relationships work and how to treat someone you like/love. Going through life without knowing how to treat a man/woman will not get you what you expect or want.

One important lesson for teachers came from the comment of one student in School Three who wrote: "We hardly had any RSE aside from the times you have frank and honest discussions with teachers and I feel these are the most beneficial because they don't try to influence you they just give you their honest opinions and you can take what you want from them". This student had obviously had at least one very positive interaction with a member of staff which demonstrates how important teachers can be for students in respect of RSE. Having a member of staff who will listen, be honest and discuss issues with students is a great asset in any school and a great support to students. Approachability, honesty and a genuine interest in young people can convey a feeling of worth to a student which, in turn, can enable students to feel safe and valued, even if formal RSE is lacking.

4.5.1.3.2 What could be improved in School RSE?

Those attending School Three wanted more RSE and they wanted RSE more often. Students considered that RSE would improve if:

They treated it as its own subject instead of just mentioning it briefly in lessons like biology and PSHE.

[The school taught RSE] Possibly every month, teach students about this topic, so they can gain awareness.

They could touch onto it more often instead of just in Year 7, so that the children gain as much knowledge as possible on the topic.

In addition to those requests for more RSE, there was an overarching message from students and comments about what had been helpful as well as ways in which RSE could be improved. One student simply wrote: "They [the school] could start doing it". Many responses seemed quite cynical and angry about the lack of RSE in this school. So, it is no surprise that many of them echoed the sentiment that the school should start teaching RSE:

Actually, providing a sex education [would help to improve RSE] because currently there is none because it is really important, especially in this age where young (sexual) relationships can start.

More information and knowledge taught to students. This would be helpful and prevent unsafe sex and people not knowing what sex means.

Not all students were cynical or angry about the lack of RSE and some suggested useful ideas about how RSE could be taught and what should be included in the curriculum:

We can have training for teachers so that they can teach it better. Well prepared lessons that are insightful and not silly.

[RSE should] go into detail, show positives, negatives of a sexual relationship, so young people can make choices at the right time and not make mistakes like others have.

Teaching us about what happens in relationships and what sort of things we might get up to, so we are prepared for the future.

People from NHS or sexual health clinics coming in because it makes it more serious and interesting.

Students in School Three said that they wanted a systematic and developmental approach to RSE, where students would be taught regularly at different ages, building on previous RSE knowledge:

By teaching different concepts of sex education and relationships at different ages not just all in one. It will develop understanding.

If they went over it every two years like Year 7, 9 and 11. It will help students understand more.

One student disagreed with all the others and wrote, in response to the question concerning what the school could improve: "Nothing [should be improved], it is fine the way it is".

4.5.1.4 School Four

4.5.1.4.1 What was 'helpful' in school RSE

School Four's RSE was provided through 'drop-down' days. Students were taken off normal timetable for a whole day and a series of lessons concerning RSE were delivered on one occasion, normally using outside agencies. Almost all students mentioned lessons on the subject of STIs in their responses:

Learning about sexually transmitted diseases, because I would have never known, it was helpful and also it was good to see the consequence of sex.

How to use a condom, where to get contraceptives and sexually transmitted illnesses, because all of the above have now been stored within my brain, helping me to be prepared and ready for the future.

What diseases can occur after sexual intercourse. It made me realise there is more to it than pleasure.

One student mentioned that they had discussed relationships as part of an RSE lesson, but there was still a concentration on the risks of sex.

The concept of establishing a relationship and the consequences it can lead to. It [RSE] has helped me to understand how it's better to stick to being [just] friends with people.

Another student talked about rights and wrongs, although it is not clear if the student was referring to the right way to do something or referencing a moral dimension to RSE:

What to do and what not to do. So, right and wrongs, do and don'ts. Helps build understanding.

Some students felt that they hadn't had any RSE or that it had happened only in Year 8:

Sex education, relationships (boyfriend, girlfriend). I was taught by my peers. Only got taught about sex in Year 8. Most of my peers talk about it with me now.

I did not have any sex education. Ask my school why?

Nothing, they were afraid to tell us.

One student's statement might shed light on why some students said they didn't receive any RSE.

Wasn't in at the time.

If all the RSE for a year, or even longer, is taught on one day and a student misses that day, they could miss out on RSE altogether.

4.5.1.4.2 What could be improved in School RSE?

School Four had many students who wanted to have more RSE. Some of their answers demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the lack of RSE and how it was taught in their school. There were recurrent themes, as in the other three schools in the study, of wanting more RSE, more often and earlier.

More:

Talk about it more with us. Our age right now, most people are not sure or going through a tough depressing time they would maybe want some advice or help.

Taught more. Non-opinionated views. How to have it, what hole is what. More about rape and abuse. What is abusive, when and how to get out of an abusive relationship. We don't know enough. People treat rape and abuse like a joke.

More often:

Doing it more often, because normally it's done once a year or less, allowing pupils to forget and get careless.

Happens only once or twice a year maybe. Don't be afraid and tell us. PSHE was removed so we can't learn it so bring it back.

Earlier:

Regular, compulsory lessons from an early age. We only had two quick lessons that didn't cover much.

Teach it to us earlier, because some may be interested in having a sexual relationship and not want to fall pregnant.

There was a feeling amongst some students that having different classes for boys and girls might be helpful, when teaching RSE:

It could be improved by separating girls and boys, so they are not together. And then teach. Because it is really awkward to talk in front of boys about this.

Professionals could come in and talk about sex and boys and girls should be separate. So we know things accurately and it's not awkward between boys and girls.

Students in School Four felt that RSE should include more about relationships which could be improved by:

Teach more on healthy relationships, rather than where you can get condoms (and rape culture etc.). We only learn about sex, sex organs etc. rather than happiness.

I think we learn a lot about the sex part but not much about relationships and what healthy relationships are like and how your partner should treat you and things like that.

Other students in School Four wanted their RSE in their school schools to improve in other ways: “Stop showing pictures that are not yet appropriate for our age”. RSE would be improved “If some things with pictures of STD’s weren’t shown. It makes me feel uncomfortable and could make some people very worried of having sex when they’re older”.

A key thought came from one student who said: “They could bring religion involved, so that it is more interesting and helpful”. In an area of high religious observance, this might seem natural for teachers to understand that including religious views concerning relationships and sex would be both interesting and helpful to students.

Whatever the other students’ ideas of how RSE could be improved in School Four, two students felt that the RSE didn’t need improvement in their school: “I don’t need it to improve. I’ve been taught all about SRE” and “It can’t [be improved]. It is good”.

4.5.1.5 Comparing the four schools

While RSE has been acknowledged as a difficult, complex and often political subject to teach (Reiss, 2005), the inclusion of faith sensitivity presents greater intricacies which require thoughtful teaching and research methods. To compare and contrast the teaching approaches used in the four schools in my small-scale study raised a number of issues. First, only one year group in each of the four schools participated in this research. In addition, three of the four schools were in an area of high religious observance where RSE is often seen as more contentious than in areas of low religious adherence, and the research was undertaken at a time when RSE was under the media and political spotlight (Ofsted, 2013). The four schools included in

the research were trusting in agreeing to be involved in any RSE research project, let alone a study asking students questions about religion and sex. Every effort has been made not to judge individual schools, but to present an evidenced account of the voices of young people to inform the educational establishment and individual schools how best they can resource the provision of RSE in the future.

Despite all the difficulties, it is valuable and relevant to the research to investigate themes emerging from the data that help evaluate differing educational styles and approaches used in the teaching of RSE.

Like others before them (Measor et al., 2000; Ofsted, 2007), my students wanted to have more information and teaching regarding relationships. This was true of schools One, Three and Four, but was especially pronounced in School Four, as the students understood themselves to have been educated about condoms, and other contraception methods alongside plenty of information, some said too much information, concerning STIs and “rape culture”, but not enough about relationships. They understood that RSE could be improved by teaching more about relationships and not just the facts about sex. School Four also concentrated all of its RSE in single days using outside agencies to deliver lessons. It could be that those prepared to come into schools to teach on these days are also likely to be sexual health providers, meaning that the emphasis during these RSE days in the school is on sexual health issues, such as contraception and STI protection.

Students in School Two said they wanted to learn more about LGBT issues and those in Schools One and Two wanted to understand the dilemmas and stresses inherent today, when considering the intersection of religion, homosexuality and LGBT+ issues. Students in School Three wanted to ‘start’ to learn about and discuss relationships and sex, as many felt that they didn’t really receive any RSE. Students in Schools One and Four wanted to understand issues such as abusive relationships. School Two appeared to cover many issues regarding relationships, but seemingly concentrated on safeguarding and support for negative relationships. The data from Schools One and Four suggested that a systematic and developmental approach would be helpful for young people and that RSE should be more ‘age

appropriate'; however, what RSE topics were appropriate at what age was a cause of disagreement among students. Learning too much RSE in a concentrated way in a short space of time was not popular with many students. The criticism voiced in Schools One and Four was against the use of drop-down days to deliver RSE.

One student did not have school RSE lessons because their parents had exercised the 'right of withdrawal' (DfE, 2000), but many other pupils had not received RSE either because schools were choosing not to teach it or because they were teaching RSE using an approach that meant the students could easily miss out on the content of lessons, simply by missing one day of school.

From interacting with the data, it seems that each school had strengths, even the school that didn't seem to teach a great deal of RSE was praised by participants for the way it managed homophobia and gay issues: "We have campaigned for the LGBT homophobic attitudes to not exist".

This brief comparison shows four very different schools choosing to deliver their RSE in diverse ways. All schools had students who gave ideas as to how RSE should be improved in their respective school and all schools had students who felt that nothing needed changing.

4.5.1.6 RSE topics requested by students

In addition to asking students questions concerning their wishes for and experiences of RSE the students were also asked: 'What else should be taught about relationships and sex in schools?' Although question 14 listed 18 topics likely to be taught in RSE (Appendix 3), some of the answers mentioned topics that were already given in question 14, e.g. LGBT issues and aspects of relationships, whilst other students wrote concerning topics that were not listed in question 14, but mentioned new topics that should be included in the teaching of good quality RSE.

Aspects of relationships:

How to maintain a relationship, how to start a relationship, how to end a relationship, because it's not on the list above

First love and approach to losing virginity, people may not know what to do.

How to handle break ups. Some people may go to extremes and may become depressed however if we learn how to handle it and more about personal relationships we would be better off.

Positive ideas concerning sex:

It [having sex] is natural. Sometimes comes across that teachers think it's bad for us.

Abusive relationships:

Rape, because it is important to know the consequences and that the rapist is at fault not the victim.

Grooming. Girls and boys should be aware sometimes relationships aren't always innocent.

Religious views concerning relationships and sex:

Other people's beliefs, to help understand and respect others' beliefs and views.

Different faiths attitudes to relationships and sex. So that you know what religions and cultures say about it.

More content concerning LGBT+ aspects in RSE:

LGBTQ. The LGBT is vague, the Q(Queer) covers all gender and sexual orientations, for example gender fluid, asexual, parsexual etc.

The idea of homosexual relationships to be accepted. People who are afraid to tell others that they are homosexuals should not suffer on their own, regardless of what other people in different religions think. I believe it should be each to their own.

Tolerance and supporting LGBT, religious approaches to sex and relationships. It will help us to be more accepting of 'other' [original emphasis] people who have different beliefs.

The last comment articulates a theme that murmured gently throughout the data, namely, that in many schools and settings young people who are LGBT+ and those who are religious are minority groups, and while there can be division between them because of some religious views on homosexuality, in some ways those who would identify as religious and those who might identify as LGBT+ have much in common, as both can be seen as 'different' and 'other'.

Consent:

Consent to sex, because this will lead to people knowing that no means no and that no consent means that it is rape.

Safe[r] sex, if you don't want to consent, how to say no. Where to go if you're pressured into something. To make children aware, to reassure them that they're not alone, to support them and to raise concerns surrounding RSE.

Peer and media pressure:

Peer Pressure, this happens daily.

How to deal with pressure to have sex. The pressure (from media etc.) influences you to have sex too early.

Not to be forced into doing anything. So many people feel like they have to, just to prove they like that person or to fit in with their friends – and that's not the case.

More on sexual relationships and also media. Many teenagers are influenced with social media that leads them having a relationship (sexual) with strangers.

When most people do it [have sex]. So, people don't feel pressured and they do it when they believe it's right.

The more personal side of sex, not just the biology and the dangers:

What happens to the body during and after sex, to know the effects.

Masturbation, because this is one thing that is common to all, whether its girls or boys and is widely spread, that no teaching is actually given about this.

Some students thought that relationships and sex education should be quite prescriptive in the values it should espouse; some of the topics they suggested for discussion in RSE could be seen by some as negative about sex, whilst others may think them quite sensible. When asked what else should be taught in RSE they wrote:

The appropriate age to be in relationships, because young children think it's something cool and could be forced into having sex without knowing the consequences.

Sex isn't what young people should do. Stop young people from wanting sex.

How to avoid bad situations e.g. staying out late etc. Keeps young people from ruining their future.

4.5.2 Interviews

It was possible to get a flavour of the issues and the wishes of the students for RSE in their schools from their questionnaire responses. However, the student interviews gave deeper insights into the themes emerging from the questionnaires. The interview responses were not as influenced by, or critical of, the schools attended. This was because the questions for students were not to do with their own school experiences of RSE but instead focused on their overall wishes for RSE. Students were asked to: 'Imagine you had a younger brother or sister, what kind of RSE would be best for them?' Phrasing the question in this manner helped to distance the student from their own encounters with RSE and to assist them in considering what they might understand 'good quality' RSE to be if they were responsible for RSE in the life of someone close to them. The interviews gave a greater depth of understanding as to what students felt was important in the teaching of good quality and faith-sensitive RSE.

4.5.2.1 More topics, more often and earlier

As was the case in the questionnaire responses, many students considered 'good quality' to mean 'more' provision of RSE.

I think that should start in Year 9 or something, not in Year 10 or 11.

I think we could learn about sex at a younger age.

I just think we do need to learn more about relationships and like LGBT.

More lessons would help students to actually think about it and actually use it to think that this is reality, we shouldn't be doing this.

4.5.2.2 Giving confidence for the future

Some students said that they thought good quality RSE, especially when taught at a young age would help to promote confidence and readiness for adult life:

You are finally discovering the world so if you have been exposed to it from a young age then when you are older, you'll know what it is going to be like.

If they do have the sex education, it would help them more and boost more of their confidence to start knowing what to do and stuff like that.

4.5.2.3 Everything should be taught

Some topics in RSE are contentious, but students said that everything should be taught to inform and protect students:

STDs and porn in the media whatever [should be taught]. I don't know, just everything you need to know because otherwise there's gonna be subjects where you are just kept in the dark and you are not going to know much about them and you are going to wish you could have learnt about it before you make any mistakes that you don't want to make.

Students understood the contentious nature of some topics in RSE and put forward a faith-sensitive method of talking about topics in RSE:

Well you could say that everyone has different beliefs, like some people want to wait for sex until marriage, some people believe it's wrong, some people believe they shouldn't use contraception or things like that. I think that that should be mentioned.

I think that [faith-sensitive RSE] would help because it's good to know what different religions think about this topic and you can relate it to your religion as well and find out the similarities and differences and then you can come back with an opinion of your own.

I think you shouldn't necessarily censor anything. You should be very direct with it, but then after explaining everything you should tell people the different beliefs about it amongst religions.

The last student quoted here considered there was a need to teach "everything", but also a need for RSE to be inclusive and of good quality; teachers would therefore need to explain there are differing views about topics within RSE.

4.5.2.4 Awkward, uncomfortable and embarrassing

The use of gender and religious background labels has been reinstated here, as the labels are helpful for the interpretation of the rest of the data and responses from participants are not critical of their individual schools.

The concepts of 'awkward', 'embarrassing' and 'uncomfortable' are discussed here in the light of what is seen by the students as good quality RSE. The same concepts are also explored later concerning the right of parental withdrawal from RSE (Section 4.7.2.3). Some students, who wrote in their questionnaires that they didn't want to be made to feel 'uncomfortable' in their RSE lessons, struggle with some of the topics included in RSE. Words like 'awkward', 'embarrassing' and 'uncomfortable' and ways to mitigate the effects of these possible difficulties surfaced often in the data:

[I don't want to learn about] The process of having sex, because it's awkward and sort of influences kids to have sex. *Muslim girl*

It is not important to learn about sex or marriage and it may be uncomfortable to hear. *Hindu girl*

Don't want to learn about sex, because it wouldn't be normal, and it would be awkward and embarrassing when there is your friend around. *Muslim girl*

I was kind of uncomfortable and that's why I kept on looking down instead of looking up and focusing and when they asked you at the end if you have any questions, I was so blank because I didn't listen to nothing, whatever you said it came out of my ears. I did not listen because I was so uncomfortable. *Muslim girl*

The students who expressed 'awkwardness' in lessons were almost all girls and the majority of those girls were from Muslim backgrounds. This could be explained by the fraught relationship Islam has with the topic of sex, and the sex education portion of RSE in particular, as explained by Muhammad Aftab Khan in his book, *Sex and Sexuality in Islam* (2006, p. 90):

In almost all Muslim countries, people are still reserved when it comes to sex. It is still very much a taboo topic, something to be spoken about behind closed doors. Sex is hushed and curtained off to the bedroom and speaking about it is considered a sin, accredits a loose character and many other such remarks prevailing in Muslim society. For today's Muslim parents, sex is a dirty word. The main reason Muslim parents do not discuss sex education with their children is because of their cultural and traditional upbringing and not the teaching of Islam. They themselves were brought up in a state of ignorance with regard to sexual issues.

The concept of sex being taboo in Muslim households may leave those providing RSE with a predicament; if some students understand sex to be 'taboo', how are the wishes of other students, who thought that everything should be taught in RSE, to be met? Some of those taking part in the study identified the possibility of awkwardness, and embarrassment, but also suggested ways to ameliorate possible

problems. One suggestion was that RSE teachers should be the same sex as the students:

I would like her [the teacher] to be female because then it wouldn't be awkward, and I would relate. *Muslim girl*

[I would like a teacher the same sex as me] Because they understand where you are coming from and they have been in the same situation that you have and you might not understand everything so they understand it from the same sex point of view, [also] if a male teacher was talking to the girls about sex education it might be a bit awkward for them. *Christian boy*

A second strategy suggested by students for reducing any embarrassment in lessons was to teach the subject in single-sex classes:

Separating the classes to being boys/girls. It would make people feel more comfortable. *Agnostic girl*

Because it is really awkward to talk in front of boys about this. *Muslim girl*

[RSE would be improved] If boys and girls would not be mixed together, but rather instead have separate classrooms. They might be uncomfortable asking questions. *Muslim girl*

Some participants welcomed the thought of teachers with a sense of humour:

[The Teacher would] Have to be funny – to release the awkwardness. They have to be well-educated in RSE. *Christian girl*

Would like them [the teachers] to be serious but not strict, to not make anything awkward, be nice, a little of sense of humour etc. *Muslim girl*

Some participants who accepted that students might feel awkward or embarrassed in RSE lessons also recognised that students may need to know all topics in RSE even if they did find some of these awkward or uncomfortable:

They [the teachers, should] say what they have to say and not hold back from anything that might embarrass them and they [the students will] actually get taught the right things. *Christian boy*

It [RSE] should be compulsory because it teaches young students how to deal with situations without being embarrassed. *Atheist boy*

It [learning about STIs] makes me feel a bit uncomfortable although it's better to learn about it. *Muslim girl*

4.5.2.5 Staged, phased and age-appropriate RSE (spiral approach)

As revealed in the questionnaires, many participants espoused the concept of a staged, phased or age-appropriate approach to RSE. This view was also revealed during interviews. Often known as a spiral approach to teaching, although not the term used by participants, the following views were expressed:

I think they should do things like this in Year 7 as well like at the beginning or something or in the middle.

If you start small in Year 6 and then go into Year 10 and Year 11 you have this kind of maturity to absorb everything and to understand. She [imaginary sister] would be in Year 7, Year 8, and Year 9. I think you can also add a little bit of sex and relationship education in there too, maybe as I said it's kind of like a stage so start small and keep on building up and building up, yeah.

I think because we've had one Inset day this year and I think they do quite a good job of telling you lots of information, but I think they should do a couple more to like go through it again because most people don't really pay attention.

What constitutes 'age-appropriate RSE' is open to debate. The UK Government in its *Policy Statement: Relationships and Sex Education, and Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education* (DfE, 2017a, p. 1) announced that RSE would become statutory and stated that RSE would be 'age appropriate'. In a press release on the same day, the DfE (2017b) highlighted comments from Russel Hobby, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), and Barnardo's

Chief Executive, Javed Khan, commending the Government for advocating RSE in schools which 'age appropriate'. Neither the DfE publication, nor commentators, explained what they meant by 'age appropriate'. The Government's policy statement, which also highlighted the importance of 'flexibility' in developing and deciding when and how to teach RSE, stated that guidance to schools would be given.

Taking into consideration students' differing levels of need, maturity and understanding in RSE, it is challenging to decide what is age appropriate in any particular circumstance. It is hoped that the opinions of students contained here, concerning the age appropriateness of the various topics expected to form part of the RSE curriculum, may assist those who must make these decisions and can play a role in policy development concerning RSE.

Participants were given a list of topics likely to be taught in RSE and asked at what age these topics should be taught. In order to aid the analysis, the data from the students have been sub-divided into three groups depending on student characteristics: highly religious students (those who say that religion is very important to them and influences everything they do); agnostic and atheist students (who could also be described as non-religious students); and all students. This sub-division of students was undertaken to ascertain if there were notable and consistent differences between the most religious and the least religious groups, alongside the group as a whole.

To aid comparisons, the average ages at which students thought topics should be taught were calculated, the range of ages suggested by students identified and a table created (Table 4.1) for easy identification of any differences between the highly religious students and those who could be described as non-religious.

RSE Topic	Age range for teaching topic suggested by participants	Average age All students (291 students)	Average age Highly religious students (71 students)	Average age Non-religious students (73 students)
What should a good friend be like?	1 – 16	8	8	8
Family and friends are important	1 – 16	8	8	7
What are the characteristics of a friendship that is not healthy?	1 – 18	11	12	11
What body changes happen at puberty? (Puberty happens between 10-14)	7 – 16	10	11	10
Menstruation (periods).	7 – 18	11	11	11
The biology of sex.	1 – 18	13	13	12
The emotional side of relationships and sexual relationships.	7 – 21	14	14	13
Choices about sex, where to go for help and support. The joys and possible consequences of having sex.	7 – 19	14	14	13
Homophobia	1 – 18	13	13	12
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues.	4 – 19	13	13	12
Pregnancy	7 – 23	14	14	13

Unintended pregnancy choices (abortion, adoption and keep the baby) and where to go for support and help.	3 – 28	14	15	14
Parenting	3 – 27	15	15	14
Sexually transmitted infections. (STIs)	7 – 27	14	14	13
HIV/AIDS	7 – 25	14	14	13
Contraception and protection against pregnancy.	6 – 18	14	14	13
What the law says about relationships and sex	7 – 22	13	14	13
Abuse and domestic violence, forced marriage etc. ...	6 – 22	14	14	13

Table 4.1 Participants' opinions on age appropriateness of topics in RSE

(Topics listed in the same order as they appear in the questionnaire)

The range in ages suggested by the participants as being age appropriate for the teaching of topics in RSE varied greatly. Those students who felt that some topics should be taught at pre-school age considered them to be the responsibility of the parents and the family to teach, or at least to start to teach. 'What a good friend should be like', 'Family and friends are important' and 'The characteristics of a friendship that is not healthy' are all examples of topics related to early relationships, and so it is understandable that some students felt these should be taught at home as well as at school. A very small number of students also understood that topics such as homophobia, LGBT issues, pregnancy and parenting should be taught before primary school.

There were some seemingly incongruous answers written in response to the section of the questionnaire discussing the most suitable age at which to include

various topics into RSE. These were included in the data analysis statistics as I feel each student voice has value. An example of one incongruous answer is that of the girl who wrote that pregnancy choices including abortion should be taught at the age of three and yet in her answers concerning other topics maintained that pregnancy and puberty should not be taught at all. This seeming anomaly cannot be explained as there is nothing else in her responses that might explain her stance on these issues.

Some students thought they should only gain knowledge about topics on a 'need to know basis'. As some of those students thought that they would not have sex until they were married and might not be married until their late twenties there was, they felt, no need to learn about unintended pregnancy choices, parenting and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) until that time. These students didn't seem to concern themselves with the possible needs of other students who might need to be taught earlier.

Table 4.1 shows that although there is a wide range of ages demarcating when participants thought each RSE topic should be addressed, on average the three differing groups: the whole group; the most religious; the non-religious students, chosen to be examined for the analysis, disagreed by around a year. Relationships and puberty should, according to the students, be taught at primary school with most other topics especially those concerning sex and sexual health taught in secondary school. The highly religious students considered that almost all topics in RSE should be taught a year later than those who could be described as non-religious.

It is possible that these differences are not driven solely by personal religiosity. A significant proportion (96%) of the highly religious students came from an inner-city area with high levels of religious observance and decisions concerning appropriateness could have been motivated by an understanding and respect for the religious norms they encounter in daily life. Significant numbers of men are seen arriving for Friday prayers at mosques, people flood out of large churches at the end of services, temples rise high above the street-scape and the wearing of

hijabs or turbans is common place. In communities like this, culture and religiosity blend to create a more conservative and less liberal environment for RSE to develop. It may be more appropriate for schools in areas of high religious observance, after consultation with parents and students, to teach some RSE topics a year later than in schools in areas of low religiosity, where the pervading culture is more liberal.

These findings could have special relevance when contemplating what is seen as 'age appropriateness' pertaining to RSE. Allowing flexibility in the age at which various topics are taught in RSE could be important when addressing the perceptions of various communities toward RSE. Listening to students and possibly parents (Dyson, 2010) to help ascertain what is seen as age appropriate in any particular situation may assist both in forming a valuable connection with cultural and faith communities and helping to build communication, understanding and community cohesion (DfCSF, 2007). This discussion with communities and parents may also assist in dispelling the fears of Miriam Grossman, among others, who distrust the motives of those who are developing RSE policy or teaching RSE. In *You're Teaching My Child What?: A physician exposes the lies of sex ed and how they harm your child*, Grossman (2009, p. 15) warns parents against those teaching RSE:

Parents, beware: the people teaching your child are activists, promoting radical agendas at odds with your values.

These harsh words contain a generalisation unfair to many who teach RSE, but Grossman is not alone in questioning the motives of some involved in policy generation and the teaching of RSE (Luker, 2006). It remains to be seen who influences the debate and decisions concerning 'age appropriateness' in RSE, but the views of the students taking part in the study have a contribution to make in this regard.

4.5.3 Discussion

Having compared and contrasted the four different schools and their approaches to RSE and studied pertinent interview transcriptions, it is possible to combine data from the questionnaires and interviews to understand issues arising from both and discuss the main themes emerging from responses to the question 'What is good quality RSE?'.

Most students wanted to have 'more' RSE taught 'earlier', 'more often' and covering a wider range of topics including dangers to do with the use of pornography, grooming, social media and peer and media pressure. They also wanted to know how to negotiate relationships, relationship breakup, negative relationships and to learn more concerning religious and LGBT+ issues. Some students felt that their school taught too much about sex, STIs and contraceptives especially condoms, while others felt their school did not teach enough about these topics. Students wanted RSE to give them confidence for the future, to reflect their background and to include aspects of religious belief and sexual identity differences.

The concept of a broad-based and inclusive RSE, where all 'relevant' topics are taught (although the question arises as to who decides what is relevant to RSE), is seen by the majority of students as the most effective and desirable form of RSE. However, there were students saying, or writing, that they found some aspects of RSE 'awkward' in that there are some topics they do not want to learn about, notably LGBT+ issues, pregnancy, parenting and STIs. Those students who did not want to learn about LGBT+ issues considered the topic difficult for them because of their personal or religious views; students who didn't want to learn about pregnancy or parenting understood these topics to be something that they didn't expect to impact on them in the near future and so didn't want to learn about them. Not wanting to have lessons concerning STIs was often linked to students feeling that teaching about STIs, and especially the pictures sometimes shown in class, was inappropriate. Students at interview suggested ways for RSE to be made more accessible to those students who were reticent to take part in all aspects of

RSE, suggesting same sex groups and same sex teachers, especially for girls, to help to make lessons more 'comfortable'. It was also felt that making lessons more interactive and sensitive to differing faith backgrounds might encourage participation and reduce the awkwardness felt by some students.

A number of students wanted to see RSE taught in a way that could build on past knowledge on a regular basis, delivered more often than the once-a-year events held in two of the schools taking part in the research. While students enjoyed outside groups coming into school during 'specialist curriculum days' or a 'drop-down' day, there are other ways to employ outside agencies to come in and teach aspects of RSE, without concentrating all the information in one day. The organisation "Deans for Impact", a group of deans of teacher training colleges in the USA, aims to ensure that teachers understand how children learn and thus better equip teachers for a career in the teaching profession. Drawing on the work of Sweller (1988) and Bransford et al. (2015), Deans for Impact (2017, p. 3) outlines how the brain enables learning:

Students learn new ideas by reference to ideas they already know [...] To learn, students must transfer information from working memory (where it is consciously processed) to long-term memory (where it can be stored and later retrieved). Students have limited working memory capacities that can be overwhelmed by tasks that are cognitively too demanding. Understanding new ideas can be impeded if students are confronted with too much information at once.

It seems that those involved in teacher training, as well as those involved in academic study and brain science, might agree with my participants as to the best way to teach RSE, and understand the limitations of, and how students may be put at a disadvantage by, the use of isolated 'drop-down days'. Drop-down days have also been criticised as a method of delivery of RSE (as part of PSHE) by those helping to form policy and best practice in British schools PSHE Association (2017):

Too often, non-specialist teachers or un-vetted external speakers lead PSHE lessons and the subject is given less curriculum time than others, with lessons

increasingly delivered through tutor periods or off-timetable 'drop down days'. This situation is deeply unsatisfactory.

The use of drop-down days may be due to the lack of trained staff to teach RSE, the lack of curriculum time, or a lack of commitment to the subject by schools because it is not going to aid achievement scores or their place in the school league tables or give their students another GCSE. It is possible that just making RSE compulsory in schools will not be enough to equip young people with the life skills they need and desire for their lives now and in the future.

The participants' principal strategy for the teaching of high-quality RSE was to introduce students gradually to the topics contained in a comprehensive RSE curriculum, where the introduction of new information, knowledge and skills is based on, and scaffolded by, past knowledge to make the introduction of new information and skills less of a surprise and therefore less controversial, difficult or awkward. Teaching RSE in this way may suit students who have reservations about learning certain aspects of RSE as well as students who want more RSE, more often. Together, participants in the research have suggested through their comments a 'blueprint' for phased, age-appropriate RSE, taught in most years of schooling starting with relationships in primary school, building on previous learning and teaching. Most participants felt that RSE should be comprehensive in nature and yet also faith sensitive. Although not all students would agree about all aspects of this 'blueprint', there was a consensus within the data to suggest that the ideas here offer a possible way forward for RSE. While it would be difficult to deliver policies, develop a curriculum and educate teachers to follow this 'blueprint' for RSE, with the students' ideas and involvement, it may be possible.

A 'blueprint' for RSE

1. Involve students in the development of RSE policies and practice.

The students in this study, for the most part, proved themselves to be wise. Their opinions were well thought out and followed a sensible logic. They offered a sound rationale for the teaching of RSE in schools.

2. Understand that not all students are the same or need the same RSE.

Different students from differing backgrounds may view the content and concepts taught in RSE in different ways. RSE like all subjects needs to be taught in ways which are age and culturally appropriate. It is possible that students from highly religious backgrounds or cultures might consider that various topics taught in RSE should be delayed by a year or so.

3. RSE should be faith-sensitive.

Even students from an area where there is low religious adherence considered that religion and its tenets concerning relationships and sex should be respected, and to a lesser extent taught about, as part of RSE, to demonstrate and respect 'difference', understanding and equality.

4. RSE should be sensitive to those with other 'differences', e.g. LGBT+, thus showing respect, understanding and equality for all.

4.5.4 Characteristics of a good quality RSE teacher

As large numbers of short quotations are used in this section, student labels such as 'girl' or 'Muslim boy' are only given when their comments relate to religion.

Participants in the study were asked, 'What characteristics would you want a teacher to have, if they were going to teach you RSE.'

The question was qualitative in nature, enabling free responses. As anticipated, the answers to this open-ended question were very varied. However, consistent themes emerged from the data which can inform the debate about RSE in schools and what form it should take, especially in respect of the kind of teacher that young people want involved in RSE.

The main theme that emerged from participant responses to the question of teacher preference was professionalism, which students felt should include sound subject knowledge, good classroom management and suitable teaching methods. From the nature of participant comments, it would seem that emotional

intelligence and sensitivity were also important along with a sense of humour and a respect for and knowledge of religions. Some of the boys felt that teachers should guide students, while others, who were a mixture of girls and boys, thought that teachers should not influence, judge or direct students. For some students, the gender of the member of staff was also important.

4.5.4.1 Professionalism

The need for teacher professionalism was epitomised by one student who simply said: “They need to be professional”. This was also communicated by others in more varied ways and included three different manifestations of professionalism: subject knowledge; classroom management; and teaching methods.

4.5.4.2 Subject knowledge

Participants expected RSE teachers to have ‘in-depth’ subject knowledge. One student explained that teachers should: “be qualified in science: biology and health and social care, [and] sociology, so they know all there is to know as well as statistics”. While it might be a tall order for any school to provide a teacher who is proficient in all these areas, it is clear from this and other comments that students expect teachers of a very high standard to be teaching RSE. Students considered that the teacher will need to:

[Have a] knowledge of the subject and [be] able to make it relaxing.

[Be] well informed on the topic and open-minded.

Knowledgeable, if the teacher doesn’t know what they are talking about they might put the wrong point across.

4.5.4.3 Classroom management

Participants expressed the view that because of the sensitive nature of the lessons which were described by some students as “embarrassing” and “awkward”, teachers would need to be able to manage the class and teach in a way that promotes effective learning. One interviewee recalled a lesson by an outside

agency during a 'drop-down day', when students are taken off timetable and the whole day is given over to RSE, saying that: "They [the students] were just being silly about it when we were actually trying to learn and get taught properly and stuff".

To counteract the possibility of some students being "silly" students expected teachers to be able to:

[...] deal with unacceptable behaviour.

[...] [be] serious, but not too serious so the class won't take it as a joke.

[...] be understanding, not too strict and be prepared for silliness and silly questions.

4.5.4.4 Teaching methods

Participants expected teachers to use applicable teaching methods that facilitate effective learning in what some students thought might be difficult lessons to engage with. They expected teachers to:

Talk in a way we can understand and grabs our attention.

Make it simple, tell us the basics so it is not too complex.

[Be] very mature and straight to the point.

[...] allow students to work independently and express their opinions in class.

Alongside professionalism student also had an array of other attributes they wanted to see in a teacher of RSE, although not all participants agreed with what they should be.

4.5.4.5 Emotional intelligence

Whilst participants expected RSE teachers to have sound subject knowledge and the ability to teach effectively, they also expected RSE teachers to have a number of abilities that although desirable are not always demonstrated in the classroom.

Teachers of RSE were expected to exhibit characteristics or skills like caring, making

pupils feel “comfortable”, creating “a bond” with the students, being “trustworthy” and “kind”. These qualities suggest that an added ‘ingredient’ may be needed to teach effective RSE, namely, emotional intelligence. The large number of quotations that follow indicate the range of participant responses, outlining the importance they attached to the need for sensitivity and understanding in the teaching of RSE. Participants thought teachers of RSE should be:

Understanding, sensitive and kind.

[...] understanding [...] as a negative environment could damage the quality of their [the students’] learning.

[Able to] make the students feel comfortable with the subject [...] especially if someone hasn’t learnt the topic before.

[...] supportive as students may open up.

Trustworthy, have a good bond with us, enjoyable.

Accepting that some students might not want to participate.

[...] sensitive and go through it slowly as it might be the first time and you might have loads of questions.

4.5.4.6 Sense of humour

It was expected by some participants that a teacher with a sense of humour would be able to manage the lessons more positively. Examples of participant comments include:

To make the lesson fun and not make it scary or serious.

Slightly humorous.

Relaxed, calm, funny and talks to the class openly.

However, some students wanted teachers who were quite serious and not at all humorous:

If you were to listen to someone who is quite jokey, the students wouldn't really focus.

4.5.4.7 Be prepared to include aspects of religion and belief

Religion and how teachers view, respect and know about religions was a topic that arose in the questionnaires from students of a variety of backgrounds:

Be polite, nice and take your religion seriously. *Muslim boy*

Open about different faiths and cultures. *Hindu girl*

They should have a knowledge of other people's beliefs. *Atheist boy*

During interview one participant felt that teachers should know about various religious beliefs so that they could:

[...] add some religious aspects to it [RSE] then I think the people will become more comfortable in approaching sex and relationships wholeheartedly.

Agnostic girl

But one Muslim girl who thought that her religion was reasonably important to her said:

I want something professional you know de-emotional, physical and social science, I just don't want what Jesus said, what Mohammed said. I want to know, okay what are the implications of sex on my life and what decisions I should take and when do I think I am ready for it, not because I am married but when should I be ready? I want to learn those points of views. *Muslim girl*

Views concerning how teachers should include and respect religion in RSE and how teachers need to handle religious issues in the classroom were again the focus of a contested area among participants. One non-religious student believed that the teacher should know about and be prepared to discuss religious issues, yet a religious student said that she didn't want to learn about the teachings of Jesus or Mohammed but wanted to know what applied more directly to her life. This

dichotomy raises a number of questions: Does she not see religion as having a bearing on her decisions about relationships and sex? What does this say about faith groups and their teaching of young people? Does it mean that this female student sees a divide between the religious and the secular with relationships and sex belonging to the secular? If so what implications are there for her in the future, regarding her faith or her sexual practice? Finally, what challenges does this pose for her faith group and the teacher who needs to handle the fracture between the religious and secular parts of this students' development, and should the teacher have to worry about this developmental dichotomy at all?

I argue that a good quality RSE teacher can and should be aware of the issues faced by young people as they grapple with wanting to know more about their burgeoning sexuality and the conflicts that may cause with their religion or culture or simply as they find out about themselves and the society they are growing up in.

4.5.4.8 Guidance, values and judgement

The following quotations were all from boys, who identified either as Christian or atheist. There were no similar statements from any girls. These boys all felt that it was the teacher's place to 'guide' or model good behaviour to students:

The teacher should be able to judge the students' opinions and give the right mind-set if they are in the wrong.

Overly promiscuous or inappropriate teachers are not good.

I would like them to always tell the truth.

There was also a feeling amongst other participants, both girls and boys, that teachers should not influence students or be judgemental, rather, that they should be:

Trustworthy and non-judgemental.

Open minded and non-judgemental.

Serious but doesn't influence students.

4.5.4.9 Gender, age and ethnicity of the RSE teacher

The gender of the RSE teacher was a topic that emerged from the data. Those who expressed a preference for a teacher of a particular gender were mostly girls who wanted a female teacher: “Needs to be female so I can feel comfortable talking about it [RSE]”. This preference for female teachers was expressed across all four schools, even in the boys’ school: “Experienced, knowledgeable and female”. However, one boy said that he wanted the teacher to “be the same gender”. Another boy from a mixed school said: “If it is an all-boys’ school then it should be a woman; if it is an all-girls’ school it should be a man, but it should be mostly women teaching RSE”. One student, a boy at a mixed school, assumed that the teacher would be a female: “Good speaker, knows what she is talking about and is nice”. It is clear from the comments of these and other young people that girls generally feel more at ease with women teachers. However, for boys the picture is more varied, so a mix of genders for RSE teaching may be appropriate but is probably something that needs to be discussed with students and parents, as well as among teaching staff, when planning RSE for a school.

None of the students expressed a preference for a particular ethnicity for an RSE teacher. Some students said that they wanted to have a “young” teacher whilst others said they wanted “mature” teacher although it isn’t clear from the data if this meant mature in years, or attitude. For those who wanted a young teacher, girls seemed to want someone they could relate to while one boy wanted “young, fit and experienced” teachers, which, upon reading the rest of his questionnaire, seemed to be ‘laddish’ behaviour.

4.5.4.10 Materials, policy and resources used to teach RSE

My research was not designed to investigate the materials, policy or resources (keep to same order as in title) used in participating schools when teaching RSE. There is little in this study to contextualise the research based on these factors as the emphasis was on listening to what participants considered important concerning their experience of RSE in their school, not on what the schools set out to teach students or how curricula were resourced. A few themes emerged from

the data, however, concerning materials, policy and resources. Some students disliked materials showing graphic pictures of sexually transmitted infections and the policy to use 'drop-down days' in some schools was not appreciated by a number of participants. It is clear from the data that students felt that teachers of RSE were the greatest resource a school could offer its students. Many students' comments concerning the quality of RSE were based around the quality of the teaching and the characteristics of the teacher who taught RSE to them. It is important for schools understand that good quality teacher education is central to the teaching of good quality RSE. Students, it seemed, considered teacher attitudes and acceptance of and sensitivity to the needs of students, the most valuable resource a school has to offer in its quest to provide all education, but especially RSE.

4.5.4.11 Super-teacher

Some students wrote a long list of desirable attributes for teachers of RSE; as one atheist boy put it: "Confident, sense of humour, understands and clearly explains the topic, isn't judgemental, friendly". One Muslim girl wrote: "Approachable, friendly, she should be quite in with the media, culture and local teenage style, so students can connect with her, she should feel like one of us". An atheist boy wrote: "They should be kind and mature. They should know boundaries and not ruin children's innocence, but at the same time inform them [the students] of the importance of RSE". It seems that a 'good quality' RSE teacher, if they are to fulfil the desires of the students in this study, would need to be a 'super-teacher'.

These few participant requests alone, along with the litany of wishes already mentioned in this chapter, are hard enough for a school to satisfy; not all the students' wishes are possible to fulfil when schools are planning a timetable. Creativity and professionalism may well come into their own when deciding how to deploy staff to teach RSE. If it is felt that students would value younger teachers, then the teacher involved in RSE either needs to show themselves young in attitude, train other younger staff or possibly demonstrate to students that teachers do not have to be young to be able to understand and be able to

“connect” with students. If students would rather have professionals from outside school, “so they don’t have to see them again”, their concern could be due to a worry about confidentiality. Making students feel at ease regarding the confidential nature (within safeguarding limits) of conversations with staff might help them to feel more comfortable with school staff teaching RSE. As I have pondered participant responses about the characteristics they see as important in an RSE teacher, two words used by male students stand out for me: ‘brave’ and ‘courageous’. These boys did not explain exactly what they meant, but their responses could possibly be seen as prophetic. As policy makers, schools and teachers seek to learn from the young people in this study so they can provide them with the teaching staff desired by students, a brave and courageous stance is exactly what is needed as the search goes on for those ‘super-teachers’ to educate students in an increasingly complex and diverse society.

4.6 Should Relationships and Sex Education in schools be faith sensitive?

4.6.1 Context: Religion, religious literacy and the growth of faith communities.

Thinkers and philosophers like Nietzsche (Kauffman, 1950), Spinoza (Kauffman, 1950; Pynn, 2012) and those involved in the enlightenment (Brewer, 2014) have struggled with and opposed the religious idea of God, or the very concept of any god or gods, for hundreds of years because they felt that there was no need and indeed no rationale for organised religion. Despite this opposition, religion has thrived in many places in recent times. In countries like Russia and China where religion has been suppressed (Thomas, 2006), it has been forced mainly underground. Now the political leaders of those two countries having realised that they cannot eradicate religion have sought to support places of worship whilst trying to maintain control of them and suppress communities where they have been unable to maintain tight jurisdiction. Legal measures came into being in Russia in July 2016 to restrain Christian worship and free expression of religious views. Citizens are not allowed to evangelise anywhere, including private houses or on the internet, except in registered churches. As most of the evangelical churches meet in homes, the measures have been seen as an effort to continue to suppress religion,

whilst the authorities maintain they are supportive of it, for political reasons (Shellnut, 2016).

Twenty first century Britain and most other countries in the world are not finished with the notion of a divine being or beings. In some areas of Britain there is tremendous growth in religious observance which is taking many different forms (ONS, 2012). There has been a decline in established church attendance, (Sherwood, 2016) however denominations like the Pentecostal movement and also non-Christian religious traditions such as Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism, have seen rises in membership, mostly from immigrant populations (ONS, 2012). This is true too of Roman Catholic congregations in inner-city areas, due to European and African migration to Britain (Brierley, 2014). The religious landscape in the UK is changing. Some areas like that around Rural School show religious adherence well below the national average according to the 2011 census (ONS, 2012), whilst in other areas similar to the inner-city borough containing Fitzgerald School, Snelgrove School and St Joseph's School religious observance is amongst the highest in the country (ONS, 2012). Faith in god or gods, may be an anathema to some, especially those of the 13% convinced atheists in Britain today (The Guardian, 2015), to others faith is the motivation behind who they are and what they do with their lives. As Luke Muehlhauser put it on his Common-Sense Atheism blog (2009): "Sometimes, one's religious beliefs provides the motivation for stunning service and sacrifice".

In Britain, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education is calling for more religious literacy in schools, public life and the media (APPG on Religious Education, 2016). SRE guidance (DfE, 2000, p. 12) advises that: "It is therefore important for [SRE] policies to be both culturally appropriate and inclusive of all children" [including those from faith backgrounds]. In their book *Faith and Values in Sex and Relationships Education*, Blake and Katrak (2002, p. 8) maintain that: "Religious doctrines can be viewed as a means to a spiritual goal, rather than merely a restriction on what is and is not acceptable. Moral codes of conduct are derived from religious teachings. On a spiritual level, following these codes can provide members of a religion with rules to live by, and consequently, can result in a profound sense of liberation. This is often unrecognised in SRE". Whilst

government agencies and writers make it clear that the background, including religious background, of students ought to be considered when delivering RSE in schools, leading to an assumption that faith sensitivity should be a desired aspect of RSE, in reality faith sensitivity is seldom evident in RSE. Teacher education about RSE per se, is limited (Robertson, 2017) and the only teacher education courses of which I am aware where faith-sensitive RSE is explored and discussed (without being partisan) are run by myself and other consultants with whom I work.

Faith-sensitive RSE teaching is not always demonstrated in our classrooms. This can cause students and or parents to be disengaged from the subject because it can be seen as taboo. If the door to information, knowledge and skills for young people is not opened with respect and understanding, it can remain closed to them. Parents of young people may choose to shut doors in our faces, denying their offspring the education they may need and want.

4.6.2 What the participants say

It was important that my research tried to find out if participants thought that RSE should be 'faith-sensitive' and, if so, how that could be demonstrated through RSE in schools. In the formative focus groups, some participants made it clear that they thought RSE should be faith-sensitive;

Girl 1: I think maybe religion with the lesson should make everyone feel comfortable with it.

Boy: Everyone should be a part of it, no-one should be left out.

Girl 1: Yeah.

Girl 2: No one should be excluded but everyone should feel comfortable like they should talk about it because there are some religions that are against contraception and that don't like stuff like that, but they [students from religious backgrounds] need to be taught about certain types of contraception that are okay and what is going against their faith and what they can do and stuff like that. *Three 15-year-olds, in the focus groups*

Whilst discussing faith sensitivity with the focus groups (Section 4.1.4) and what it might look like in RSE lessons, participants expressed the opinion that faith sensitivity should contain two important elements. Respect for faith and religion and an understanding of what faiths and religions teach about relationships and sex.

When planning and formulating the questionnaire used in stages 2 and 4 of the data collection, I decide not to ask the simple and direct (closed) question, 'Should RSE in schools be faith-sensitive?', as it seemed possible that participants in the research may just say 'yes' because they thought that would be the sought answer and not because they had thought through the reasoning behind their response to the question. In the inner-city schools during stage 2 of the data collection using questionnaires, students may have felt that to say "no", might show a disloyalty to their religion, or that of their peers, due the high numbers of students from faith backgrounds. It is also possible that Rural School participants may have felt that they were not showing respect to minority groups if they gave a negative answer. I split my initial question into two separate questions considered needed by the focus groups to probe faith-sensitive RSE. The first question asked whether students felt they should learn what different religions say about relationships and sex. The other question addressed the issue of respect for religions in RSE. These two questions were added amongst 15 other additional questions considered important by the focus groups, as part of a tick box, Likert-style (1932) table of questions. As I didn't want to pose the two questions in isolation so that they took on a high profile within the questionnaire, they were hidden among other questions.

In the questionnaire, participants were asked, 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- 9h. I think we should learn what different religions say about relationships and sex, even if we don't have a religion ourselves.
- 19j. I think it is important to show respect for different religions in relationships and sex education.'

A large majority of the students in my sample who were attending the three inner-city schools said that both elements of faith-sensitive RSE were important. Approximately 90% of students answered that religion should be respected within RSE and 7% said that they weren't sure, leaving only 3% of pupils who felt that there was no need for religion to be respected. A lower percentage of participants, only 71%, indicated that they felt they should learn what religions teach about relationships and sex in RSE lessons. Around 11% specified that they felt information about religious teaching should not form a part of RSE in schools. It was unsurprising that the more religious a pupil was the more predisposed they were to 'totally agree' that respect for religion and awareness of religious teachings should be included in RSE in their school. In contrast, the school with the lowest religious observance among the inner-city schools, as the graphs below demonstrate (Figures 4.10/11/12) had the highest number of participants agreeing that religions should be respected in RSE lessons. In Fitzgerald School 17% of participants identified as agnostic or atheist, whilst the Snelgrove School sample contained only one of 70 participants who identified as agnostic or atheist, and in St Joseph's School only one of 78 participants identified as agnostic or atheist.

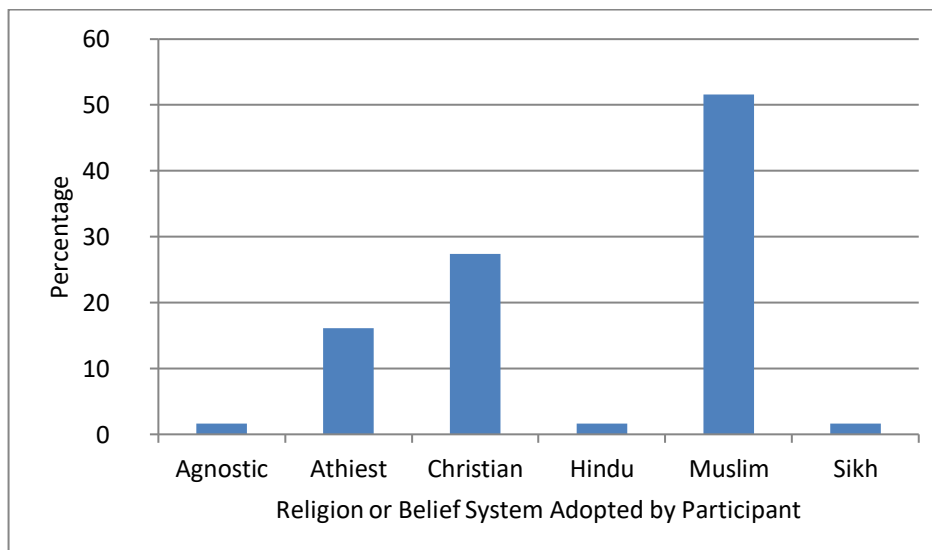


Figure 4.10 Fitzgerald School – religious observance of participants

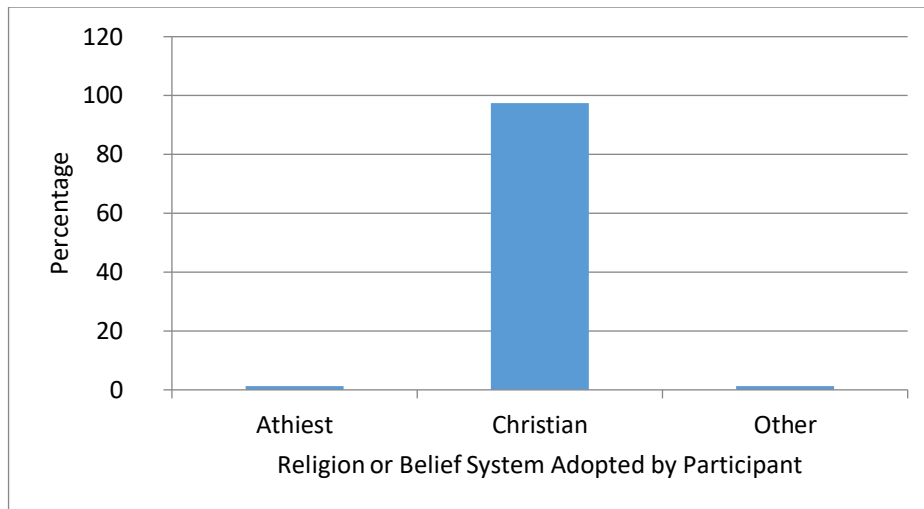


Figure 4.4.11 St Joseph's School – religious observance of participants

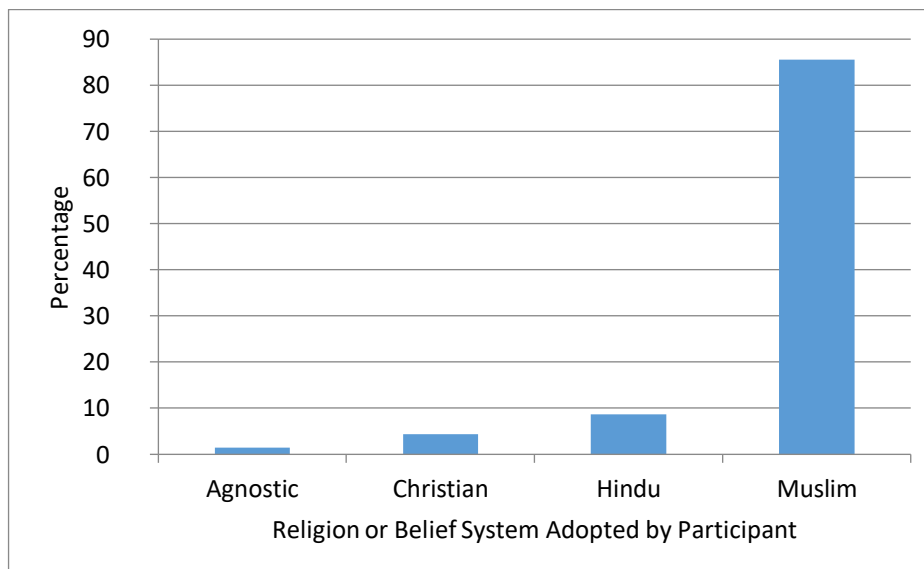


Figure 4.12 Snelgrove School – religious observance of participants

The biggest surprise though, came when analysing the results from Rural School data where 76% of students identified as agnostic or atheist (Figure 4.13) with only 24% saying they belonged to a recognised religion, mostly Christianity. In this school, 88% of participants said that religion should be respected in RSE lessons (Figure 4.14). This percentage was very slightly higher than St Joseph's School and not significantly lower than both Fitzgerald School and Snelgrove School.

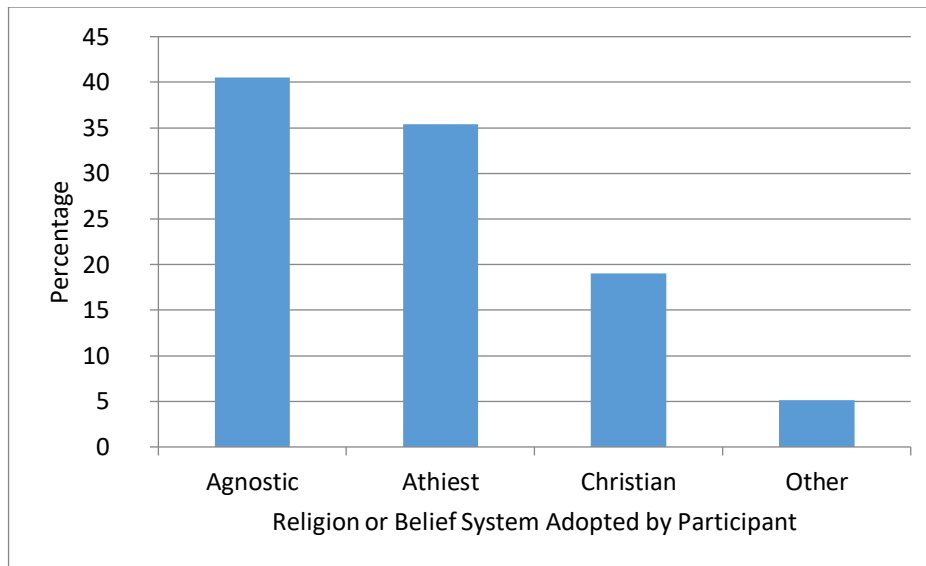


Figure 4.13 Rural School – religious observance of participants

4.6.3 *What is 'faith-sensitive RSE' and how should the concept manifest itself in classrooms?*

'Faith sensitivity' as indicated in the literature review (Section 2.10) is not a widely used term and there is a discussion to be had concerning what is meant by it and why the term 'religious literacy' has not been used in this study. Religious literacy is a widely adopted term and one that has been given many different meanings. For example, in the definition adopted by the Harvard Divinity School, Religious Literacy Project (2018) religious literacy is knowledge-based with little expected action forming part of the concept, whereas in Britain the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (2016) definition of religious literacy is broader and action- and attitude-based. This latter approach is more akin to the concept of faith sensitivity as presented in this thesis, but there are still several other reasons why 'faith-sensitive' and 'faith-sensitivity' are the phrases used in this study:

- The term 'faith-sensitive RSE' was used throughout this research to mean that RSE should, in line with the views of focus groups participants, be both respectful of various faiths and impart information and knowledge concerning faith and people of faith at the juncture of relationships and sexual health and practice.

- The term 'religious literacy' was not used because it has come to mean different things to different groups of people. It seemed more effective to employ a less well-known term and then to explain what is meant by it, so as to avoid confusion.
- The word 'faith' rather than 'religion' was included in the term as it is more fluid, enabling individuals to have the freedom to understand faith, their own and that of others, in a less defined way. It is also the case that the word 'religion' has negative connotations for some or perhaps is a concept more confined to religious organisations, structures and traditions, whereas faith is usually understood to mean something wider.
- 'Sensitive' is a word that indicates attitudes and behaviours as well as understanding, respect and knowledge.
- By the end of the study, LGBT+-sensitivity and student-sensitivity in RSE had been included because of the grounded nature of the methodology. It became clear that to discuss student-literate RSE as a development of religious-literate RSE could have been misunderstood by teachers as meaning a discussion concerning reading ability and not a sensitivity to the needs and identities of individual students. This possible misunderstanding meant that I became even more confident that the original decision to use the term faith-sensitive RSE was the right one.

There are, of course, limits that need to be considered when discussing faith-sensitive RSE. All RSE should respect and inform students about the law concerning relationships and sex; it should also be constrained to sit within the declared ethos of the school in which RSE is being taught and conform to guidance from the DfE. Faith-sensitive RSE does not mean faith-dominated RSE, nor RSE that is only sensitive to one majority, or even minority, discourse concerning relationships and sex. There will, inevitably, be some areas of disagreement and debate concerning the teaching of RSE in general and around issues of faith in particular, but these debates can result in positive educational and social outcomes if managed carefully.

In discussing issues, including those that may have religious or cultural significance for students, it is important to encourage all students to engage with the lesson or have their stereotypes challenged, but there are other educational discourses to explore in RSE. Most teachers have an educational goal to widen horizons for students and open their eyes to people, issues and experiences that they have not encountered before. However, this broadening of understanding needs to be carried out with an understanding and care that aids positive identity construction and doesn't diminish young people's concept of self.

Some may assume that the home backgrounds of some students result in constraints, due to students' cultural circumstances. Obviously, some students like Manoj (Section 4.8.3.2) are questioning their cultural and religious backgrounds and they should be given support and space to query and change their identity, should they so wish. Many students, though, are not only comfortable with their cultural and religious circumstances, but proud of them. It is an understanding of the distinction between these categories of students that forms part of the sensitivity needed to be shown by educators and their ability to open doors for students that enables faith- and student-sensitive RSE to take place.

The sociologist of education, Michael Young who has done much to conceptualise 'future knowledge', social realism and education generally, argues that the way ahead for education is for it to embrace the idea of 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2014). Discussion of 'powerful' is problematic. Important questions arise such as, who decides what is powerful? Who decides what is good quality RSE? Different people feel they have some answers, whether they be liberal scientists, sexual health providers, imams, pastors, young people, academics, teachers or parents, among others. It is hard to say who can answer these questions definitively or if one group has greater insight than another.

A possible way forward may be to meet the students where *they* are – culture, background, gender, sexuality and so much more – to lead, maybe beckon, certainly not force them, to come into an identity-safe space where they can explore their own values and viewpoints, and those of others. Good quality faith-

sensitive RSE accepts and respects students where they are and seeks to give them the opportunity to learn more than they know opening them up to knowledge that could be a powerful, positive driver for their future. This knowledge may indeed liberate them from the constraints of their current specific cultural background, it may also help them to understand the positivity that can be found in that background and open others to gain an understanding of ‘difference’ and how diversity and equality fit into discussions concerning RSE.

4.6.4 Discussion: Why is the faith-sensitive delivery of RSE important to schools?

The most important reason to me, as a researcher, for the facilitation of faith-sensitive RSE in schools is that the clear majority of the young participants in my study indicated that religion should both be respected (Figure 4.14) and taught about in RSE (Figure 4.15), the two components which the formative focus groups understood to constitute faith-sensitive RSE. It is also clear from my research and from the current British context that the introduction of faith-sensitivity in RSE is important because it increases understanding and respect for religion and belief systems contributing to an understanding of religious attitudes and teachings regarding relationships and sex. The extent to which the participants across all schools understood this to be important, may suggest that this is a generalisable finding from the study.

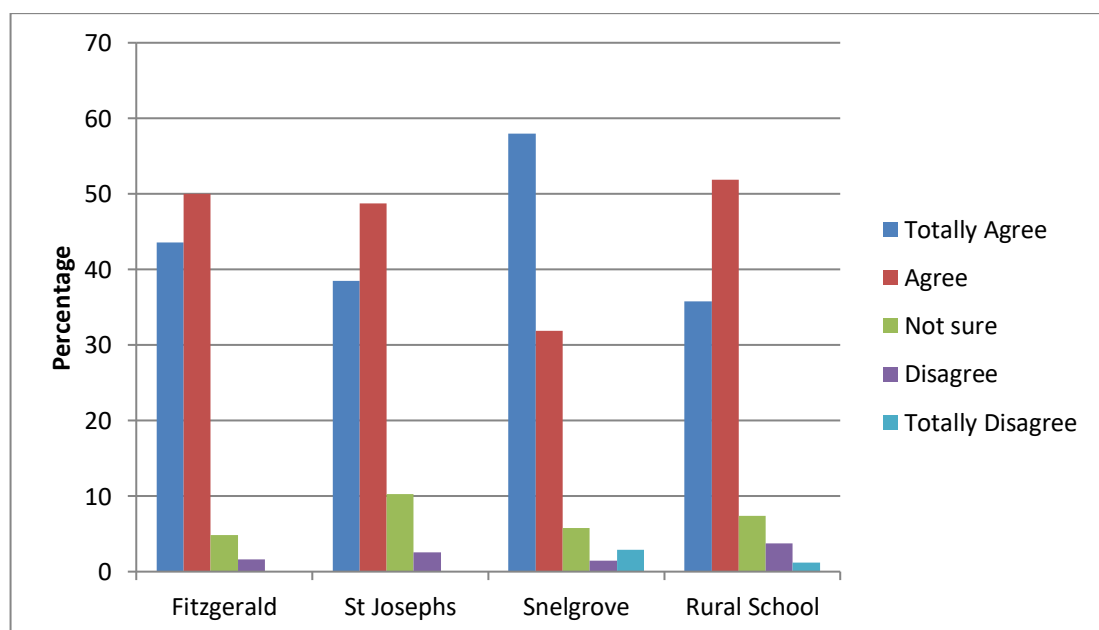


Figure 4.14 Student views concerning respect for religion in RSE

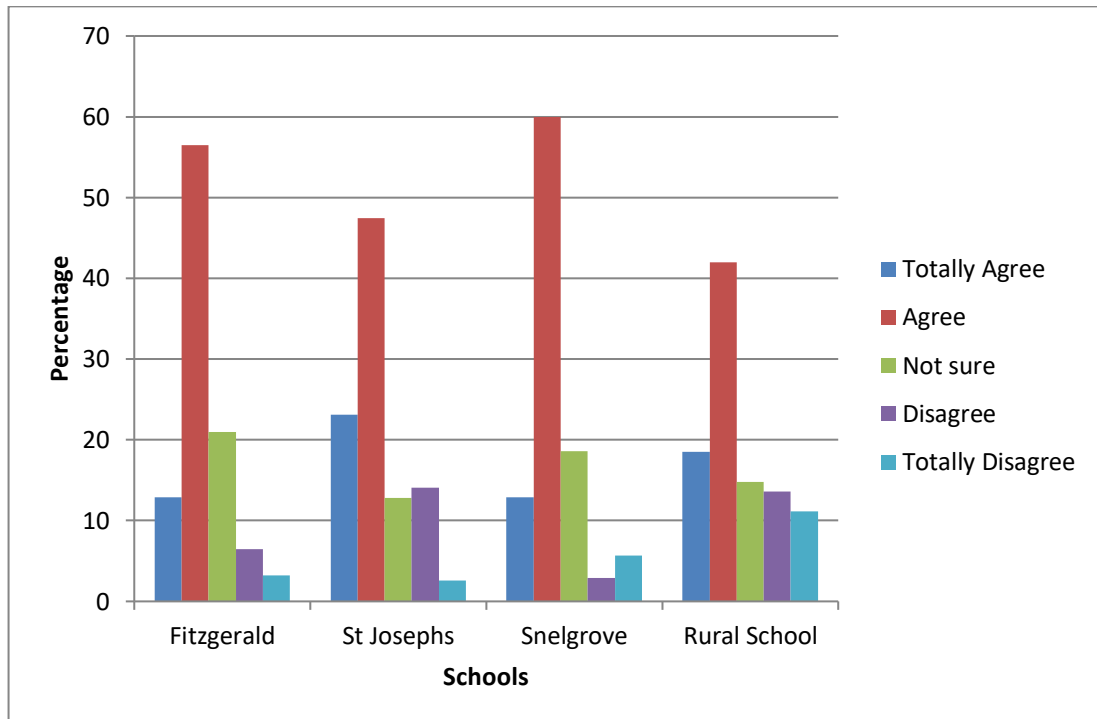


Figure 4.15 Student views on learning about religious teachings and beliefs in RSE

Faith-sensitivity has an importance in its own right, but in addition there are educational agendas where faith-sensitivity in RSE can enhance not only outcomes for schools but provide evidence suitable for an Ofsted inspection. At present schools in England need to demonstrate to Ofsted, governors of academy trusts, local authorities and other external bodies that they are fulfilling their obligations in the delivery of equality, Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) provision and ‘Fundamental British values’ (FBV) both in the curriculum and the ethos of the school. The facilitation of faith-sensitive RSE speaks to all these agendas and may also work to show how the school is fulfilling part of their Prevent Duty (Prime Minister’s Task Force, 2013).

If RSE is to become faith-sensitive, LGBT+-sensitive and ultimately student-sensitive it will be an enriching experience for all students, giving those who come from minority groups a confident sense of self and place, as well as enabling those from majority groups to learn and understand about, and from, those about whom they

may have little knowledge, or whom they may misjudge or give no regard to. This approach will celebrate diversity and, if handled well, bring about more equality in the classroom.

4.7 Compulsory RSE and the right to withdraw from lessons

Whether RSE should be compulsory and whether parents should be able to remove their children from RSE has been a contentious issue for decades (Reiss & Mabud, 1998; Riches & Wells, 2004; Piltcher, 2005; Reiss, 2005; SEF, 2011; Relate, 2014; DfE, 2015; Education Committee, 2015; Fleet Street Fox, 2015; Radio 4, 2015). The participants in my study suggested that they should also have the right to withdraw themselves from RSE lessons. This adds another layer of complexity to the debate.

4.7.1 Context: Toward the provision of statutory RSE.

RSE and PSHE has been widely discussed in the press (Weale & Adams, 2016) and in some quarters the removal of the parental right of withdrawal from RSE has been actively campaigned against (Brook, 2017). The Government announced in its policy statement in March 2017 (DfE, 2017a) that RSE was to become statutory. This policy statement states that parents will maintain their right to remove their children from any aspect of RSE not covered by the National Curriculum, in line with section 405 of the Education Act 1996 (DfE, 1996) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 2010). The Government expects RSE to be delivered in a way that: “respect[s] the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018. Protocol 1, Article 2). In the evidence given to the 2015 Education Select Committee on *Life Lessons: PSHE and SRE in Schools*, it was made clear that very few parents exercise the right to remove their children: “the Minister told us that only ‘a tiny minority’ of parents withdraw their children from SRE” (Education Committee, 2015, p. 47). The right of withdrawal from these lessons can be seen as a negative move, denying students information valuable to their current and/or future lives, undermining the rights of the child. While the right for parents to remove their children from RSE is actively

campaigned against by some organisations (Brook, 2017) other, religious groups like SRE Islamic (Patel, 2015) and The Christian Institute (2016)) are supporting parents who wish to remove their children from RSE lessons and are likely to continue to campaign for the right to be retained in the future.

4.7.2 What the participants say

In the formative focus groups during stage 1 of the study (2014), participants wanted the research to ask not only if RSE should be compulsory and if parents should be able to take their children out of RSE, but also whether students should have the right to remove themselves from these lessons. These three questions were therefore posed to the participants taking part in the questionnaire stage of the study. The students understood 'compulsory' to mean that it had to be taught in all schools, not necessarily that it was compulsory for students to attend.

Most questionnaire participants felt that RSE should be compulsory in schools (Figure 4.16), although some said that it should only be compulsory in secondary schools and not primary schools. Some of those who said that RSE should not be compulsory in primary school also felt that issues to do with puberty and relationships (not sexual ones) should be taught in primary schools.

I guess it is good to be taught quite young, but I feel like it would make it a bit awkward for the children so I think in Year 6 when most people will start to go through them changes like puberty and things like that that's a good time to learn it [RSE] but I think you should learn more about relationships in Year 6 and when you go to Year 7 learn more about sex education and things like that.

Atheist girl

Sex is something that everyone should know about. Therefore, schools must teach it, or students might learn about sex through a wrong source, e.g. porn.

Muslim boy

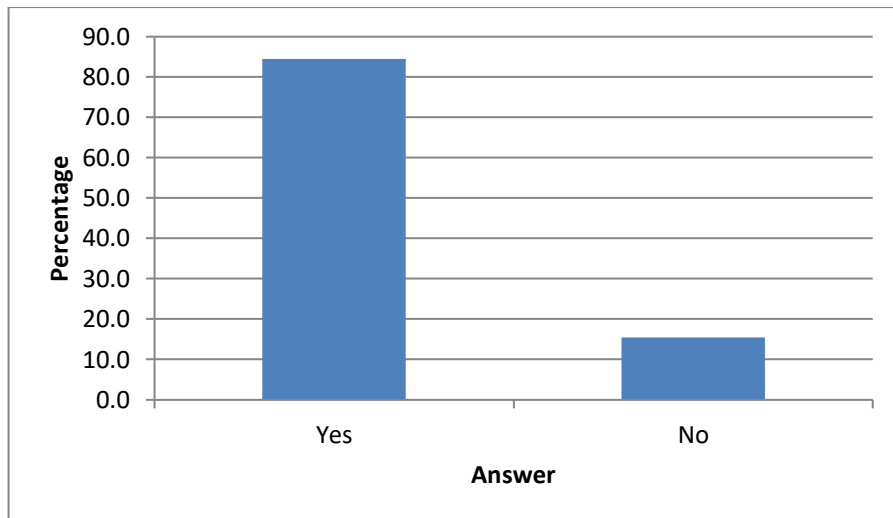


Figure 4.16 Student Participant views as to whether RSE should be compulsory in schools

Participant opinions about withdrawal from lessons were less well-defined. A third of students wrote they thought parents ought to be able to withdraw their children from RSE (Figure 4.17).

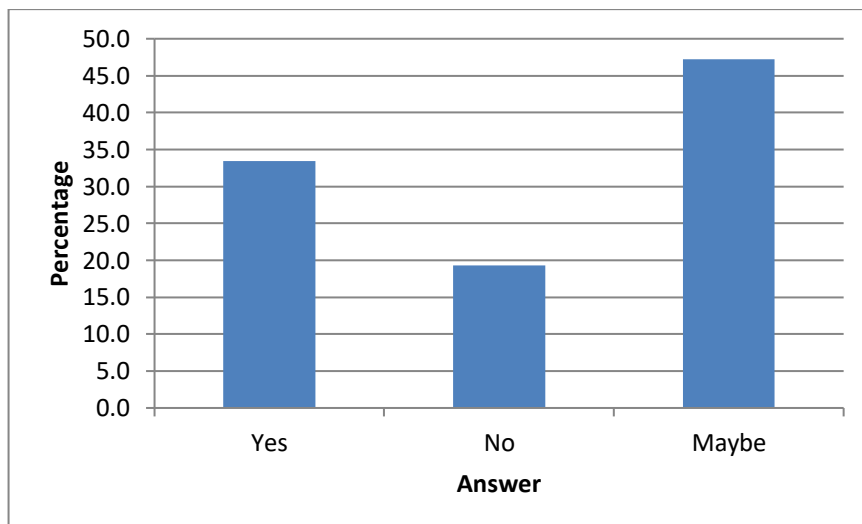


Figure 4.17 Should parents have the right to remove their children from RSE?

Almost half of the students indicated that they should be able to remove themselves from RSE lessons (Figure 4.18).

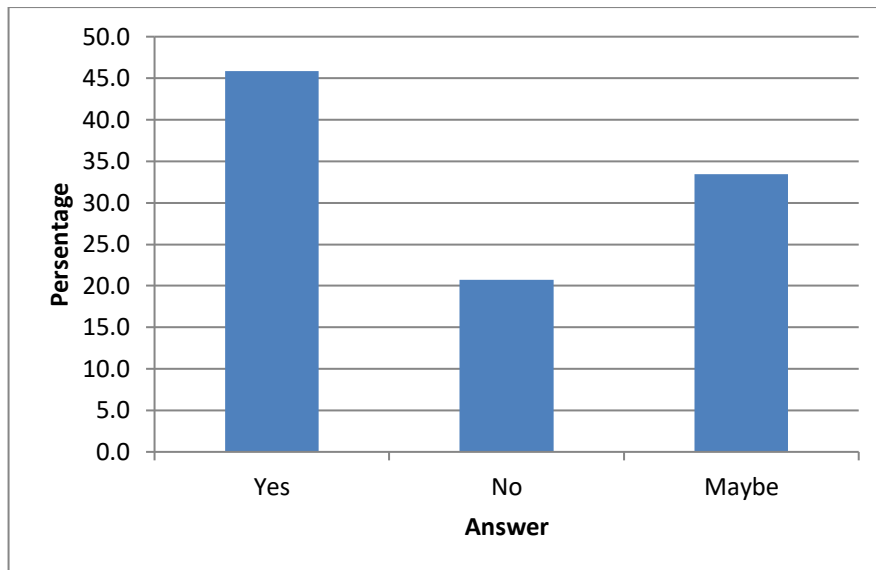


Figure 4.18 Should students have the right to remove themselves from RSE?

Figures 4.16-4.18 demonstrate a strong call for statutory RSE, especially in secondary schools, but it is evident too that the question of withdrawal from lessons by either students or parents is less clear in the minds of the participants. The qualitative data give a very varied and nuanced elucidation of the young people's opinions.

4.7.2.1 Compulsory RSE

Students felt that RSE should be compulsory in schools because they saw schools as being the most reliable place to learn about RSE:

The things that are in the media or things your friends and family say are not all fact. If you are being taught in school, you can be comfortable that it is all true.

Atheist girl

You are given the option of doing it the right way rather than just figuring it out.

Christian girl

Students also felt that it was important for their future lives:

You will be taught later in life, but it is better to learn from an early age. *Hindu girl*

Many young students need to know what is coming up in the future, without studying relationships and sex education, they would be missing out on vital socialisation. *Muslim girl*

Those who came from backgrounds where their religion was important to both them and their family took a range of very different stances on compulsory RSE. One group felt that RSE shouldn't be compulsory:

Because it has to be done at the right age. *Christian boy*

Others felt that it should be compulsory because:

Some students might not learn about RSE from anywhere else, therefore to make everyone more aware of RSE it should be taught in schools. *Muslim boy*

Cos it teaches right and wrong. *Christian boy*

Some students realised that because parents may not have the knowledge or confidence to talk to their children about RSE it would be better for the school to teach it:

In some cultures, RSE is 'taboo' and is often not spoken about, so RSE would be good in schools because they [students] will need to know about it. *Muslim girl*

Around only one in six students expressed the view that RSE should not be taught in schools. Reasons expressed by this minority of students were quite varied. A few of them thought that the time could be better spent on exam subjects:

Waste of GCSE time. *Christian boy*

Others thought that it was not appropriate to teach about sex at an "early age" or that RSE should be: "Compulsory in secondary, but not in primary" *Muslim Girl*. One Muslim student felt that RSE should be taught only at college with most teaching (apart from relationships and puberty) happening after the age of 16. Not all students who said that RSE should not be taught in schools came from strong religious backgrounds:

It doesn't seem to be important because you will learn it out of school anyway.

Atheist boy

Not all students may be ready, but only when they are mature enough it can be taught to them. *Another Atheist boy*

4.7.2.2 Parental right to withdraw from RSE

A high proportion of participants could see that the present parental right to withdraw their child from RSE has both advantages and disadvantages, which is why almost half of them said "maybe" in answer to the question 'Should parents have the right to remove their children from RSE?'. It would be easy when interpreting the graphs (Figures 4.17 and 4.18) without the qualitative context provided by the study to assume that the students understood the parental right of withdrawal to be unnecessary or didn't know what they thought. Actually, the students were very sure of their opinions, but could see the arguments both for and against parents having the right to take their children out of RSE lessons:

Maybe the parents have the right as it is their child and they could be religious and have their own beliefs, but it is important to know about sex education.

Atheist girl

If they believe that the RSE is having a negative impact on their child [they could withdraw their child], but they must have reasonable cause. *Christian boy*

If parents want to take them out there must be a good reason and they should be aware the RSE lessons are very important and it may have an impact on the child's life. *Muslim girl*

Of those who said that parents should not have the right to take their children out of RSE, most maintained that preventing a child from attending RSE lessons would undermine the rights of the child:

The child has the right regardless of what the parents think. *Strongly Atheist boy*

A parent would not be able to take a child out of a maths class so why take child out of an RSE class? *Muslim girl*

Parents shouldn't be able to stop their children from learning what they need to like to learn. *Christian girl*

There were, in addition, a few other reasons given by students as to why parents should not be allowed to remove their children from RSE lessons:

Because I feel embarrassed talking to my parents. *Sikh boy*

They should understand that RSE is vital and benefits their children. It provides a lot of information in a careful and disciplined way. *Hindu girl*

Larissa, a British Christian of Caribbean descent, said at interview:

If they are not happy about the children learning about it and stuff. I think it's because it's their child isn't it? And they don't want to them to be exposed to stuff at a young age and so can become defensive.

Larissa's words highlight difficulties faced by both schools and parents. Parents want what is 'best', as they see it, for their child; schools want to deliver what they feel is 'best' for their students as a whole. The needs of an individual child may be different to the needs of most students in a particular year group:

The parents may feel like the child isn't ready for that [...] Especially talking about sex. They show about sexually transmitted diseases and they show images and I think that's probably one of the big ones that would make you feel uncomfortable. It makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. *Christian girl*

I also think that parents, because they know their child more than anyone, they can know if that education is suitable for their children or not and I think they deserve the right to do what is best for their children. *Christian boy*

Parents are more likely to feel they know what is best for their individual child, but may be heavily influenced by their community, background and possibly limited understanding of RSE. Schools on the other hand may be able to see the bigger

picture involving a large number of students but may not understand the issues caused for some parents by certain teaching methods or materials. As Larissa also pointed out during interview:

Say, if their children have been exposed to pictures that have got to do with sexual education but is not relevant and they don't want them to see them things. Like nudity or something. It should be a diagram and not an actual picture of someone. I got this view from some parents.

As both parents and schools endeavour to work out what is 'best' RSE from their viewpoint, they can easily disagree. This may mean that the school uses resources that are not seen as appropriate by some parents and possibly some students. In return, parents can become defensive and cause problems within the school and possibly withdraw their children unnecessarily from RSE.

What is the answer given such contestation, where some parents do not trust the school to deliver appropriate RSE for their children and schools in turn can feel they know what is best for their students as a whole? Schools that work with and listen to parents when deciding on RSE policy and the choice of teaching materials or outside education teams can defuse most anxiety about RSE and may find that parental defensiveness dissipates:

They [the school] should write letters or they should call them [the parents] in to tell them the exact curriculum or what they are going to tell them [the children] about what stuff is going to be exposed to them so they [the parents] don't have to think of the worst or anything. *Christian girl*

Surely if they [the parents] ask to see the lesson plan and what was going to be taught, then they would know that it would be for the good of their child's welfare. *Another Christian girl*

Showing parents teaching materials in advance, especially at primary level, means that parents have the opportunity to experience what their children will experience and hopefully have their minds put at rest; however, if there are parental concerns about the materials, then the school has the possibility of finding or developing

alternative resources. Including parents in this sort of process also means parents are better equipped to talk to their children about RSE at home or be advocates for RSE in the playground when talking with other parents.

4.7.2.3 Students' right to withdraw from RSE

Almost half of those taking part in the study felt that children and young people should have the right to take themselves out of RSE. Around a third said "maybe" with only about one in five saying "no" (students ought not to be able to remove themselves from RSE). Members of the "no" group were the most vehement in their comments.

Many students especially boys try to act older pretending to know a lot but really, they don't. I think that they would try to take themselves out to impress people and pretend their knowledge is good [therefore don't need RSE].

Christian girl

SRE should be learnt as it is useful for life. Missing these lessons is like missing subject lessons. *Hindu girl*

If parents don't have a problem with it then the student should stay in the lesson. *Muslim boy*

Some might think it is awkward, it is immature to leave, they don't know when they are going to need it. *Hindu girl*

Those students who said that they should be able to take themselves out of RSE again expressed that they felt it was their right to do so. One Muslim girl wrote that RSE could result in oppression: "They have a right to say what they want to absorb into their mind and learn without any oppression being forced on them". Another student, a Hindu boy, felt they may not be 'ready' for RSE: "Students may not want to learn SRE at the current age they are". The largest number of students who felt they should be able to remove themselves from RSE used words like "uncomfortable", "embarrassed" or "awkward" (Section 4.5.2.4) as part of the reason for student withdrawal from RSE; as one Muslim boy put it: "It is completely

up to them and how they may feel, they may feel uncomfortable". Uncomfortable, embarrassed and awkward were words that were used frequently in the questionnaires when describing either their or their peers' attitudes towards or difficulties with RSE.

4.7.3 Discussion

Responses from participants were well thought out and varied. Students could not easily be type cast with religious students saying one thing and non-religious students taking a differing stance. Some atheists agreed with those from religious backgrounds, e.g. the atheist boy who wrote: "I think the parents are ultimately the decision maker and if they removed their child from RSE class they would have a reasonable excuse". Others who identified as strongly religious were able to see the problems their own religion could cause for some young people, especially if they were removed from RSE by parents. One Christian girl who described her religion as influencing everything she did said that RSE should be compulsory because: "I think it should be introduced so that people are aware of the dangers, but it should be done subtly and gradually to prevent people being silly". She felt that parents should not have the right to withdraw their children from RSE, but that: "Parents should be explained to that this is being done in a subtle and non-explicit manner so they don't have to feel defensive to[wards] what their child is being exposed to", and that students should not be able to withdraw themselves because: "There is no need as it is done at a mature age say Year 9 or 10 then there shouldn't be any reason [for the child to want] to remove themselves". It was unclear whether this student was describing the RSE that she received in her school or that she wished to receive, but either way she obviously had coherent views about the teaching of RSE, when and how it should be taught and how parents should be approached when explaining RSE. Parents can be a very effective part of the RSE team especially if they are encouraged and empowered to talk to their children about relationships and sex.

For some schools in some areas of the UK this reassuring symbiosis is not easy. Where there are worries about secularisation and liberal attitudes in school,

distrust is easily generated, and one parent's fear can infect a whole religious or other community. Rewards for the children attending a school if the difficulties with parents can be dealt with in a respectful and collaborative way can be hugely important though. If Joy (Section 1.2.7), a motivational figure for this research, had not been withdrawn from RSE lessons her opportunities in life might have been substantially improved by not having had her first child at 19, a child who was loved, but the product of a very unhappy and transient relationship for Joy. It is possible that if Joy's aunt had been confident in the quality and content of RSE in Joy's school, understanding it to be respectful and understanding of faith, Joy might not have been removed from RSE lessons. This may have given her the skills, attitudes and knowledge to enable her to better negotiate her relationships and sexual activity.

4.7.3.1 Difficulties in deciding who should make decisions concerning RSE

This study has been produced by looking through a practitioner's lens (Section 3.1.3) and so the 'flavour', 'personality' and aims of the study reflect what, in my view, should be the concerns of anyone who is teaching or developing policy concerning RSE, i.e. what is 'best' for young people with regard to RSE. The literature review uncovered the harsh truth that adults disagree intensely about the curriculum and pedagogies employed in the teaching of RSE and young people's voices concerning RSE, especially as its juncture with religion are seldom, if ever, heard. The discussion concerning what is 'best' for young people has to include their views or it may be seen by them as irrelevant or used by others as a pawn in a political debate.

By listening to young people, it is possible to develop RSE that is sensitive and relevant to the lives lived by the young people expected to benefit from RSE.

Given the evidence collected by this study, there are areas within the data where young people's views could be said to be inadequate, immature or unwise and therefore to plan RSE relying only on young people's opinions could be ill-advised. Two examples where students' views may be seen in this light are at what age the students believe certain topics should be taught in RSE, and at what age students

consider it is appropriate for a young person to have sex. I would argue that listening to students is necessary if teachers and policy makers are going to ensure that topics within RSE are taught in a way which is age appropriate and that if we understand what their opinions are concerning sexual debut, teachers will be better equipped to provide student-sensitive RSE even if some of the students' opinions may need questioning.

Some academics and commentators may say that the age at which it is 'OK' to have sex for the first time may be a question that young people are not able to answer adequately, but who is? In the UK it is illegal to have sex below the age of 16, which helps to safeguard vulnerable children and young people, but above that age people are free to decide for themselves what age is 'OK' to have sex for the first time. To hold a discussion in RSE concerning the age of consent and differing views on it, including sex inside and outside of marriage, peer pressure and risks, including emotional dangers, is important. It may equip a young person with the necessary skills to decide for themselves how they view their aspirations for their first sexual exploit, within the rational and unpressured space of the classroom, prior to the young person becoming sexually active. It is possible that a relevant, information-based discussion could be something they remember when they are faced with a boozy party, the steamy backseat of a car or even a marriage bed. The classroom is also the space to discuss the myths that 'everyone is doing it' and that 16 is the age by which you are expected to become sexually active (Onaverage, 2018).

A small proportion of participants in the study considered that they should be able to remove themselves from RSE. This, whilst something that was very important to a minority of participants, may be unwise and could be difficult for a school to administer and could be exploited by some students for all the wrong reasons. I would therefore agree that this might be problematic; however, the students in the focus groups felt the idea should be explored in the research and so, in line with their wishes, and grounded theory, it has been. What has emerged from the data is that many students feel awkward and embarrassed by aspects of RSE so their ideas

for mitigating this need to be borne in mind when formulating policy and agreeing pedagogy, materials or staffing for RSE.

4.8 Identities and conflict

Revelations about diverse and interesting identities are strewn throughout the findings of this research, it is the conflicted nature of some of these complex and differing identities that is most interesting. Here I discuss why identity is important and how RSE could be a safe and developmental place for some of the contested identities represented in this study.

4.8.1 Identity and its importance

There are several reasons why identity is important. Firstly, it is important for matters of state and society that aspects of your personal identity need to be known, in so far as to check out who you are and who you say you are, for example: to make sure you are old enough to buy alcohol; or have a right to enter the country or take money out of a certain bank account. Secondly, identities are important to those who adopt those particular identities as it helps individuals to develop a sense of self. As Richard Jenkins (2002, p. 114) writes, our identities are “imagined but not imaginary”; in his book *Social Identity* (2004), Jenkins contends that identity is a ‘process’ not a ‘thing’. He points out that there are two types of identities: group identities are formed by being part of certain groups of people, e.g. nationality whereas individual identities consist of characteristics that are individual in nature, e.g. personal names. Jenkins discusses his hypothesis that we are made up of various identifying characteristics and that at different times distinct characteristics that make us who we are become the most dominant whilst others become less important. Jenkins also suggests that at various times emotions are tied into our understanding of who we are and what our identity might be. He maintains that how we see our own identity and that of others also gives a steer as to how we treat people whom we may see as ‘different’. One example given is that of the treatment of Catholics and Protestants during the troubles in Northern Ireland.

Identity is far more complex and important to the individual than the simple recognition of age, nationality, name, address and bank details. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and Brubaker (2004), in a similar vein to Jenkins, put forward the notion that identity is a construct and that identity construction is a process that probably continues throughout one's life.

If identity helps people to belong to a group or denotes individualism, then it is not surprising that our identity is important, and that during adolescence, which is such a process of change and discovery, it is especially important.

4.8.2 Conflicted identity

It is possible that some or even many of the identities in the study were far more complex or conflicted than was evident from the simple questionnaire data. Identity confliction and confusion was not the main focus of the study; however, a number of anxieties and concerns experienced by the participants emerged during data analysis, especially whilst interrogating the interview data. As only a few of the students taking part in the various stages of data collection were included at the interview stage of the study, it seems reasonable to conclude that as so many of the students who were interviewed demonstrated confliction in their identity development, this may be an issue for more students than the 25 interviewees. Three main areas of identity clash were noticed among the students: culture, national heritage and Britishness; cultural and/or religious background and prevailing societal values and practice, including in regard to sexuality; and issues concerning gender. Some students in the study expressed that they felt conflict within themselves concerning some of the identities that they felt they should, or wanted to, align themselves with, due to their struggle for personal freedoms or concerning sexuality, their family expectations, religion, media and peer pressure. Some participants expressed that although they understood their religion taught that there should be no sex before marriage, they didn't want to adhere to this teaching, or thought it might be hard to observe in their real lives. Some expressed that although they knew their family and their religion would not accept LGBT+ relationships, it was something that they did not think should be taboo.

4.8.3 *Conflicted lives*

Previously in the demography section of the findings, students' national identity was explored (Section 4.4.4.5). The development of national identity seems straightforward by comparison with the other identity types expressed by students. For many of the participants in the study it was clear from their answers to questions that their identity was both complex and important to them. Many, especially during interviews, demonstrated a conflict within their awareness of who they were. Some revealed aspects of fluid identity. The notion of fluidity in identity is normally associated with sexual and gender identity (Galupo et al., 2015) or ethnic identity (Einenstadt, 2015). Fluidity within religious identities, was evident from the data. These differing aspects of religious fluidity, alongside other aspects of identity that seems to be changing in the young people involved in this study, for me, shows that whilst some researchers seem more at home with certain aspects of their subjects' lives, as a teacher, and now as a researcher, I have to be interested and concerned with the whole person. Whilst this research has concentrated on how young people feel about relationships and sex education, and especially the under-researched area of religion within RSE, I can't look only at students' religious identity.

Student identities are complicated, intricately moulded by their characteristics and lives, yet autonomous, sometimes disagreeable, but always interesting. To deconstruct their identities into component parts makes research more straightforward, but often hinders seeing the whole individual. Changes that happened with some of the students during the time between their questionnaire and their interview demonstrated that many aspects of a student's identity are open and subject to change; thus, the term 'fluid' seems apt. Two girls who identified themselves in their questionnaires as Muslim and Christian respectively claimed during interview that they were agnostic:

I was born into a Muslim family, but I am secretly an agnostic. *Muslim girl*

I have actually turned agnostic since [answering the questionnaire]. *Christian girl*

The interviews gave students the time and safe space to unpack some of the confictions they felt and the ideas they were grappling with. For many, the conflict was between their religion and parents' culture from "back home" and living in a "western" society and being exposed to differing beliefs:

I am from a Muslim background, we have certain things that we cannot do. It is really hard to follow rules because you are in such a society where everything is all Westernised. *Muslim girl*

Because I was born back home, and I have always been expected to follow what my parents say because I feel like if I don't do what they tell me to do in something they will feel like I am rebelling. *Muslim girl*

It seemed that there was less conflict where families had been resident in Britain for longer:

If they [the girl's mother and her sisters] went to school, they were not allowed to go out with anyone. They didn't really have communication with boys, so if it's girls, it's just girls, if it's boys, it's just boys, whereas in my case I merge with both boys and girls. There's more freedom for us, like our parents give us more freedom, but whereas in their time they didn't get that much freedom, their parents used to be more strict. *Muslim girl*

Some students were attempting to maintain what they felt were the positive aspects of religion and culture, retaining an identity that attached importance to their values and religious views, but were not finding it easy. Most religious students felt that their religion taught that there should be no sex before marriage and possibly that LGBT+ relationships were unacceptable, but little else when it came to issues of romantic relationships and sex. As some students disagreed with the religious teachings concerning sex before marriage and LGBT+ relationships, these were the areas most alluded to by students as areas of tension with their religion. Rosario, however, had a broader perspective on what his life should be like, as a Christian, and was trying to live by the Christian ideals he respected. This included respect for whoever was going to be his wife and that having sex with his

wife would be the first part of the sacrament of marriage, not just the marriage service (Reiss, 2014). Rosario realised that it wasn't going to be easy:

Well, I am a practising Catholic and, in my religion, I believe no sex before marriage because it also relates in religious education that you are meant to spend your life with one woman for the rest of your life and I think that if I start committing adultery [...] I wouldn't like if the woman that I would marry does the same things so it's kind of contradictory and kind of being a hypocrite saying if what I do, if the girl does it I wouldn't see her the same way of having sex with other boys when she would be married to me, but it is hard to live like that because the norm in society, which I have also learned, is that sex before marriage is a very common thing such as in universities so that's the norm that everyone abides by. I think it's hard to overcome on those temptations [...] religion teaches you, [which] would be helpful to know, that having sex on the day of your marriage is the first stage of your sacrament.

Rosario was determined to stay true to his beliefs:

I want to stick with my opinion and be myself whereas other people might feel intimidated and segregated for feeling a different thing and I know some people that they believe in one thing, but they write the other just to fit in with society.

Rosario had a clear notion of what he believed and who he was; he took on a strong Christian identity. Having been told that I would endeavour to give students religiously and culturally appropriate pseudonyms when quoting them in the thesis Rosario made sure that he gave some examples of Christian pseudonyms, one of which was Rosario. He did not want to be mistakenly identified, by those reading the findings from the study, as a Muslim due to his Bangladeshi heritage.

Other participants were struggling with what they saw as the shortcomings of not just their religion but also their culture and so were moving away, (mostly carefully, slowly and often in a hidden manner, from the religion and culture they grew up in. For example:

I used to go to a mosque and a lot of the things that we are taught are very one-sided. I mean I am a debater so when I listen to some of these things, in my head I am already contradicting a lot of what they are saying and yes okay religion teaches them something but I think that there are other sides to something and because we are not taught them we can't have a thorough understanding of something when you have been taught something from one point of view [...] Our religion says things about treatment about women being obedient to their husbands but then atheists would believe in the whole equal in all ways, so yeah we [Muslims] say women are respected, but they are also obedient and that contradiction I don't like it, so when I hear about the atheist point of view it does make me question our morals. *Muslim girl*

4.8.3.1 Change and new understandings: the role of the teacher and faith groups

Change in a student's religious understanding is often linked to a modification in values concerning sex before marriage and the student's understanding of the place of LGBT+ relationships in society. Religious students' views tended to be most pronounced when they came from very strict backgrounds and when the reasons for religious tenets were not understood by them. Faith groups and possibly parents, it seems, are successful in explaining to their young people what they shouldn't do, according to their beliefs or cultural norms. These parties are less effective, it would appear, in supporting them while they question those beliefs or cultural norms, or in explaining the reasons for them. Parents and faith groups may have missed an opportunity for here to aid identity formation by not providing a safe place for explorations of faith, identity and moral issues.

The role of the teacher during RSE is partly to understand and give space for students' identity conflicts and changes. As Halstead and Waite (2002, p. 23) explained:

The school has an important [...] role in relation to sex education, [...] to help children to make sense of the total input and to construct their own sexual knowledge, values and attitudes more reflectively and systematically on the basis of the variety of influences to which they have been subjected.

Showunmi et al. (2016), when discussing the leadership experiences of women, especially women of colour, suggested the need for 'identity safe spaces'. This concept, whilst used in the different context of gender and ethnic identity amongst women leaders, remains an important one. If classrooms, and probably not just RSE classrooms, are to be identity safe spaces where identity is given room to be expressed, maintained, developed and valued, teachers may have to engage a very specialised skill set, especially as adolescent identities are so diverse and also subject to problematic and complex change. Young people need to be valued for who they are at the time when they arrive in the classroom. Teachers need to understand that students are on a journey of discovery and that they have a duty to support, recognise the importance of and respect the need for that journey. Teachers should show respect and care, whilst possibly 'scaffolding' change and new understandings.

Manoj is one such young person changing from a Muslim identity to that of an atheist. His case may help those interested in this study to understand some of the possible changes that young people traverse as they question or even move away from the religion they were brought up in, whilst recognising that often, like Manoj, they may not or don't want totally to turn their back on their old religion and family culture.

4.8.3.2 Case study: Manoj, development through confliction

Manoj presented as a very interesting case and bucked some of the trends found in the data. He was a 15-year-old British atheist who considered his atheism to be very important to him. He was struggling with the expectations of his family, who were strong Bengali Muslims. He wanted, and did get, his information about RSE from the media and internet and said that he didn't think that RSE should be compulsory in schools, as he felt that people "should learn from experience". He wrote that parents shouldn't be able to remove their children from RSE, but that students should be able to remove themselves if they wished. He considered that an ideal teacher of RSE should be open to discussion, but also be serious. Manoj wrote that he thought that most RSE should be taught at or before the age of 11 with the

exception of LGBT+ issues and homophobia which should be taught at an older age. Even though he had said that he wanted to learn about RSE from the internet, he also thought that young people should learn RSE while at school so that “they could be prepared” [for relationships and sex]. He did not consider the media to influence him, but felt they are “too over sexualised”.

Manoj did not feel that he could talk to his parents about relationships and sex but wrote that his religion gave him a code to live by although he sometimes found it difficult to live by that code. It was unclear what religion he was talking about as he also said that he didn’t have a religion, but still had a code to live by that was important to him. He talked about his parents’ religion as a ‘superstition’ and yet he still agreed that religion should be respected and learnt about in RSE.

From his answers on much of the questionnaire it was clear that Manoj was conflicted over his own atheistic beliefs and living in a household that held tightly to Islam. He was happy to have a serious romantic relationship with someone from a different faith as long as they were: “someone who has no problem pretending to be a Muslim in front of my family, my family don’t know I am an atheist and they are strict Muslims”. Despite this he wrote: “I want my child to grow up with a religion that encourages modesty and kindness, e.g. Islam and if he or she changes her mind as he/she grows up then I am fine with that”.

At interview Manoj expressed his confictions in more detail. He felt very British and thought that his parents were trying to take him away from that culture to be more Bengali. He was angry that his parents assumed he was a Muslim and yet he wanted his children to be brought up as Muslims. He said that his parents’ Islam didn’t make sense to him. Manoj felt that different religious ideas about relationships and sex should be taught in RSE: “so people could find their own way of thinking about it, so they could actually choose themselves and not someone choose for them, like parents”. He said that some religions ‘look down’ on others and that was prejudice. Manoj was especially conflicted when discussing aspects of what he had been taught about Islam which he found unacceptable:

Different religions have weird views about relationships and sex. Like Islam, it says that you can have sex with a girl when she has hit puberty, which is on average nine or ten years old and I don't agree with that. It encourages paedophilia, cos it's saying that you can marry a nine-year-old.

His parting advice for anyone teaching RSE in schools was: "Don't bring your own views into it, they are just your own individual views. Don't get into it, just stick to what you are supposed to be teaching and that's it".

It is hard to unpick some of the strands of Manoj's dilemmas about religion and especially his Bengali Muslim upbringing. He saw some aspects of Islam, especially as presented by his family, as unacceptable, whilst valuing other aspects. Like all conflicted identities revealed in this research, Manoj's story gives a small insight into how the identities of young people develop and mature through their teens and how the identities of students from religious backgrounds may possibly have more issues to work through, at this time, than other young people.

4.9 LGBT+ – Area of conflict and conflicted identity

LGBT+ issues were shown by the data to be an area of conflict for a number of students and constituted a complex area of study. LGBT+ as a term is explained more fully in the 'key terms' at the beginning of the thesis. The original research design and plan did not include a detailed inquiry or analysis of students' opinions concerning LGBT+ issues, due to the extensive coverage the topic receives from other researchers. During the data collection, however, it became clear that LGBT+ inclusion and advocacy was important to some students while other students found that teaching about LGBT+ in RSE was problematic for them. The 'grounded' nature of this research necessitated listening to students' voices concerning LGBT+ issues and these are explored here.

The contentious nature of this subject for students, is apparent from my data, with some students not wanting to learn about LGBT+ issues in RSE at all, many not understanding LGBT+ issues to be a problem and still other students expressing an LGBT+ identity or showing themselves to be LGBT+ allies. Despite the possible

difficulties in teaching about these issues they are not insurmountable for teachers to deal with. The divide between opinions; people's ideas about what is right and wrong and the facts and the protection of and equality for divergent groups under British law, is an important aspect of RSE that needs considering, especially where polemical subjects like LGBT+ issues are involved. Some scholars say that LGBT+ matters should not be considered controversial (Hand, 2008). That may be an ideal to strive towards, but to ignore that LGBT+ identities were seen as controversial by a number of students in the study, and not just students from faith backgrounds, could push ideas, some of which could be homophobic, underground. Pushing any ideas underground may prove counterproductive and deny the truth for some of the young people, represented through the data.

In the study, LGBT was the term used for the questionnaires and was also the term used most readily by students. LGBT+ is used here when the term needs to be more inclusive than simply lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans* groups of people.

Question 14 in the questionnaire asked if and at what age topics including LGBT issues should be taught in school RSE and it was the only place that LGBT issues were mentioned in the questionnaire. Yet LGBT issues came up time and time again in both the questionnaires and the interviews. At interview, several of the students who had mentioned LGBT relationships in some of the answers in their questionnaires were able to express more fully their views about LGBT+ identities.

In question 15 the questionnaires asked students: 'What else should be taught about relationships and sex, in schools?' Several students said that they wanted to learn more about LGBT issues:

LGBT issues, because they are not currently taught and too many people find the subject taboo. *Atheist girl*

Learn more on LGBT, because some people may be experiencing the feeling of being gay, lesbian, etc. but doesn't know how to approach it. *Muslim girl*

They [LGBT students] are not really taught how to have sex and I think most gays only really know how to have sex through porn, but people seem to ignore that because of the focus on heterosexual sex. *Muslim (secretly agnostic) girl*

Eleven students (4%) said that they didn't want to learn about LGBT+ issues or lifestyles in RSE; interestingly, only one of these students was from the highly religious group (those who said religion was very important to them and influenced everything they do):

I would rather not learn about gay beliefs. *Christian boy*

Do not want to learn about gays, I don't approve. *Christian boy*

These are life choices and not everyone should have to learn about them, it should be an option. *Muslim girl*

[I don't want to learn about] LGBT, because it shouldn't be encouraged.

Agnostic boy

Three other agnostic students who said that they didn't want to learn about LGBT issues in RSE did not give a reason for their opinions and one Muslim girl specified a selection of RSE topics that she thought were not important to learn, because she wanted to spend more time on her studies, not for religious reasons:

[I don't want to learn about] The biology of sex, choices about sex, pregnancy, LGBT, because they take up a lot of time in lessons for no reason and we can learn these things by ourselves or from parents – a lot of it is common sense.

Muslim girl

Question 21 in the questionnaires asked: 'What do you understand your religion/belief system to say about relationships and sex? Give what you see as the three most important points or guidelines'. Some students used this question to reinforce their or their religion's negative views concerning LGBT+ issues:

Never marry an LGBT or be a LGBT. *Muslim boy*

Being gay/lesbian is forbidden. *Muslim girl*

Gay relationships are OK. Gay sex is not allowed. *Christian boy*

Inter gender relationships should not be committed. *Christian girl*

Students explained they received much of their information about LGBT+ from the media, although they acknowledged that this could be both a positive and/or negative influence on them and society:

I am much more open/educated on LGBT and do not judge people's sexual preferences. I choose what to do [about sexuality] via media, however the media can manipulate things and only show mainstream lifestyles, e.g. straight people. *Atheist girl*

Sometimes the media can influence others about homophobia and LGBT, what they say is true and reasonably positive, it can give you the sort of ideology you would never have had. *Christian boy*

At interview, some students mentioned that opinions concerning LGBT+ was a conflicted area for them as they saw the religious views, with which they felt they should align, as being negative concerning homosexuality, but personally felt they could not own that view for themselves.

One example was Shani, a Christian girl who came from an African background and still saw herself as exclusively African. She considered her religion to be very important to her, influencing everything she did. Shani was invited for interview because of the detailed and coherent thoughts she had regarding RSE.

It seemed clear that Shani was sorting out some internal conflicts between what she thought and what her faith group was teaching her. One of the points Shani made in her questionnaire was that she didn't think faith leaders were very good at teaching young people about RSE. When asked why that was the case she started to talk animatedly about homosexuality:

I think because personally when it comes to my religion, being homosexual is a sin and you are not supposed to be a gay or lesbian, but I personally don't really feel that way. I mean, I follow my religion to the book, but when it comes to

things like this I feel, like, people should have a right as to who they want to be with. You can't control who you fall in love with or you end up loving, so I think it's not even if I wasn't supposed to be I wouldn't see myself as being homosexual, but I wouldn't discourage someone just because they are. I wouldn't go against them. I wouldn't be a homophobe.

Later in the interview Shani went on to say:

I feel like me, personally, I would never, never say I am a homo, I am not at all, but if I was [...] I think because of my religion I would personally feel, like, I just don't see myself there [being homosexual]. I guess I just can't imagine myself or anyone I know there, but I think that if I did know someone who was, cos I don't right now [trailed off].

I wouldn't go against someone [who was LGBT+] like, this is really ridiculous, but I have always said that I really want a gay best friend and I don't know why, I always say that, but my parents wouldn't agree with that at all. They would not agree, but I personally really wouldn't mind. It's not my business, if someone asks what they feel I can't control that even if my religion says it's wrong and I agree with my religion, but I don't agree with it on that point. I don't feel like it's our right to tell people how to live. I mean, obviously the Bible, that's what it's supposed to do but you can't control who you end up liking; it's not something you can stop or start, so it's not really our fault.

Shani spent a great deal of the interview vocalising that she wasn't gay or lesbian, although her discourse was very sympathetic to LGBT+ people. The last sentence of this section of her interview could be very telling: "[...] you can't control who you end up liking, it's not something you can stop or start so it's not really our fault". Shakespeare's quote from Hamlet comes to mind: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks". By spending so much time denying that she was a lesbian or "homo" as she put it, she seemed to infer that she might be and by the end of the conversation raised the possibility that she saw herself as part of the LGBT+ community, perhaps without realising it, by using the word 'our' instead of 'their'.

Shani knew that the interview conducted for the study was totally confidential, that no-one would know who had made particular comments to me. If, as some of the data from her interview indicated, she was questioning her sexuality, she still felt that she had to veil her possible homosexuality. It is possible that she was only just coming to terms with her sexual identity and so didn't feel at ease talking to a stranger about it, but the conflict she felt was palpable and also concerning. Another student explained what some LGBT+ students might be going through in these terms:

It would probably be later on in life that they are then happy with themselves they would 'come out' if that's the term to use. In a school environment it would be very hard to be different from everybody else, to stand out as much like that. I think it would take a lot of courage for somebody as young as we are now. *Agnostic girl*

This girl from Rural School felt it would be hard for someone in her school to 'come out'. For those students in religious communities it may be even harder; however, not all students from strongly religious backgrounds felt that to be the case:

Just tell them that it's [being homosexual] OK and that we should all be loving and sort of focus on what Christianity really stresses upon which is love and I think that is quite universal ideology within all religions really, to be loving and caring and to look after others and form a society where we can all live alongside each other however 'different' we are. It isn't just LGBT really; it's just about people all around us who are 'different' to us. We have to learn to respect and be accepting and that's really hard to do without tackling how we do actually approach it, so seeing what people actually think about those matters that are quite controversial and people who are 'different'. What they think about them and sort of trying to break it down and dealing with the crux of the problem like seeing what's wrong with our view which might affect us and lead us to be unloving towards the other people. *Christian boy*

While the student above had some brilliant ideas of how 'difference' including LGBT+ should be treated, how many students are working through these issues in

their lives, but without the care suggested, especially those who come from religious backgrounds? Some students are challenging and struggling with religious norms alongside endeavouring to make sense of their religion in the light of their same sex attraction and *vice versa*. Religious communities need to understand the dilemmas faced by some young people and try to support them, but schools have a role to play too.

For those RSE educators who are unfamiliar with religion or have turned their back on a religion, it would be easy to dismiss accepted religious tenets about sexuality, as these may be seen as anti-homosexual, as irrelevant, old fashioned and cruel, especially to those individuals who may identify or will come to identify as LGBT+. However, to convey disrespect for those religious tenets in a classroom may be counterproductive. This study has shown that not all anti-homosexual feelings come from students who are religious. Discussing these topics in an open and non-judgemental manner is one way that students suggested schools could handle this RSE and other difficult issues. Whilst ensuring that the classroom remains a safe place for all students it is important to acknowledge that people have differing views concerning relationships and sex including homosexuality and differing sexual identities. When dealing with possible homophobic views, it is important that equality is explained, and why equality is important within British law, but by shutting down discussion concerning sexuality, students' minds are not opened to new ideas: facts and opinions cannot be shared or heard. Students who do not feel listened to may be alienated by the lesson and switch off, enabling them to ignore content, information and ideas shared in the classroom.

Some of the students who stood as LGBT+ advocates in my study, either saw religion as a place of care and acceptance for those who were LGBT+, or were beginning to question their religion in the light of their religion's stand on LGBT+ issues as some students struggled with the idea that their religion sent out two potentially contradictory messages. That of love and acceptance of the person, but still seeing LGBT+ practices, if not same sex attraction, as a sin.

One Christian boy, 'Asher', who was also an LGBT+ ally, put it this way:

Yeah, that's quite a big thing that we need to deal with. I think it's already in the curriculum how different Christians deal with matters of LGBT and obviously it's not clear but they [the school] have gone into a certain amount of detail which is enough I think, but I think it should be across all curriculums so we can encourage tolerance and inclusivity because sometimes people do feel that they are being victimised because of their sexual orientation and so I think that shouldn't be the case. I think we are quite liberal in our approach, but other [church] schools and other faith-based schools are quite rigid on matters of LGBT and they don't want to even discuss it, so I think it is sensitive matters that we do have to deal with. It's not something we can just ignore and recently I made a video interviewing people within in our school asking what they thought about LGBT matters because that was part of our RE [Religious Education] unit and they told us to make like a project or whatever and that was quite interesting to see how 'different' people felt about it. Some people said: "I see it as a disability and don't like it; it's not something that we should do" and it's an opinion and we have to respect that, but some people did say that gay marriage should be allowed, and it is a sort of healthy debate really. If you ignore it, it's not going to be dealt with and therefore you need to have some sort of input on those sorts of matters, however controversial or incompatible it might seem with the religion.

Educators (and researchers) can learn so much from listening to students like Asher when it comes to teaching in relation to contentious topics like LGBT+ issues and faith in RSE. His ideas for the holistic and sensitive teaching of, what some may see as controversial, topics in RSE is explored in more depth in the Discussion Chapter 5 of the study alongside a proposed model to encourage teachers to evaluate their approaches to RSE and how they can attempt to make their teaching more sensitive to the diverse needs of their students. Such teaching may be difficult, but that is the tricky nature of good quality education, especially good quality relationships and sex education and that is why the LGBT+-Sensitivity Filter Model (Section 5.2.2) has been devised, based on the Faith-Sensitive Filter Model (Section 5.4.1) to aid those teaching or employing those to teach RSE.

4.10 Guidelines to live by: Tenets, opinions and dilemmas

Students were asked in question 21 in the questionnaire: ‘What do you understand your religion/belief system says about relationships and sex? Give what you see as the three most important points or guidelines’. There were many and diverse answers to this question. Some of those who said that they didn’t have a religion maintained they had no guidelines, while others who identified as non-religious gave a very coherent and robust set of guidelines. Most students from religious backgrounds were clearer about the guidance their religion gave them. The letters a, b and c below denote the three most important points or guidelines students believed their religion/belief system gave them.

4.10.1 Religious backgrounds

For almost all students from religious backgrounds the answer to question 21 seemed to be based around sexual conduct.

- a. Marriage before sexual intercourse, so no sex before marriage. Virgin.
- b. Marriage should be open to procreation, hence no contraception.
- c. A marriage should be everlasting, so no divorce and must happen between a man and a woman. *Christian-Catholic boy*

- a. Be married in a relationship.
- b. Sexual relationships only occur after marriage.
- c. Don’t have children before marriage. *Hindu girl*

- a. You can’t have sex until you are married.
- b. Not allowed to have a boyfriend.
- c. It’s haram to be a lesbian/gay/transsexual. *Muslim girl*

Most students from faith backgrounds wrote that their faith gave guidance stipulating that sexual intercourse should only take place within marriage. Some

students chose to use the other two guidelines to reinforce the 'no sex before marriage' message:

- a. Engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage is not allowed.
 - b. You are not allowed to have a romantic relationship before marriage.
 - c. We should keep ourselves covered, lower gaze before marriage, only after marriage are you allowed to have intercourse. *Muslim girl*
-
- a. You must not have a relationship before marriage.
 - b. Should not have any kind of sexual relationship before marriage.
 - c. You must get married. *Muslim girl*

The responses from most religious students regarding the second and third most important points or guidelines were more diverse, but still mostly around sexual conduct rather than the way in which relationships should be conducted. These points/guidelines were rather rigid, unambiguous and didactic in nature compared to those put forward by those students who were non-religious:

- a. Don't have sex before marriage.
 - b. You cannot divorce.
 - c. You cannot have an abortion. *Christian boy*
-
- a. You have to be married before you can begin to think about sex.
 - b. You can't use contraception when having sex.
 - c. Abortion is not allowed. *Muslim girl*
-
- a. You shouldn't marry anyone who is not from a good caste.
 - b. You shouldn't have sex until you are married.
 - c. You should marry someone from the same religion. *Hindu girl*
-
- a. Have kids once completing the sacrament of marriage.
 - b. Never have sexual relations before the age of 18.
 - c. Only have sex to create life. *Christian boy*

Many of the religious students said that they wanted to live by the guidelines they understood their religion to give them:

It is my duty to obey God's word. There isn't a conflict with anything to do with my religion. *Christian boy*

As I am a Hindu I will follow these rules. I live by my parents' and my rules of life. *Hindu girl*

My religion knows what's right and wrong for us, so this will help us have a happier future life. *Muslim girl*

Because my religion protects me from doing something that I will regret my whole life. *Christian girl*

A small number of students who professed a religious faith devised guidelines for life that demonstrated a strong moral compass, but one that was not overtly based on, or showed a limited knowledge of, religious teaching. However, it is possible that they may have just decided to interpret religious tenets in a less legalistic way:

- a. Only have sex with someone you love.
- b. Don't toss the word love around like it means nothing.
- c. Don't ever compromise your relationship for something stupid. *Christian boy*

- a. If you are not comfortable with what your partner is implying say no and don't consent.
- b. Surround yourself with individuals who influence you in an optimistic way and don't pressure you.
- c. Be aware of the consequences of your actions and make sure you fully understand what you are doing. *Christian girl*

4.10.2 Non-religious students

For those from non-faith backgrounds, the answers proved to be rather different, with many of those with an atheist or agnostic identity seemingly making up their own set of values which appeared to be more varied and less dictatorial:

- a. Have a relationship, or have sex, when you feel ready.
- b. Ask about what you don't understand.
- c. Never be ashamed about something you've done from love. *Atheist girl*

- a. Be open about how you're feeling.
 - b. Talk to someone else about your relationships, so they can help you if there is a problem.
 - c. Do not force someone into something they are not happy with and do not allow yourself to be forced into something. *Agnostic girl*
-
- a. Respect – Always have respect for the other individual during intimacy.
 - b. Understanding – Understand what the other person wants/doesn't want.
 - c. Safe – Be safe with yourself during intimacy, for example understand the sexual diseases. Ask your partner if they have one, also wear condoms, etc. so safe during sex. *Atheist boy*

The last quote from an atheist boy seemed thoughtful, especially when expressing the will to give respect and be understanding in relationships. The student may also have been a little naïve when it comes to safety within relationships. Asking if a partner has an STI may not bring a truthful answer either because the partner does not want to share that information, or because they are unaware they have an STI. The student needs to understand that using a condom is a wise decision and would indeed make sex safer, but not 100% 'safe'.

Where students, mostly non-religious students, had constructed their own set of values the personal guidelines the students devised were apparently more considerate towards their partner; however, their ideas about guidance for their lives were rather more varied, fuzzy, fluid and subjective. Two students who had written themselves a set of guidelines for their lives said this:

These are my own guidelines, so I may choose to stick to them or they could change. *Atheist boy*

I would try and abide [by them] but some maybe challenging for a person.
Atheist boy

4.10.3 *Conflict, complexity, stress and pressures encountered at the junction of religion, family, society, the media and sexual practices*

When delving into the issues that most concern young people while they work through their adolescent confusion, identity development and engagement with their changing world, it is important to recognise and analyse the areas that give them most concern. The data showed some clear areas of stress for young people which help to identify how RSE in schools can effectively support young people's navigation of ideology development and challenging personal decision making. The data demonstrate that the concept of 'sex only in marriage' is a place of contested engagement for many students from religious backgrounds:

I think the main one really is about sex before marriage and contraception because that's sort of like there are so many things that affect us to make sure we are not virgins until we are like 30 or something. Sort of like peer pressure that makes us feel pressured into doing things that we shouldn't or wouldn't normally do but it is sort of made normal by the people around us, people who don't feel that religion is important at all and also sometimes there is a conflict between what is the purpose of life. *Christian boy*

Other issues such as LGBT+ relationships and peer and media pressure are topics of tension and differing opinions for all students. For those from religious backgrounds the dilemmas and societal, religious and family pressures seem to be more keenly felt:

To be honest, we are not even allowed to be in relationships until after marriage, and sex after marriage I'm quite confused with it. *Muslim girl*

She went on to write:

[I am] Not really sure about sex, may have it after or before marriage (planning not to). Being in relationships is fine for me. *Muslim girl*

4.10.4 Sex and marriage

Marriage, arranged marriage and cohabitation were important issues for most of those taking part in the study, but for those from religious backgrounds marriage was especially important. For them the concept of marriage was central to the discussion about sex; many of them understood their faith to say that sex should only happen within marriage and a high proportion of those wanted to follow the guidance from their religion:

I am sure God has gave these guidelines for a reason and I want to keep my virginity for my husband, not give it to someone who may not see it as something respectful. *Muslim girl*

Others, even some of the most religious students, considered that waiting to have sex until they were married might be difficult:

It's a period where you have to go through, sort of, I don't call it problems, but it's sort of problems to deal with urges that are sexual. *Christian boy*

Large numbers of student considered 'no sex before marriage' to be a 'given' in their religion:

You can only have sex after you have married. *Christian boy*

Sexual relationships only occur after marriage. *Hindu girl*

Do not have a relationship before marriage. Remain a virgin until marriage. *Muslim girl*

Some, all girls from Muslim backgrounds, understood that even romantic relationships outside of marriage are frowned upon:

Have sex after marriage. Be "pure" and have modesty. Relationships before marriage is forbidden. *Muslim girl*

It is haram (forbidden) to have sex before you are married. Lower your gaze. No romantic relationships. *Muslim girl*

One student who said that her religion was very important to her, bucked the trend for Muslim girls by writing that her three guidelines for relationships and sex were:

- a. [Have] A religious partner, who practices Islam.
- b. Respect one another in a relationship.
- c. The importance of women's rights in a relationship (e.g. respect, equality).

She then went on to say that she wanted to follow those guidelines because:

It's the way I have been socialised and they aren't unrealistic, rather they are politically accepted as well and personally. I believe in equality and respect is a moral absolute.

It may be that this particular quotation demonstrates a development of one student's ideas to incorporate a more Western, feminist approach to life, or that she had identified a feminist strand, like Margot Badran (2013), within her faith that sees equality of the sexes, indeed feminism, to be something encouraged in Islam. This student, a Muslim girl, might meet with resistance from her community if she expressed these views openly, but this was just one example of the tensions experienced by young people as they navigate the conflict at the juxtaposition of their faith and the way they live their lives. Other participants voiced the disillusionment they felt with what their religion taught about relationships and sex:

I believe due to the plan I have (University until I am 27) that I can't wait all my life to have sex and not every time I have sex I would like to get pregnant [so I will use contraceptives] *Christian girl*

I think that I should decide what to do in life and who I am going to be. I believe that religion or God should not decide for me. *Muslim girl*

Some students considered religious guidelines about relationships and sex as protection and helpful:

I know I've got a boyfriend, but I think it has restricted me to not having sex and stuff because there are times when it is like "no, no you need to stop". *Muslim girl*

I think I have so much else to do and yeah in a way it just kind of protects you from doing certain things that you will regret, maybe regret, in your future life. *Christian boy*

For a small number of those in the study, 'arranged marriage' was also important issue. The prospect of an arranged marriage only affected those from South Asian backgrounds, who were also Muslims. Some were struggling with the idea they might have an arranged marriage:

I think that men and women should be equal in a relationship and I think no sex before marriage is good. However, I am not sure and still sceptical on arranged marriages. *Muslim girl*

I want a love marriage, not an arranged, so it needs to be romantic. *Muslim girl*

However, other students were seemingly reconciled to the idea of an arranged marriage:

When you are going to get married like personally for me I know I am going to get an arranged marriage because that's the type of background we come from. So, it's usually my parents who will probably choose someone so I think it is better if I have a talk about relationships with my parents so that they can understand the type of person I like and the type of habits and personalities that I am looking for so they have a better understanding. *Muslim girl*

This girl also went onto say that:

Yeah but I would prefer a love marriage because I think that's more exciting, but I don't know what's going to happen.

This shows that although she was resigned to an arranged marriage, a love marriage seemed more desirable.

4.10.5 Peer, media and societal pressure

Students recognised that some of their religious rules were considered negatively by society in general:

In the religion of Islam, you can't really have sex until you are married, and a lot of people find that dumb. *Muslim girl*

[...] people that are like "I don't want sex before marriage" and they get like laughed upon. *Christian girl*

Students also understood that societal and peer pressure may precipitate sexual activity:

A lot of kids have gone through that pressure. I know many Muslim girls I talk to where people will tell them that they should do it and then that has actually swayed them into doing things and then they talk about how they regretted it. I have a cousin who was convinced into doing it by a non-Muslim guy and then she regretted it and she's really messed up over it and I think it was as much as she obviously gave her consent anyway. It wasn't her fault as much as it was the influences around her telling her that she might as well do it. *Muslim girl*

Peer pressure that makes us feel pressured into doing things that we shouldn't or wouldn't normally do, but it is sort of made normal by the people around us, people who don't feel that religion ... [trails off]. *Christian girl*

Well the Christian and Catholic perspective is having sex before marriage is a sin and I think most Christians and Catholics do do that [have sex before marriage] because of maybe the society they are in and the type of friends they have, and I think that some people may slip up. I know a bit about that, so I think some people should look into how they should avoid temptation and things to do with sex before marriage and actually obey the code and go by it. *Christian-Catholic boy*

A Muslim girl acknowledged the possible negative effect of peer and societal pressure:

Yeah, a lot of kids have gone through that pressure. I know many Muslim girls I talk to where people will tell them that they should do it and then that has actually swayed them into doing things and then they talk about how they regretted it. I have a cousin who was convinced into doing it by a non-Muslim guy and then she regretted it and she's really messed up over it and I think it was as much as she obviously gave her consent anyway. It wasn't her fault as much as it was the influences around her telling her that she might as well do it. *Muslim girl*

4.10.6 Faith sensitivity and student sensitivity as strategies for helping students to deal with conflict

Verity, an agnostic student from Rural School, who had written in her questionnaire that she felt someone might be bullied for not having sex, regardless of religious background, elaborated at interview on what she meant:

I think some people think, especially people in my year group [Year 10, aged 14-15], like they are in a relationship and they feel like they have to do stuff with that person, to fit in with their friends who have also got like in a relationship and saying what they've been doing and then they have got something to say as well. It's like so you don't feel left out of conversations and stuff, if all your friends are in relationships and you're not you can't really join in I suppose.

Verity also felt that if the school undertook more teaching about religion, those students from religious backgrounds would be supported, but also the teaching would equip non-religious students with a greater understanding of 'difference' and would help them to understand and talk about a range of differing approaches to relationships and sex:

I think we should do [learn about different religious views] because I think it then gives people a different view on sex and how different people see it. It would help people not to be quite as judgemental I suppose. Like judging somebody for being of their faith or like race or something and then not really understanding what they believe.

Verity felt that people from faith backgrounds might be judged, especially if it meant that that they had decided not to have sex:

For not [having sex] but then if you were to learn about it [religious views] you'd understand the reasons why and it would give you a whole better view on it.

Verity knew that in the area she lived in a stigma was attached to those not having sex, boys and girls, but mainly girls. She finished this section of her interview by saying:

It's almost like you're not really cool if you haven't had sex and stuff.

Verity also thought that the school could help students who might be under this kind of pressure:

Well they could do like (we have had it), days when we've learnt about being able to say no if you don't want to and stuff and I think they could then include that it's okay not to and you shouldn't feel forced by your friends either. It [the day on RSE] was about being able to say no to your partner if you don't want to or to somebody else.

Some of the students struggled with the idea of saving sex until marriage:

Christians think that sex was created by God for love and how to express their love and things so if you are going to have sex with someone and you are in a relationship and you are not married you should at least be able to stay in the relationship with them until you are married then I think it would not be a sin, but another side Catholics believe that you should wait even though you are in a relationship, you shouldn't fornicate with each other so you should wait till you get married. *Christian-Catholic boy*

4.10.7 Implications for faith and student-sensitive RSE

Whilst there has been a concentration in this thesis on religion and how it impacts the lives of some students, within faith-sensitive RSE there needs to be a realisation

that an expectation of sex only inside marriage is a norm for some students but is often not an aspiration shared by society generally. When deciding on the content of RSE, but especially faith-sensitive RSE, it is important that marriage is covered. Arranged marriage should be talked about in a positive but realistic light too, especially if there are students who might be expected to have an arranged marriage, or at least a partially arranged marriage, where the child and the parents work together on the project of finding a spouse. The difference between arranged marriage and forced marriage may also need discussing, possibly along with a discussion concerning online dating and how in some ways arranged marriage and online dating (Ramanathan, 2016) are similar. It is likely that both methods have their advantages and probably their disadvantages.

I think they should be open-minded about everyone's beliefs because obviously some people don't mind having sex before marriage, some people will only have sex after marriage, so I think they just need to like I think most teachers will be open-minded about that. *Muslim girl*

Deciding not to have sex until after marriage, or only to have sex with someone once you are committed to them for life, are healthy choices and should be recognised as such, but for many, maybe most, of the students in British schools the reality is that they are likely to have sex before they are married and probably with more than one partner (NATSAL, 2018). A range of different relationship set ups need to be reflected and respected within RSE.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

So, where have I got to on my journey through the forest of young people's experiences, existences, and their wishes for RSE, their relationships, including sexual ones, and their futures?

In this thesis I have probed aspects of the lives of young people, shared, to some extent, their dilemmas, begun to understand the predicament of the clashes that many of them must manage and have pondered the differing cultures that touch young people's lives. I have understood the importance of home, a place where strong family bonds of culture and religion, the borders of which are often blurred, mingle with the warm smells of pierogies, pakoras, biryani, jollof rice, chicken, rice and peas or shepherd's pie – a place of safety and support. Equally, homes that can also be places where the bonds of family, culture or religion are stressed, fragile or fractured. The study has shown that students live in a society where liberal and religious values, shackle, alienate, enlighten or free students.

None of these cultures, and many more besides, are totally positive, none are totally negative, they are all important.

Educators of RSE are in a privileged position of holding, supporting, informing and guiding (for guiding takes place even when we don't realise it or don't want to recognise it) young people as they develop and as they navigate the changes, struggles and growth that sculpt their views, values and personalities through adolescence. As educators we can choose to ignore the dilemmas, dichotomies and vagaries young people face or the richness of experience and diversity they bring to our lessons; we can carry on teaching young people what we think they should learn in RSE, in the way we feel they should learn it, or we can listen to them. By listening to what they have to say, as shown in this research, we can learn from them and begin to understand more fully what it is for RSE to be student-centred

and student-sensitive in a changing world of shifting values, cultures, technologies and ideas, equipping young people for their lives ahead: lives that will include relationships and probably sex. Lives where experiences at school and the education they receive should, could, or will, equip them to discover who and what they want to be.

5.2 Research questions addressed in the study

At the end of this thesis, I return to the research questions. I discuss how the findings of this investigation answer the questions which were posed following the formative focus group conversations, at the outset of this study.

5.2.1 What is seen by participants as good quality RSE?

Students had no doubt that good (or 'high' as it is now called in Government documents (DfE, 2017a)) quality RSE was possible and seemed to relish the chance to be involved with the study. However, most did not think that the RSE they received was of a high quality and a minority didn't think that they had received any RSE at all. For some students this was because RSE was taught in special curriculum days, or 'drop-down days', and they were absent so missed the RSE lessons for the year.

Most students wanted to learn about relationships and sex in their school because they saw it as a trusted place where they could receive quality, unbiased information and support during lessons. Whilst not many students considered that they had good quality RSE in their school, most of the Year 10 (14-15-year-old) students in the study generally thought that improvement to the quality of RSE could happen if it were taught in a more systematic way, covering a greater range of topics. Students identified topics already taught as part of RSE: healthy and problematic relationships; family; parenting; puberty; the biology of sex; unintended pregnancy choices; contraception; sexually transmitted infections; HIV/AIDS; domestic violence; contraception and safer sex, but also wanted RSE to include online communications, e.g. pornography and social media, love, how to manage and end romantic relationships, LGBT+ issues, and religious and cultural

aspects of relationships and sex. Students wished to learn more about the emotional aspects of romantic and/or sexual relationships.

Students understood that the quality of the teachers providing RSE lessons was key to what they understood to be good quality RSE and expected lessons to be taught by expert teachers who could be relaxed and comfortable teaching what some students understood to be 'awkward' content, and in turn manage what could be tricky behaviour and embarrassment in the classroom. Students also anticipated that teachers who were emotionally and religiously sensitive to the needs of individual students were those who could teach RSE most effectively.

Many students considered they didn't have enough RSE in terms of time, regularity, content or all three. They considered that good quality RSE, particularly when well taught, would help them in their adult lives. Most students indicated that while they understood that they could learn about relationships and sex when they left school, from places like the internet, doctors, friends and family members, they would prefer to learn about relationships and sex while at school.

Students did not think being taught in 'drop-down days' was the best way to learn RSE, but suggested an approach where lessons were built on systematically in each school year, indicating that they felt that the use of a 'spiral' curriculum would be most effective. However, students did appreciate the visiting speakers who were organised to take part in these special days.

5.2.2 Is there a place for faith-sensitive Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in mainstream schools and if RSE is taught faith sensitively can that be beneficial to all students?

Students in the formative focus groups thought that RSE should be sensitive to religion and faith, and that for RSE to be faith sensitive, it needed to include two elements. The first was that RSE lessons had to demonstrate a respect for religion and faith, which in turn would help students of faith to feel valued and involved, as well as addressing some equality issues. The second element, according to students, was for RSE to involve teaching about religious views on relationships and

sex. The large majority of students (89%) in the questionnaire stage of the research indicated that religion should be respected in RSE lessons, 8% signified they weren't sure and only 3% wrote that they didn't really think it necessary for RSE to be respectful of religion or faith. In Rural School, where there was very low religious observance amongst students, 88% of students felt that RSE should be respectful of religion and faith and 60% of students said that the RSE curriculum should include the teachings of religious and faith groups concerning relationships and sex. This was only slightly lower than the 67% of students across all schools who considered that the teaching of religious views and tenets in RSE was important with 16% not being sure and only 17% saying that religious or faith views on relationships and sex should not form part of the curriculum in RSE. Given the widespread advocacy amongst students from a range of faith backgrounds for the inclusion of respect for and knowledge about faith in RSE, I developed a Faith-Sensitivity Filter Model to support teachers as they seek to make the RSE they teach faith-sensitive.

In answering the two initial research questions, it became clear that as well as understanding what students saw as good quality RSE, and whether RSE should be sensitive to faith, there were also themes emerging from the data to suggest that students thought RSE should also be sensitive to other groups of students, especially those of differing sexualities. It was felt that to be true to the wish to have the research and its findings 'grounded' in the data given by the students, a third research question should be added.

5.2.3 Is there a need for RSE to be more inclusive of and sensitive to LGBT+ and other minority groups of students?

The data demonstrated that students felt RSE should be sensitive to other groups of students not just faith groups, especially those who identified as LGBT+. Students' concerns for those of differing sexualities was reasonably strong across differing groups, including those who saw themselves as religious and very religious (Section 4.9). I had decided ahead of data collection that although there was an already significant body of study around LGBT+ issues and RSE (Rodrigues & Ouellette, 2000; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Biddulph, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2012; Sanchez, 2012), LGBT+

issues would not form a significant part of data collection, research analysis or discussion. My decision to make grounded theory the major methodological approach used in the study has meant that as a number of students, including students from faith groups, chose to discuss LGBT+ issues, especially at interview, it was appropriate that I acknowledge, analyse and discuss these issues as part of the study.

While the focus of the research has been on the intersection for young people of faith, relationships and sex education, it seems that there is a will, at least on the part of some of the participants in the study, to see LGBT+ issues as an important part of the 'landscape' of RSE that needs to be addressed when investigating what 'good quality' RSE might become in the future. According to official statistics, 1.6% of the British population identify as LGBT (ONS, 2015) although some believe the figure could be far higher (Spiegelhalter, 2015). In my study, only one student identified openly as gay, and one as asexual, but a number of those taking part in the study presented as advocates for LGBT+ students. I did not set out to investigate LGBT+ issues in depth and felt it ethically questionable to ask about participants' sexual orientations, because as a researcher I would not be in a place to support a participant who may be openly adopting an LGBT+ identity for the first time. It is likely from the ONS (2015) figures that at least five students in the study would be LGBT+ but the number could be substantially higher than that,

Models to aid teachers to understand and be sensitive to students' needs were devised and will be explained later in this chapter. To understand the process and thinking behind the synthesis of these 'Sensitivity Filter Models', it may be useful to discuss, in more depth, some of the findings in the light of existing literature. It is hoped that the 'filter models' will be used by those teaching RSE as they seek to support students to traverse adolescence and further identity formation. The models should equip schools to deal with 'difference', which will in turn will encourage school RSE to become, or remain, a safe, informative, supportive and encouraging space for students.

5.3 Conflicted identities:

One difficulty that affected many students was that of conflicted identities as shown in the findings in sections 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10. Many students felt conflicted concerning their personal identities and practices and the identities they were expected to adopt, either by their peers, society in general, their family or religious community.

5.3.1 *Cognitive dissonance*

Before starting to explore the differing types of conflicted identities that emerged from the study, it is worth considering the possible place of 'cognitive dissonance'.

Leon Festinger, in his book *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957), argued that when actions and beliefs, or two differing sets of beliefs or values, come into conflict with one another, we feel a 'cognitive dissonance', mental discomfort, or psychological stress, engendering a need to rectify the conflict or 'dissonance' in some way. This helps to reduce, eliminate or deny the discomfort felt. Rectification can be done by changing one set of views or values, changing actions, making little of the issue or trying to justify any action taken (Festinger, 1962). An example of cognitive dissonance might involve a student who believes from a spiritual point of view that they should only have sex within marriage; however, they want to live with their boyfriend. They can choose not to live together until after they are married, decide that they don't believe that that is what their religious writings say, resolve that they don't care what their religion might say on the matter or justify the decision by saying that God is a God of love and that they will get married at some point and God would understand. The concept of cognitive dissonance is consistent with some of the findings in my data. For those who have a faith and live in 21st Century Britain, especially if living in a culture that is alien to them, the possibilities for cognitive dissonance and the need to deal with it to restore mental comfort and reduce mental stress are clear in some of the findings.

5.3.2 Cultural or religious background and prevailing societal values and practice, including those impacting on sexuality

Many students in the study felt a conflict between their religious or cultural background and that of the society in which they found themselves. Others understood themselves conflicted because they did not necessarily want to conform to the values and norms of their peers, even if they did come from similar backgrounds.

Stern a researcher into climate change looked at environmental issues and people's attitudes to them (2006). He argued that people viewed issues differently depending on how the discussion about the subject was framed by society, the media and others. In addition to these influences, the young people in my study also had 'framing' from their family and their religious and cultural communities to take into consideration when working out who they thought they were, who or what they wanted to become and how that affected their identity. It is this framing and the fact that identities are 'changing' and 'malleable', as Cohen (1995) discussed, that explains why some of the students in my study were moving away from traditional identities based on nationality and religion and taking on a far more 'modern' persona. This shift entailed remodelling their relationship with their religion and their communities.

In my study, the largest number of conflicted notions of identity seemed to emerge concerning the internal negotiations young people had regarding their personal value systems. Some took a very situated view where it seemed they adopted varying value systems for differing situations. An example of this was one student who championed an antiabortion argument in the workshops for a boy that he felt should be prepared to take responsibility for a child, whilst advocating that a girl who was pregnant should have an abortion to protect her family's reputation. This switching of values, whether conscious or not, seemed to be dependent on the situation that some of the students found themselves in. Some moral decisions were very situated depending on what was most salient, or a cynic might say

convenient, to them at the time, seemingly working subjectively without referencing a static set of values.

Many of my participants were questioning, if not outright rebelling against, cultural and religious values, whereas others were conscientiously fighting the tide of liberalism and trying to stand firm, rooted in the religious or secular values they aspired to put into practice in their lives.

Durkheim's (1915, p. 47) definition of what constitutes religion can be scrutinised to give an idea of some of the issues that young people are grappling with in the path towards maturity.

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called Church [Temple, Gurdwara, Mosque] all those who adhere to them.

Durkheim also maintained that Church must be a collective thing. This definition, devised at the beginning of the twentieth century, shows how ideas may have changed in respect of multi-faith adherence and discourses; concepts have changed with the emergence of more systems of religions in society and where more homogenous sets of religious beliefs followed by any one religion have given way to a diversity of teachings (Davie, 2015).

Much has been written about the differing forms that religion has taken in Britain during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Wolffe, 1993; Davie, 2015), the various denominations in Christianity (Bowden, 2005), manifestations of Islam (Donohue & Esposito, 2007) and the emergence of other minor religions or sects (Barratt, 1996). It was clear that my students' understanding of what their religion stood for and how it was manifest in their lives was changing, that traditional orthodoxies were being morphed into new expressions of religion and belief (Davie, 2015; Fresh Expressions, 2017) and a whole different stratum of complexity of religious identities were being adopted by students.

Durkheim's assertion that there is one single moral community that adheres to a set of beliefs or practices is not the case now even if it was at the time of his writing, which is doubtful. For example, in the past twenty years, the position of women in ordained ministry has changed considerably in several Christian denominations (Grenz & Kjesbo, 1995; Fraix, 2006), whilst in Islam there is now a wide realm of teaching about women's dress and head covering and the subject of modesty (Hoodfar, 2001).

Within faith groups there is increasingly more discussion and disagreement about homosexuality than they used to be (Bates, 2004) with ideas and practice changing in some congregations, with some strands of Christianity such as the Quakers (Quaker.org, 2017) conducting same sex marriages in their places of worship and other denominations or individuals carrying out services to 'bless' same sex unions, very different to Christianity's traditional views on homosexuality (Church of England, 2003). These divergent and changing values within religions, can be seen as being driven by cultural changes, as espoused by Durkheim (1913) and explored by Davie (2015, p. 168):

[There is] a radical shift in modern culture that represents a shift away from life lived in terms of external or objective roles, duties or obligations, towards life lived in accordance with subjective rather than objective experience.

An example of these cultural differences is provided by Yip and Page's study (2013). Buddhist students interviewed for their research were described as ethnically white with the exception of one mixed heritage participant. It is unsurprising that these predominantly 'white' participants understood their form of Buddhism to be extremely tolerant and in line with prevailing British cultural values. Values which tend to be open, liberal, and non-judgemental towards sexual identities and practices including homosexuality, along with expecting equality for those who are LGBT+, and recognition of sexual orientation and gender reassignment are protected characteristics under British law (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2010), as is religious belief. For a different piece of unpublished work I carried out a few

years ago, I interviewed a Buddhist, Sri Lankan monk. The Buddhist values he taught at the temple in England were more aligned with traditional Asian (Sri Lankan) values, than those espoused by the white Buddhists interviewed by Yip and Page for their book: *Religious and Sexual Identities: A Multi-Faith Exploration of Young Adults*, as many other religions practised by those from Asian backgrounds would have shared the same values as those of the monk. Given that the Western interpretation of Buddhism doesn't seem to have the same religious teachings as the monk, it is possible that here is an example of Buddhist teaching developing culturally independently allowing for individuals, or groups of people, to develop autonomous religious values to complement their own sociological view. So, here are just two very different forms, of probably very many expressions of Buddhism, one influenced and crafted by Western societal values and one by Eastern cultural norms. This possible schism in one religion dependent on the social context of individuals has particular significance to my study which looks at the relevance of faith-sensitive RSE as this adaption of traditional religious values is a process that seems to be going on with some of the students in my study. Especially through the interview data it is possible to see students wrestling with the differing influences of religion's and society's values. One example of this conflict was the boy who described himself as an agnostic Muslim, demonstrating that although he freely took on a Muslim identity, he was unsure about the reality of his faith, and articulated that this was due to the Muslim stance on homosexuality.

It would seem that strong or 'thicker' identities can bring a sense of belonging and that this in turn can generate the advantages of resilience (Werner & Smith, 1992; Gilligan, 1997, 1999, 2001). If this assertion holds true, then it is also fair to conclude that that young people's identities are precious and should be treated as such in the classroom. Whilst respecting each student's identity, it is also important for teachers to recognise that these identities may be changing or conflicted and that these challenges and developments may need to be managed within the class.

Whilst secure identity can lead to resilience, insecurity about who one is and where one 'fits in' or belongs can cause vulnerability. Thoits' (2012) work interrogates the

theory that stress factors cause mental illness. One school of thought that Thoits (2012, p. 357) explores is that stress can cause 'interruptions to identity':

In essence, stress appraisals might be seen as signals to the self about the adequacy of one's "person-environment fit" (French, Rodgers, & Cobb, 1974). Burke (1996) takes this idea a step further, suggesting that all social stressors could be reconceptualised as "identity-interruptions".

The vulnerabilities that can be caused by these 'identity interruptions' can have devastating consequences for individuals and possibly those around them. When looking into child sex abuse in Rotherham, Alexis Jay, a social worker and academic, (2014) found that over one third of the 1,400 abused children were already known to social services and many were in care. A child in care or 'looked after' has had familial and social identities 'interrupted', simply by being put 'into care'. This in turn may bring about a further vulnerability to a child who has already been recognised as vulnerable, which is why they are being 'looked after' by social services in the first place, sometimes making them easy prey for abusers.

A number of young men who have subsequently been involved in terrorist related crime, have come from difficult non-Muslim backgrounds, but have enlisted to join Islamist terrorist organisations. One commentator, Craig (2001), wrote of Richard Reid the shoe bomber:

Certainly, his background suggests that he was a vulnerable, easily manipulated misfit with a grudge against what he saw as a cold and unjust society: a young man who latched on to a faith he believed would give him the identity he lacked and the revenge he sought against the society in which he was raised.

Secure identities where students have a clear idea of who they are and what is important to them, help to engender stability, security and resilience, whereas insecure identities may open young people up to vulnerability and possible manipulation which in extreme cases could end up in abuse or radicalisation.

The foreword to *Questioning and Teaching: A Manual of Practice* (Dillion, 2004, p. ix) argues that:

[...] questioning by teachers is an exercise of power and control – and thus limits authentic discussion and discourages questioning by students. But, and this is the core of everything that follows, questioning by students and the discussion which follows, can be regarded as the starting point for effective education [...]

If this conception of the starting point for effective education is correct, and like everything in education it is open to scrutiny and criticism, then it is conceivable that education may involve the process of students questioning their own identities. Often, however, education can be seen as espousing a certain type of post-modern or liberal philosophical position which may denigrate particular aspects of identity like religion and offer only the positives of a liberal society in its place.

Mark Roche, writing in *Liberal Education* (2009), discusses the teaching of values and cites several liberal academics who maintain that ‘faculty staff’ should teach critical thinking rather than values (Lindholm et al., 2005; Fish, 2008). This could appear to be a good strategy to use with students forming their identities in their teenage years. However, if it is then students who are supported or encouraged in class, to critically question their own identities, even their religious identities, must also be given equal space to critically question modernity and liberal values in the light of their own spiritual experience. Roche (2009, pp. 34-35) goes on though, to question the wisdom of those who contend that colleges shouldn’t teach values arguing that:

Late adolescence and early adulthood represent a privileged time for the exploration of new ideas and the formation of identity; as a result, for many students, the college years become crucial markers for who they are to become [...] Not only do we as faculty members educate students in virtues and

values, we want to do so. The very faculty members who stress critical thinking and often shy away from discussion of values lament that today's students are too oriented toward material gain and insufficiently interested in values.

This paper is available on the website of the 'Association of American Colleges & Universities', an organisation that sees itself as "A voice and a force for liberal education in the 21st century" (2017). Based on this strident statement, it would seem that the teaching of values, liberal or otherwise, is not only impossible to eliminate from education (Halstead & Reiss, 2003), but is desirable in education.

Guttering (1999), in his work on liberalism and modernity, considers the way in which modernity and standard liberal views are often seen as the same and argues for a concept he calls 'pragmatic liberalism'. This, according to Anderson (1994), is a practical liberalism that aims to see things the way they are and recognises that religion is part of social reality which can be open to liberal development, instead of being written off by some who have described religion as 'premodern'. Butler (2008, p. 1), in her writings about torture, recognises that the denigration of someone's values, especially religious and cultural values, can have a devastating effect not only on those who are denigrated, but also on those who carry out the deliberate humiliation, in this case of prisoners:

Hegemonic conceptions of progress define themselves over and against a pre-modern temporality that they produce for the purposes of their own self legitimisation. Politically, the questions, what time are we in? are all of us in the same time? and specifically, who has arrived in modernity and who has not?

In the same way as Butler's contention, educationalists may ponder the responsibility they have to support young people to examine and develop their identities in ways that are personally validating and respectful so as to enable adjustments in identity to take place in a stable and secure way, rather than an

'interruption of identity' that may cause psychological disruption, or personal insecurity in the student.

Mok and Morris (2009), writing about 'cultural chameleons and iconoclasts' suggest that individuals with a bi-cultural identity are likely to adopt either an assimilated or a conflicted relationship with their host country. If the incomer becomes integrated, then they are likely to move to assimilate; however, bi-culturals who are conflicted between the two cultures are more likely to become reactant, they can be alienated from the host culture and so react against it. This disjuncture can be formed, in part, by negative treatment or isolation in the host culture and can be manifest in second or third generation immigrants, as well as those new to Britain. These individuals may be totally embedded in society yet alienated from it, Mok and Morris argue that often previous generations are seen as chameleons, having adapted to life in Britain and those around them. However, some young people seek a stronger identity and place to which they can belong, and so may take up a fervent alignment with a cultural or religious group to experience this. If they encounter difficult and unsupportive family backgrounds or discrimination and disrespect for their background, religious or sexual identity within the host culture, this may leave self-identity weakened or disrupted. Their intense need to belong and gain self-worth can leave individuals vulnerable to manipulation and possibly radicalisation (RAND, 2006). Mok and Morris (2009, p. 885) when summing up their findings wrote:

To handle the problem of reactance, one strategy may be to help bi-culturals feel less conflicted about their cultural identities by drawing their attention to positive experiences with culture; positivity facilitates identity integration.

It is important that teachers don't just pay lip service to their responsibility for inclusive RSE. By understanding and acknowledging differing cultural and religious values and identities within RSE, a possible site of reactance can be minimised, allowing students to feel validated and understood within RSE. This may help bring about a feeling of inclusion. Whilst faith-sensitive RSE will never be a panacea, it

may be part of the complex jigsaw of measures that encourages a genuinely egalitarian educational system that embraces educational unity and respect for and inclusion of all students, including those with a faith.

The intersection of religion and sexual orientation has been studied extensively (Haldeman, 2004; Worthington, 2004; Bartoli et al., 2008; Meyer & Ouellette, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). The journal *The Counselling Psychologist* dedicated a whole issue to studies that looked at the intersection of religion, sexuality and mental health of LGBT+ clients (2004). This issue contained harsh criticism of conversion therapy and those who offer it to clients. This therapy, rarely used nowadays, was practised on clients who wanted to, or were being forced to, change their sexual orientation, by offering a series of sessions with a therapist, counsellor or psychiatrist to attempt to bring this change in the sexual preferences of same-sex attracted people. This is a highly contested area of therapeutic practice and is the subject of a 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK' backed by NHS England and NHS Scotland, The Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Psychiatrists and others who describe the therapy as "unethical and potentially harmful" (Professional Associations, 2017, p. 2). The therapy is discredited and no longer used by reputable therapists, but the fact that it was used for many years, shows that some of those who are same-sex attracted have struggled with the issue especially, it seems from the research, if they are also religious (Worthington, 2004, p. 741):

Religious orientation provides one of the many contexts for the development of individual and social sexual identity processes. In fact, religion and sexuality are inextricably intertwined for many people because virtually every religion regulates sexual behaviour and dictates a specific set of values regarding human sexuality. Thus, sexual identity development is likely to vary depending on the moral convictions learned, adopted, and/or rejected by individuals regarding sexual orientations, values, needs and behaviours. As a result, some same-sex attracted (SSA) individuals may experience intense internal conflicts

between experiences of sexual attraction and their internalized sense of morality arising from religion.

Things have changed since 2004 and judging from student comments in my study, some of them are LGBT+ advocates even if they are not, or are not openly, LGBT+ themselves. One thing that is clear from the literature is that young people who are conflicted about their sexual identity are also more prone to mental illness (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Duarté-Vélez et al., 2010).

Yip and Page's book *Religious and Sexual Identities: A Multi-faith Exploration of Young Adults* (2013) is based on research that has parallels with my own study in that they include students of various faiths and examine the intersection of religion and sexuality, even if their work doesn't concentrate on education in the way that my research does. Yip and Page's research methods, i.e. questionnaires and interviews, are similar to my own, although they don't use workshops but do use video diaries and write extensively about the conflicted and multifarious identities of some of their participants.

The students in the Yip and Page study were in their late teens and early twenties and were mostly university students. Almost one fifth of them identified as LGBT+, a substantially higher proportion than is thought to be the case in the British population at large (Chalabi, 2013). It is worth pointing out that LGBT+ students do not share a single identity and so this needs to be considered when discussing LGBT+ identities, even though much of the literature groups these identities together (Almeida et al., 2009; Davie, 2015; Puddington, 2016). Indeed, many people, especially in campaign groups, happily congregate and identify under the LGBT banner – cf. The LGBT Foundation (2017), The Peter Tatchell Foundation (2017) and Pride in London (2017). However, this does not mean that they want to be seen as a homogenous category of people, but more an alliance of those whose sexuality often, historically, caused them to be treated differently by society, though this is now changing in some countries (Vogel & Wanke, 2016). The diversity of experience and identity for people who are often referred to as LGBTIQ needs to be understood and teachers mindful of students who may carry one of the LGBT+

labels for themselves or who may carry that label in the future, when teaching in the classroom and interacting with these students in other situations.

Looking at religious identities alongside sexual identities was interesting as the participants in the Yip and Page study (2013) were likely to have a more developed identity, as they were older, by between three and ten years, than my students and so seemed to be further along in their identity development. Some of the young people in the Yip and Page study had decided to turn their back on the religion of their youth, or just on the religious institutions they were once part of, because they felt unable to reconcile their religion with their sexuality. Some found places of compromise or comfort, where their religion and their sexuality could co-exist in harmony or at least a place of well-being. Still others found religious communities where their LGBT+ identity could be fully expressed and celebrated. In my study two of the male students suggested that LGBT+ identities could be dealt with by adopting a heterosexual lifestyle and “get[ting] married to a woman” as the best way to ‘present’ their sexuality. If any of the participants in the Yip and Page study had ‘dealt’ with their sexuality conflicts in this way, the phenomenon does not seem to be demonstrated in their data.

Many of Yip and Page’s (2013, p. 29) participants had a strong connection to their faith communities and valued the sense of belonging; others felt excluded because of their sexuality and lifestyle. One student from a Catholic background said:

My religion is one of the most confusing, guilt ridden and uncertain things in my life ... I am forced to hide aspects of myself and often tell lies.

Some participants articulated the need to express ‘different’ identities in different circumstances, often being conflicted when they did so. In gay bars adopting one type of sexual identity with no religious persona apparent, and in a place of worship, religious identity would be on show, with no whiff of a homosexual or ‘trans’ identity.

Just as those of faith can feel included and secure if teachers talk openly about religion, so it is likely that those who identify as LGBT+ might find RSE more equitable and caring if LGBT+ issues and differing sexualities are understood and discussed within RSE.

5.3.3 *Gender Issues*

With regard to conflict between aspects of personal identities, such as culture, religion, sexuality and nationality, in my study, these were largely internal conflicts caused by external pressure and influences on the young people as they searched for and tried to develop their authentic identities (cf. Lindholm, 2008). Where gender was concerned, the students appeared confident in their maleness or femaleness; any problems with gender issues seemed to emanate from outside pressures and influences which dictated how those genders should be worked out in their lives. These influences often disagreed with, questioned or were damaging to gender identities.

It might be presumed that those who see them self as transgender or transsexual (trans*) would probably have a certain amount of internal struggle (Westbrook & Schilt, 2013), but no student in the study identified as trans*, so this type of inner conflict was not reflected in the data collected. Most of the students who sensed a conflict over gender issues especially what they saw as discrimination were girls, although some boys also felt pressure to live up to a set of external standards concerning masculinity that they were trying to challenge. Boys mentioned looking at pornography as an issue alongside their peers' expectations about their sexual practice.

Frye (1983) hypothesised that women and men become like the women and men they are expected to be because they 'practise' the roles of being male and female, so solidifying gender to become what is seen as 'natural' or 'normal' by society, generating a constructed notion of gender; this was further reinforced more recently in the Handbook of Constructionist Research (Lorber, 2008).

Some of the girls in my study felt that gender, virginity, and what was expected from them as young women, were social constructs and questioned the constructed stereotypes they experienced:

That's what I mean, I don't know why people find it [virginity] an important thing but that's why I think it's like a social construct because there isn't an actual reason why it's important to some people, but why is it important? *White British Atheist girl*

The South Asian girls did not seem to be affected by society's norms, social media and magazines in the same way as other girls; however, they were often treated very differently to their brothers, who had more freedom and greater prestige within the family (Barcellos et al., 2014).

The white British girls talked about being expected to fall into a mould of media-informed and -dictated imagery that causes them to feel manipulated into having a boyfriend or being more sexually active than they may want to be. They also felt manipulated by social media. Andreassen et al. (2017) found that the greatest number of those using social media addictively are young, female and single and that it can bring about narcissism and low self-esteem. Emma Renold's work for the NSPCC (2013), giving Year 8 students a chance to say how they saw their own sexual development and how that development was enhanced or made tricky by the world they lived in, recognises some of the same dilemmas encountered by my participants. Things that were noticed were that children found it hard to have friendships that weren't boyfriend or girlfriend relationships. Girls especially felt that they had to 'fit in', couldn't be themselves and felt annoyed about the sexist environment in which they found themselves.

Often it is thought that gender issues mean sexism against women; my female students certainly experienced sexism, saying that men and boys were sometimes, treated more favourably than women and girls. But research is also being conducted about men, boys and social media, recognising that the prevailing discourses about body size and shape can also have a negative effect on the self-confidence and wellbeing of boys and men (Perloff, 2014).

Pornography can also be a gendered issue, with boys more likely to watch it than girls, and then using the images they have seen to develop a blueprint of what is expected of girls (Flood, 2009). The boys who had conflicts with the concept, as well as the reality, of pornography were the boys who saw themselves as most committed to their religion. This is unsurprising given that some of Rasmussen and Bierman's (2016) research seems to demonstrate that religiosity has a moderating effect on the use of pornography. Generally, the boys who were less religious didn't mention pornography, although this could be because they didn't bother with it, rather than because they didn't see watching it as a contentious issue.

5.3.4 *LGBT+ issues*

It seems that LGBT+ identities and sex before marriage were the most contentious and conflicted issues for my students, especially those from religious backgrounds. Only one student in the study explicitly adopted a LGBT+ identity, although it became clear at interview that some students manifested an advocacy role for those who may be LGBT+. The tone and the content of some of the comments in the questionnaires and the discussions during the interviews gave some indication that there might have been more LGBT+ students amongst participants than was evident from individual admission. This lack of disclosure could be partly to do with the fact that there were no questions on the questionnaire asking about the participant's sexuality. For those adopting an advocacy role for LGBT+ students, the conflict between their religion and their views on LGBT+ issues were in some cases evident:

I think because personally when it comes to my religion, being homosexual is a sin and you are not supposed to be a gay or lesbian, but I personally don't really feel that way. *Christian girl who didn't consider her religion to be important*

Yip and Page (2013) have much to say about religion and sexuality and the conflict felt by the young adults they interviewed during their exploration at the intersection of these two aspects of their participants' lives. Western Buddhism was understood to be quite tolerant of adherents who were also LGBT+, but the

participants in their study felt that most other world religions were not. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) carried out research with a group of British gay men who came from Pakistani backgrounds. The men who saw themselves as particularly religious felt that homosexuality and Islam were incompatible and struggled to reconcile their religious and sexual identities; others changed their Islamic expression from a culture- and community-based one, where they felt that they would not be accepted, to one which relied on greater personal spirituality and communication with God at an individual level.

Prior to his work with Page, Yip (1996, 2005, 2008) wrote extensively on the subject of the intersection of faith and sexuality and found that those who were religious and LGBT+ developed a range of 'coping strategies'. These strategies manifested themselves in several ways. Some of Yip and Page's (2013) participants compartmentalised their life so that they took on either a gay or a religious identity at any one time, but never the two together. Others turned their back on their religion, whilst several participants aimed to live a life in line with what they saw as the tenets of their religion. Some of those attempted to deal with traditional views of LGBT+ tendencies by ignoring them, while others found a way of looking at what their religion taught in a way that would allow for the LGBT+ lifestyle that felt natural to them.

Higgins (2008) suspected that a few gay men who had decided to marry straight women were also fundamentalist in their religious belief, causing internal homophobia and so leading them to have marriage relationships with women, in an attempt to help reconcile their faith and their sexuality. Higgins chronicles the breakup of some of those marriages which were in part attributable to changes in attitudes, both internal and external, towards homosexuality. Much of the research carried out is published in therapeutic journals such as *The American Journal of Family Therapy* (Yarhouse et al., 2015) and the *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010) and even the research that is published in other types of journals, like the *Journal of Bi-Sexuality*, still see that their "genesis was in the world of psycho-sexual counselling" (Edser & Shea, 2002, p. 7). Kays and Yarhouse (2010) and Yarhouse et al. (2015) looked at the outcomes for such marriages and at ways

of supporting couples, individually or jointly, when marriage problems arose, due to a spouse 'coming out' as gay or bisexual. Buxton (2008) estimates that there are at least two million gay, lesbian or bisexual people in the USA who are, or have been, heterosexually married. It is likely that this phenomenon is also likely to be affecting religious communities in Britain.

There is an array of ways that religious people who are also LGBT+ manage their possible conflicts at the juncture of religion and sexuality, but it is not only these groups who have tensions here. Heterosexual couples may also have issues when they investigate their religion in the light of their sexuality and vice versa.

5.3.5 *Sex before marriage*

Many of those students in my study who took on a religious identity, even if that religion was not very important to them, were clear that their religious tenets considered sex outside of marriage, in the form of an affair when married or sex before marriage, as unacceptable. However, while they seemed to understand and 'buy in' to the concept of faithfulness in marriage, they also hesitated at agreeing with the idea of not having sex until they were married. They wanted themselves and any partner they might have, married or not, to be faithful to them, but thought that even if they wanted to 'wait until marriage', and many didn't see why they should, they would find it hard because of social pressure and sexual 'urges'.

Yip and Page (2013, p. 116) also found that their participants saw sex before marriage as acceptable practice; one participant rationalised his 'living together' arrangement with his fiancée in the following way:

Me and my fiancée, we are not married. We, just, you know, we are partners, we live together, and obviously we do have sexual relations, which my Mum's religion [Christianity] would condemn and so would Islam [...] The reason we don't get married is because we want to have good jobs and we want everything to be sorted out and marry afterwards and be secure. We do feel that we are married. We do everything

together, I cook, I help, and you know, it's like I'm living a married life [...] Even though the religion says that you shouldn't [have sex] before marriage, we think that we are more than married, and so as long as we are happy with each other and we are not forcing each other [...] And so, we do live like a married couple, yes [...] Our God is a god of love, so he does understand, and we are doing something that is not just sex. And I think that comforts us [...] so till we get married we just kind of save [money] and build our lives [...] we are pretty much in love.

Marcus [the name given by Yip and Page to this participant] sought to validate his sexual relationship with his girlfriend even though he knew it was 'condemned' by Christianity and Islam: first, by distancing himself from his religion, calling Christianity his 'Mum's religion'; then, by saying that the relationship was just like a marriage anyway; and also by saying that 'Our' [demonstrating personal commitment to Christianity] God is a loving god and understands the situation.

My Year 10 students were unlikely to be in the same type of 'live in' relationship as Marcus for a while, but what was written in the questionnaires and interviews demonstrated that it is likely many of them will take a very similar line to Marcus when they get older and find themselves in a romantic relationship.

Much has been written in the literature about the use of 'abstinence-only-until marriage-education' (AOUM) which was highlighted in the literature review (Section 2.14.2) so will not be discussed at great length here; suffice it to say that some students felt that abstinence until marriage should be taught in school. The difference between AOUM and what many of my students sought in RSE was that they desired to know everything about relationships, including relationships that may be sexual, while at school, even those who thought that sex should only happen within marriage. So, the idea of RSE that teaches 'only' about abstinence until marriage, was an anathema to all but a very few of my students, in a similar way to the writings of Kirby (1994, 2008).

5.3.6 Agency and changes to religious practices

The chapters in *Religion and Youth* (Collins-Mayo & Dandelion, 2010) demonstrate the changing ideas of young people from all over the world concerning religion and the struggles they face. The book showcased research from those exploring the religious trends within groups of young people from different cultures and following differing religions. The research found that some had to hide religious affiliation at school, that young people of faith were those least likely to be sexually active, but that across the board young people are more sexually active than they were in the past and that young people today are less likely to demonstrate spirituality by worshipping in churches, mosques or temples and adhering to the tenets of their religion if they have one. A recurring theme in this book is that young people are still spiritual, but the outworking of that spirituality is different to that of their parents.

Linda Woodhead, in her epilogue to Mayo and Dandelion's *Religion and Youth* (2010, p. 240), writes:

Religion is no longer part of the status quo against which they [young people] must rebel [...] It is the secular society created by their parents which forms the backdrop for rebellion [...] corrupt politicians, cynical marketing and public relations industries, unfettered capitalism, growing social inequality, post-colonial injustices and the destruction of the environment.

This is not to say young people are turning to religion instead of the secular society, just that religion isn't so much rebelled against because it is not seen as important in as many young people's lives as it used to be.

Simon Best's (2008) research with young Quakers shows that they are changing the religious practices within their religion. It would seem that my young people are also changing the way they view religious and personal practice and are exerting agency, gaining independent ideas about what they think their faith should allow or

stand for. *Muslim Youth: Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations*, edited by Ahmed and Seddon (2012), considers the needs of Muslim youth in various countries around the world and recognises the challenges that young Muslims face. The book also demonstrates that these young people's reactions to their religion, may, in some places, be changing. This is giving rise to a changing face of Islam.

Whilst radical religion receives many of the media headlines (BBC News, 2017; Verkaik, 2017), judging from my data and the literature, as the culture in Britain becomes more liberal so do the views of those in mainstream religious communities. This is true with regard to issues such as sex before marriage (Jeremiah, 2011; Merritt, 2016; Church of England, 2017), women in leadership and ministry (Frais, 2006) and LGBT+ issues (Merritt, 2017). It is hard to know how this relaxation of moral views will affect young people, but it can be seen that young people play a part in leading these changes. It may be the case that the conflicted identities that many of our young people face concerning their religion and 21st century British society will be the very thing that changes both.

5.4 Filter models for RSE

The discussion, recommendations and models created for educators to use in their formulation of policy and the teaching of RSE, contained in this section of the thesis have been based on the data and the findings generated by my research. Their development has however also been informed by academic writing, my professional educational and RSE training, understanding and experience as a teacher and woman of faith.

5.4.1 The Faith-Sensitive Filter Model for RSE

The discussion, recommendations and models created for educators to use in formulation of policy and the teaching of RSE, contained in this section of the thesis have been based on the data and the findings generated by the research. Their development has however also been informed by my professional educational and RSE training, understanding and experience as a teacher and woman of faith.

To be a faith-sensitive educator requires a reasonable grasp of how faith is worked out and impacts on participants' everyday lives. Students at the focus group stage of the research were clear that faith-sensitivity consists of two parts, a respect for faith and an understanding of faith issues. If faith-sensitivity is to be part of RSE then a teacher, policy maker, or educator needs to understand what could hinder or encourage faith-sensitivity.

Even if a school has only a small number of students or even no students who have a faith background, participants in my study maintained that religion should be respected, and students would still want to learn what religious groups teach concerning relationships and sex, as this would form part of their wider education and aid cross cultural understanding.

It is important to know about different religions, so we can respect and understand them. *Christian boy*

It [learning about what other religions' views are on relationships and sex] informs us of other cultural beliefs so that we can respect them. *Atheist boy*

My research concentrates on the needs of students from differing faith backgrounds and produces a model that could help educators either from within schools or from community groups toward faith-sensitivity generally as well as faith sensitivity in their RSE teaching. I argue that each educator comes to the subject of RSE with an 'offering'; this is what they bring personally into the classroom and is made up of various aspects of themselves, their experiences and their competencies. All these can influence the lesson quality and can have a positive or negative effect on the sensitivity shown towards students. By filtering this 'offering' in four different stages (Figure 5.1) educators can be encouraged to understand students' needs in the light of their backgrounds. The aim of the filter is to support and enable the provision of what is seen by the participants in the study as 'good RSE'. This 'filter' can also be used to scrutinise school or organisation-wide ethos or policies concerning RSE.

It is possible that some educators apply this filter system naturally. Their desire to

see the students they teach flourish, and the respect and care afforded to their students, shows that they self-analyse their 'offering' without even knowing about 'The Faith-Sensitive Filter' and are sensitive to the needs of students, almost instinctively. However, not all people who teach RSE are trained teachers and not everyone who teaches, whether trained or not, likes or respects all young people. By scrutinising school ethos and classroom practice in the light of the four layers of the Faith-Sensitive Filter, it is possible to critically evaluate aspects of teaching in order to analyse lesson content and pedagogy and understand what constitutes good practice.

The Faith-Sensitive Filter Model was generated following the findings of this study to assist educators in the pursuit of the faith-sensitive RSE called for by the student participants. It is designed to work like a refining filtration system. The educators' 'offering' works to enhance the quality of any RSE lesson. Of course, the 'filter' is not designed to remove the qualities and traits of educators that the students appreciate and value.

[A teacher should be] confident, funny, patient, talkative and know how to lead the lesson how we would want it. In an appropriate way. *Christian boy*

The idea of retaining what is valuable and removing any detritus that might affect the quality of the lesson means the filter is more like a honey filtration system than one designed for water. What comes out of a water filtration system must be pure to drink. Raw honey, on the other hand, is filtered to remove any undesirable substances like bits of dead bee and wax. However, the things that make honey, honey, and not just a sugar syrup, are the traces of pollen and the different nectars used, by the bees to make the honey in the first place. Honey is crafted by the bees and then filtered by the bee keeper to make it suitable for consumption. With RSE both of what goes in the top of the filtration system and what comes out in the form of student-sensitive RSE lessons are crafted and filtered by the educator and is a quality-enhancing process, much like raw honey production.

There are four layers of filtration of the faith-sensitive RSE filter:

1. A will to support and show respect for young people in RSE
2. A commitment to faith-sensitive RSE
3. Knowledge and understanding of issues faced by young people of faith
4. Reflexivity and critical thinking.

Together, these four levels of filtration can lead to faith-sensitive relationships and sex education.

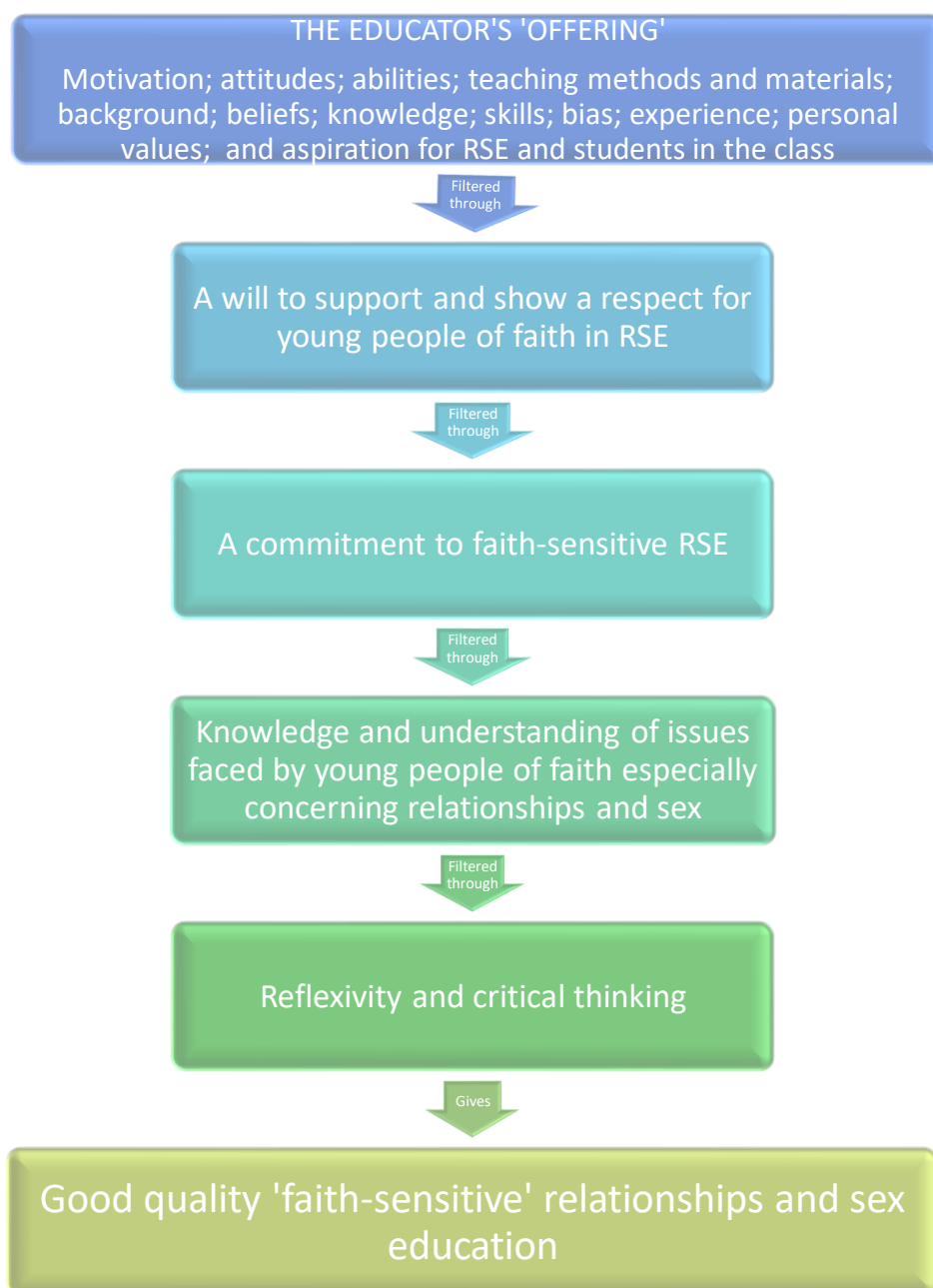


Figure 5.1 'Faith-Sensitive Filter Model' for relationships and sex

5.4.1.1 The educator's (teacher or facilitator) 'offering'

The offering from the educator is introduced at the top of the filter and passes through four levels of filtration, demonstrating self-scrutiny, which work to remove or lessen the content of the offering that could hinder the educator's sensitivity to students' need.

Whilst trying to be sensitive to the needs of students it is important to understand that the teachers' 'offering' to the class has the power to influence the quality of the lesson and the outcomes for young people. This offering can affect the content tone and emphasis of the lesson. If the offering is carefully managed it can be to the benefit of all students, mitigating any bias they may have enabling them to stay, or become, sensitive to the needs of the students.

When looking at what the teacher brings to the RSE lesson it is important to understand what is meant by each aspect of their offering and how this could affect the educator's teaching.

a. Motivation to teach RSE

RSE is often a tricky subject to teach, and because of its contentious nature consultation with parents is advised and teaching materials scrutinised for bias and appropriateness (DFE, 2000). Even as a subject within PSHE, RSE is often not supported by schools with adequate training, curriculum time or resources. Having not been given statutory status until 2017 and not being an examination subject (in 2018) means it is likely that those teaching RSE are motivated by factors other than teaching status and prestige, 'lumbered' with it because other staff steer clear of teaching it or are bought in from organisations outside of school to teach RSE.

If there are strong personal motivational reasons, on the part of educators, for wanting to teach RSE then these need to be considered as part of the educators' offering and scrutinised accordingly. It is possible that some may choose to teach RSE because they feel they want to be an advocate for minority groups such as

those of faith or LGBT+ students or because they come from a sexual health backgrounds and it is part of their job.

If an educator comes from a faith background they can sometimes have issues with topics like abortion or same-sex marriage, whilst those who want to advocate for LGBT+ young people or who are themselves are LGBT+ may have negative attitudes towards students who may be struggling with the perceived moral aspects of differing sexual identities. Educators who come from a sexual health background may assume that more young people in the class are sexually active than is the case due their experiences in sexual health clinics where most of the young people accessing services are sexually active.

Any motivation for teaching RSE can be positive, but it must be carefully examined to ensure that no student or group is disadvantaged or disenfranchised by loading the lesson with topics, materials or stances that support only the teacher's ideas of what should be provided in RSE and therefore bias the lesson. Any motivational bias can be moderated if thought about carefully.

b. Attitudes

An educator's attitudes to life, relationships and sex can all affect the emphasis given in RSE to certain topics or opinions. Attitudes concerning gender are a good example. Gender issues are highly debated and form an important part of RSE. Gender discrimination and identity are seen very differently by divergent groups of people (Nayak & Kehily, 2006). It is important that teachers are aware of the range of views concerning gender in society and are sensitive to those whose gender identity may be fluid or countercultural, as well as those whose understanding of gender is binary.

c. Abilities

In some cases, the training or lack of it (Ofsted, 2013) of some of those teaching RSE in schools means that their ability to teach or facilitate RSE leaves something to be desired and this may affect an educator's ability either to teach the content of the

lesson or to manifest the classroom management skills needed to teach the RSE lesson in a way that will benefit and be sensitive to all students.

d. Teaching methods and materials

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the content in RSE, teaching methods and materials need to be carefully analysed (filtered) to ensure they are appropriate for students, not only in the eyes of the educator, but also in the those of the students and possibly their parents, where parents are likely to take issue with some aspects of RSE, e.g. representations of nudity in classroom materials. Teaching methods and materials should also comply with the policies of the school. Just because a school has used one good resource from an agency or organisation does not mean that all materials from that source are appropriate, so each resource must be evaluated on its own merits by the school or the teacher responsible. It may help to secure advice and support from parents and school governors when choosing materials for RSE.

e. Background, identity and beliefs

A person's background, identity and beliefs can be the most influential aspects of self (Goffman, 1956) any educator brings as part of their offering and can include many features: class; culture; life experiences; ethnicity; politics; sexuality; religion and much more, all of which can affect the tone of an individual's teaching.

A teacher from a conservative, ethnic minority and strict religious background may have a very different outlook on teenage sexuality to a teacher from a liberal, western and sexual health background (Gallup, 2002). If an educator has an experience of domestic violence and/or sexual abuse, they may understand the importance of consent in a very different way to one who hasn't. Whatever a teacher's beliefs and backgrounds, these aspects of who they are can enrich the lesson or diminish it depending on whether or not the teacher is valuing the students and addressing their needs as a priority, whilst recognising that, as a teacher, they have their own predispositions when teaching RSE.

f. Knowledge and skills

If a teacher is to carry out effective and informative RSE there is a quantity and quality of knowledge and skills, they will need. The gaining of these skills is best carried out through training but can also be gained through experience and general knowledge. Whilst knowledge is a good thing, to serve any group of students well, the knowledge a teacher has needs to be shared in an age and situation-appropriate way, sensitive to the needs of the students.

g. Teaching experience

This is one of the most useful implements in the RSE educator's tool box. Teaching experience should advantage for any educator, equipping them to deal with specific situations and pupils as well as enhancing classroom management skills and giving confidence to those teaching RSE. Not all students or classes, schools or areas of the country are the same and even experience needs to be filtered to ensure that assumptions are not made about the needs of students, based purely on experience. If previously a teacher has worked in an all girls' school in a highly Muslim area, they may experience a very different cohort of students in a mixed school in a mostly white area where students may come with a very different set of needs and values.

h. Bias

All individuals are biased (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Bias, where it causes the teaching or treatment of students to be unfair can be caused by any of the factors listed as part of the teacher's offering. Banaji and Greenwald point out that there is bias even in "good people" (preface), i.e. those whose intentions are not to be biased in such a way that they quiet other valuable voices. Banaji and Greenwald suggest that it is impossible to eliminate bias, but that if bias is identified then is easier for a 'good person' to align their behaviours with their intentions to create a safe place for all. It is expected that the 'filter' will serve to enhance this alignment.

i. Aspiration for RSE and students in the class

A teacher's aspirations for RSE and the students in their school, can be truly inspirational, motivating students to expect more from and learn more about

relationships. What teachers want to achieve within lessons will affect the way they teach and what they teach. It is important that these aspirations are in line with the ethos of the school and the needs of the students and possibly the desires of parents.

5.4.1.2 A will to support young people through RSE

Any policy maker, facilitator or teacher of RSE needs to want to support students' development from childhood through adolescence toward adulthood if they are to be effective. Young people will sense if teachers are involved in RSE because they have to be, or because they want to be. In my experience students can tell if an educator is there simply to impart sexual health information or because they want to encourage young people to make the most of their relationships, of which sex may be an important part now and/or in the future. Decisions, attitudes and relationships forged during adolescence can have lasting effects on the future lives of students and can affect who they become. Students in the study clearly valued teachers and felt themselves drawn to and supported by those who showed an interest in students' lives and were open in talking about relationships and sex. Having a clear will to encourage, empower and see students flourish in their relationships and gain an understanding of the reality of relationships and sex is an important starting place for any educator who wants to deliver good quality RSE and that includes faith-sensitive RSE

Policy makers need to understand the importance of RSE lessons if these are to be taught well and have a positive impact on the wellbeing of students: "because sex is a part of life, just like being taught about mortgages in life skills lessons" (*Christian boy*). Those responsible for the policy and the quality of teaching in RSE should be sympathetic in respect of curriculum time: "If they treated it [RSE] as its own subject instead of just mentioning it briefly in lessons like biology and PSHE [it would be improved]" (*Muslim girl*). The need for staff training should be taken seriously: "[A good teacher is] someone who is honest, informative and professional which will cover all aspects of the subject [RSE]" (*Agnostic boy*) and

“They would be unbiased, they would be knowledgeable, informative, open to questions and friendly” (Atheist boy).

5.4.1.3 A commitment to faith-sensitive RSE

An educator who values each learner as an individual, even in a class where learners come from many differing backgrounds (e.g. economic, racial and faith), with diverse experiences, values, sexualities and aspirations for the future, will normally communicate worth and significance to those young people and help them to maximise the influence of the lessons in equipping them for their future relationships including, typically, sexual ones. Most religions have very positive teachings about relationships and sex, even if sex is expected to take place within the boundary of marriage. A commitment to communicate religions’ sex-positive messages, whilst being respectful of religion, opens doors for young people from faith backgrounds to learn RSE and especially those topics students may have thought were taboo within their communities.

5.4.1.4 Knowledge and understanding of various faiths

Students in the study considered that anyone teaching RSE should be trained and have a good subject knowledge and skill set, enabling them to teach RSE effectively. If RSE educators are to be faith-sensitive, they will also need to be trained about different faith groups and their values and tenets regarding relationships and sex. Even a basic understanding or training in these matters will help teachers to better support those students who come from a faith background. They will need to have the skills and attitudes and use methods that show respect for and insight into the concerns, dilemmas and joys of students from faith backgrounds with regard to relationships and sex. Such educators will enable students to make positive links between their religion, relationships and sex, enabling young people of faith to flourish into a faith identity (if that is what they want) that includes positive relationships and attitudes to sex.

For students from faith backgrounds, RSE can bring them into direct conflict with what some of them might see as worldly, Western or liberal values. By

understanding this, educators can mitigate the chance of those students turning their backs on the content of the lesson or developing unnecessary confusion between what the school and their religion believes about relationships and sex. Students need capability as well as capacity (Sen, 1985), when it comes to RSE. Most students have the capacity to learn about RSE and to be able to see the lessons as a positive addition to their development through adolescence. However, if a student feels that the lessons are disrespectful of their religion or not applicable to them as a person of faith, they may 'switch off' from the lessons, affecting their capability to access RSE fully. Some of the participants from faith backgrounds, often the ones that didn't seem to know much about what their faith taught concerning relationships and sex, maintained, during data collection, that some things were "against my religion". My experience has shown that once religion is acknowledged and discussed even briefly in RSE, those students from strict faith backgrounds relax a little and access the lesson better. This is what one Muslim girl had to say at interview:

I think that some of the girls they feel uncomfortable and if you just open up a bit, maybe add some religious aspects to it, then I think the people will become more comfortable in approaching sex and relationships [education] wholeheartedly.

The lack of capability that students encounter if RSE is not taught in a way that develops their ability and comfort at accessing the lesson could, according to Sen (1985), be an issue of social injustice.

5.4.1.5 Reflexivity and critical thinking

As discussed previously, no RSE is value-free, but it is possible for a personal agenda, what Reeves (1994) calls a 'surreptitious agenda', to be bought into the classroom and thus bias the content and 'flavour' of the lesson so that it becomes skewed or predisposed toward a set of ideologies, opinions or beliefs that may be presented as facts or preferences, possibly affecting the balance of the lesson. Thus, Reeves advises educators: "As well as reflecting on events, before during and after, you need to be aware of your surreptitious 'agenda'" (Reeves, 1994, p. 107).

It is also possible to alienate a group or groups of students who may disagree with the tone, content or main focus of the lesson. By being reflexive, it is possible for a teacher or facilitator, carefully, to think through their own feelings, bias, experiences and beliefs to make sure that they are producing a balanced and informative lesson that is as sensitive to the various needs of the students in the class as possible. It is important too for the adult leading the lesson to understand that they may be seen as a role model for students and, as such, they need to be inclusive of and sensitive to minority, or even a silent majority, of students.

Reflexivity is a concept that is increasingly gaining currency in professional practice literature, particularly in relation to working with uncertainty and as an important feature of professional discretion and ethical practice. (D'Cruz et al., 2007, p. 2)

Reflexivity and critical thinking require the educator to 'step back' from the content of the lesson and understand how their own ideas and beliefs about relationships and sex may affect that lesson. It is also important to think how the students' ideas beliefs and experiences may affect how they understand the lesson. Educators need to think critically about what is appropriate in the context of the students in their class. Often the role of 'devil's advocate' is an important one, even if it only helps a minority of children feel their ideas are being taken seriously. Methods and materials need to be evaluated critically and questions asked about whether students in the class may find them offensive or difficult, even if the educator is at ease using them. Small adaptations can often be made that help young people from religious backgrounds access materials and messages in a way which is faith-sensitive. For example, when carrying out a lesson on safer sex and condom use there can be diagrams of how to use a condom given via PowerPoint on a whiteboard for students (especially girls) who are uncomfortable with watching a condom demonstration. These students can still learn the same lesson content, but without experiencing a condom or condom demonstrator (which looks like an erect penis).

5.4.1.6 Asher's interview as an example of how the data shaped the Faith-Sensitivity Filter Model

Faith-sensitive delivery of RSE is more an attitude and an overall approach to be adopted rather than a specific set of guidelines to be followed to the letter. It is a way of 'being' in the classroom more than about lesson content, especially if students are to be offered a comprehensive curriculum in RSE. A knowledge of faiths gives understanding about different beliefs, even if these beliefs are not shared by the educator. Students should feel that their religion is valued and respected but at the same time have doors opened for them, doors they may choose to enter as they move towards a greater understanding of relationships, sex and sexual health. The way in which religion can be respected, as well as showing care and acceptance of 'difference' was demonstrated in the data. The responses of one particularly articulate and thoughtful student helped me investigate the complex issues that surround the delivery of faith-sensitive RSE, even in a church school setting. In non-religious schools, the complexities of 'difference' may be even more keenly felt by those from faith backgrounds. Asher was a Christian, 15-year-old boy who said that his religion was very important to him and influenced everything he did; he was of mixed Indian and European heritage.

Asher explained some of the complexities, dilemmas for students and discussions that need to take place in RSE if young people are going to have a safe space to develop their own opinions about relationships and sex. Asher made it clear that faith-sensitivity needed to be an important part of RSE; he also expressed his opinions that RSE should not take only one set of strict religious views into consideration but understand that there are a range of religious views. Asher was also aware that in some circumstances there may be challenges for RSE educators as they endeavour to be sensitive to a range of seemingly 'incompatible' values or opinions.

Below is part of an interview carried out following Asher's participation in the questionnaire phase of my research.

Researcher: You say in question 15 [in the questionnaire] that ‘tolerance in supporting LGBT and religious approaches to Sex and Relationships should be included in RSE’. Please tell me a bit more about that and why you think that they should be included?

Asher: Well, because it’s a huge part of our life because it’s something that you can’t ignore.

Researcher: Let’s do one at a time. What about religious approaches to relationship and sex education and how that should be included?

Asher: Well, sometimes it’s sort of vaguely taught in a sense that because we are a church school, we have to teach it differently, I think, to other schools in the sense that we have to see how we can be chaste. In Christianity it’s quite strict in that we have to adhere to certain rules. Like you are not allowed to have sex before marriage and that you have to be chaste and monogamy is quite important and so I think it will help guide the young people. Obviously it’s a period where you have to go through sort of I don’t call it problems but it’s sort of like problems to deal with urges that are sexual and it’s important to find a way within a Christian school to not just shun it [sex], obviously it’s part of everyone’s life and so we need to sort of find a way to work around the teenage aspects of sex because sometimes it’s sort of – some people see it as they don’t care, some people do think it’s quite important to remain chaste and celibate before marriage and some people might feel that they [the school] are being too Christian and some people might feel they are not being Christian at all, they [students] are just here [attending the school] because they [the school] provide good education and their families have encouraged them to go here. So, I think we should change it in the sense that we should help people to understand it’s okay if they have engaged in sexual activity but also to educate them on the Christian viewpoint without being quite judgemental and shunning it [sex] in a way. We shouldn’t put them down because that would just make them feel unloved which is not what we want to do as Christians because Christianity is based upon love and Jesus taught us to love everyone as

ourselves and so it's quite important to ensure that everybody is included and cared for in the quite diverse society that we are living in today.

By analysing the language and the scope of this section of his interview it seems that Asher has lessons for many teachers and policy makers. He sees 'inclusivity' and 'care' as important aspects of RSE and is happy to talk about religious values in a positive way, such as monogamy, chastity and only having sex within marriage. He is also realistic about the tensions and dilemmas that young people face and discussed 'sexual urges' and sex as 'part of everyone's life' and he suggests that schools shouldn't 'shun it', i.e. ignore sex and sexuality.

Asher identifies that sometimes RSE needs to be 'taught differently'. It would seem from the context that he thinks that because he goes to a church school, RSE has to be taught differently, but maybe this is also applicable if there are students from religious backgrounds in a class that is not in a faith school. He seems to see himself as 'different' to those who 'have engaged in sexual activity', understanding those students as 'them'. Still, he sets out values that 'we' should adopt, including being 'non-judgemental', saying: "We shouldn't put them down" or "make them feel unloved". He sees that RSE should: "ensure that everybody is included and cared for in the quite diverse society we are living in today".

The conclusions I have drawn based on the data in this study lead me to agree with Asher. In many ways this student has outlined exactly what faith-sensitive RSE should be like: being comfortable with religious issues, language and values, whilst understanding that there are those in the class who are sexually active and that most students will become sexually active at some point in their life, even if only within marriage.

5.4.2 LGBT+-Sensitive Filter Model

Whilst LGBT+ issues did not form a major part of the study, the data helped to identify the importance of LGBT+ issues for some students and brought a realisation that many of the methods employed to bring about faith-sensitive RSE could also be used to ensure that RSE becomes increasingly sensitive to LGBT+

students. The Faith-Sensitivity Filter can easily be tweaked to create the LGBT+-Sensitivity Filter too.

Again, as already shown in the LGBT+ and conflicted identities section of the findings, Asher had an enlightening contribution to add to the debate about how LGBT+ issues should be dealt with in RSE and how LGBT+ students could be supported through RSE (Section 4.9).

Asher displayed a very mature view about and understanding of the need for inclusivity in RSE. His project obviously uncovered a range of different opinions about how his fellow students viewed LGBT+ identities. He was acutely aware of the different attitudes of students, from clear and somewhat cruel, judgemental and outwardly hostile through to support for same-sex relationships and marriage. Interestingly, he doesn't totally condemn those students who have a negative attitude to LGBT+ students, but says those views need to be respected, perhaps because he might see these students as holding a strict religious line, a line that he may understand, even though he doesn't seem to agree with it. Asher sees that it is important to address what he describes as "controversial" issues in RSE even those that might be seen by some as "incompatible with religion". He sees the debate around these issues as a 'healthy debate' and realises that it could be ignored by schools, but that it is a "sensitive matter that we do have to deal with". He understands the topic of LGBT+ relationships to be a sensitive issue, but feels that within RSE they should be treated with attitudes that show "tolerance and inclusivity"

Asher identifies a difficulty faced by teachers and RSE facilitators if they are to be sensitive to all sides in a debate. There are times when faith-sensitivity and sensitivity to other minority groups will cause a friction; it is then that the calibre of the RSE teacher is truly seen.

So, it seemed a natural progression to assume that LGBT+-sensitive RSE may also be important if LGBT+ students are to be valued in RSE.

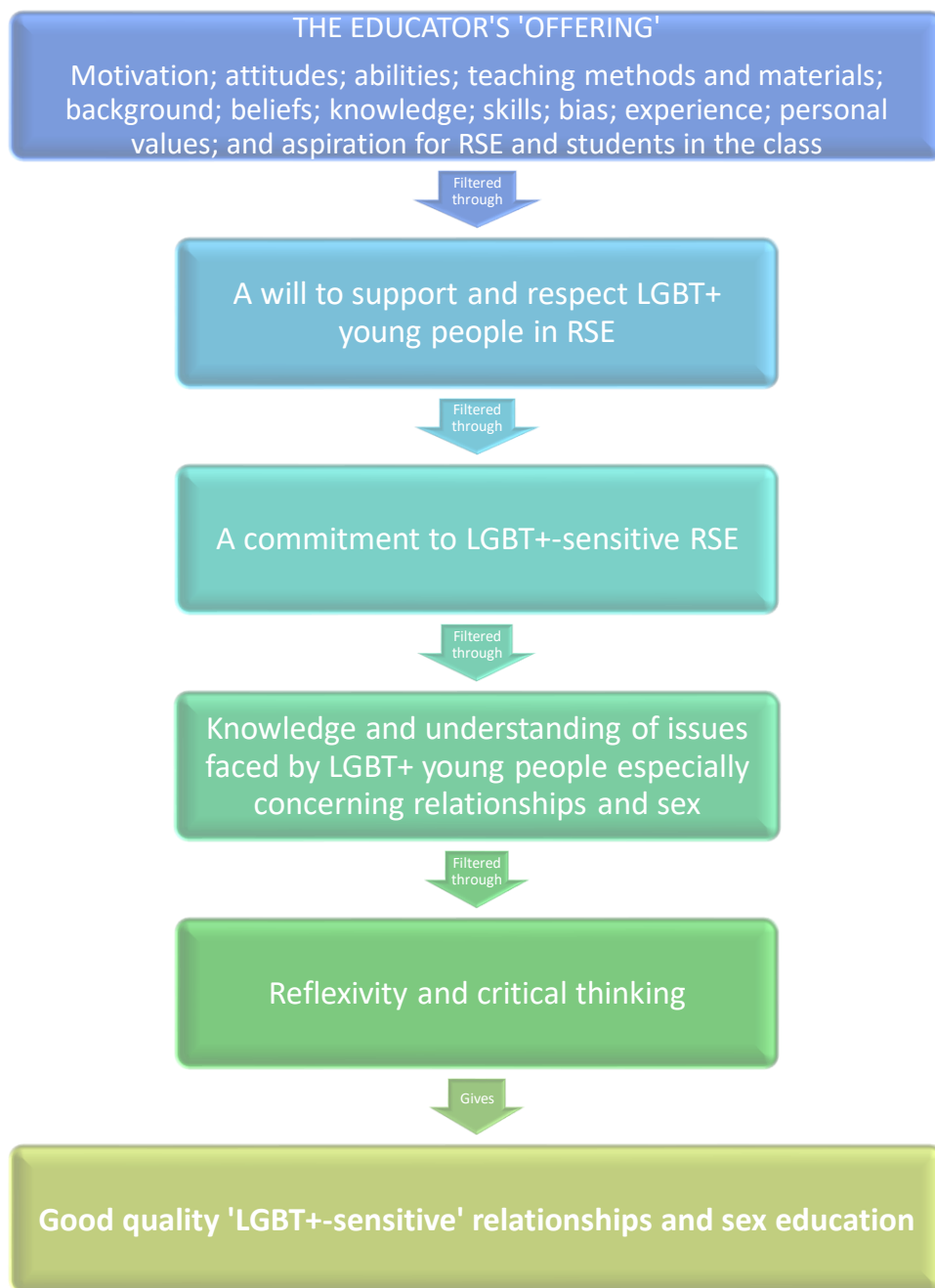


Figure 5.2 Model for 'LGBT+-Sensitive Filter' for Relationships and Sex Education

5.4.3 Student-Sensitive Filter Model

The wonderful young people taking part in this study have given those of us who work in the field of Relationships and Sex Education, so much to think about, so much to put into practice, and so much material to help in the creation of a methodological framework within which RSE teaching and policy can be situated.

Discussed here is one possible way in which the data generated by the study can be developed into a methodological framework that cannot only support faith-sensitive RSE in schools, but also help deliver RSE that will support other individuals or groups that may require RSE lessons to be more sensitive to their needs than they are at present. It is hoped that this model of teaching RSE, should teachers choose to employ it, will enhance the quality of and equality in, lessons for all students, but especially those who can easily fail to benefit from RSE because it is not always provided in a way that attempts to meet, understands or is caring of their needs.

The development of the 'Student-Sensitive Filter Model' occurred in three stages. Its genesis came about with the extensive work undertaken to design the 'Faith-Sensitive Filter Model'. The Faith-Sensitive Filter Model for RSE started to be formed during the analysis of the ideas and opinions emanating from the student data and has its origins in the understanding that participants wanted RSE to be faith-sensitive.

The students in my study described the kind of RSE teacher they want to experience in the classroom and while there is some diversity of views in the findings around issues of gender and whether the teacher should advise on moral issues or not, there was a general consensus concerning some of the other abilities and skills desired by students. The students said that they wanted 'good' teachers who needed a wide-ranging set of skills: know their subject matter; have good classroom management; are caring; able to help with difficult issues; put students at ease in the classroom; and have a good sense of humour. This may be a difficult for any individual to achieve but is desirable if teachers and facilitators of RSE are to be effective educators in this complex subject area. For an educator to be caring of divergent young people, they need to be sensitive to and have knowledge of the needs of various groups in the class in so far as is possible.

Once the LGBT+-Sensitive Filter had been produced based on the Faith-Sensitive Filter, with small adaptations, there seemed no reason to stop there, as the same approach could be used to make RSE sensitive to the needs of all students.

Many organisations are also calling for RSE to be made more inclusive of those from other minority groups, e.g. disabled students (FPA, 2018; Inside Government, 2018; RSE Hub, 2018) or are considering how RSE can help to safeguard vulnerable groups such as 'looked after' children who are more likely to be susceptible to sexually exploitation (Public Policy Exchange, 2017; University of Kent, 2018).

Students who may benefit from the implementation of the student-sensitive RSE could include: special needs students (Moxon, 2010); looked after children; those who may have been abused; young mums, dads or pregnant girls; students who have had abortions or their child has been adopted; students whose parents live apart; refugees; students who are sexually active and those who are not; students who would like to become sexually active soon and those who don't intend to have sex until they are married; traveller children; students with differing sexualities; those from varying cultures or religions and a myriad of other possible minority or silent majority groups.

If educators are to be sensitive to all the groups mentioned and possibly others besides, teachers and facilitators need to evaluate what they bring to the classroom, which, together with the set of contributions brought by the students, makes for a complexity that needs careful management. It is expected that this methodological framework for teaching RSE will help teachers to be mindful of the disparate nature of students and the consideration that is needed to teach effective and caring RSE to the full diversity of students.

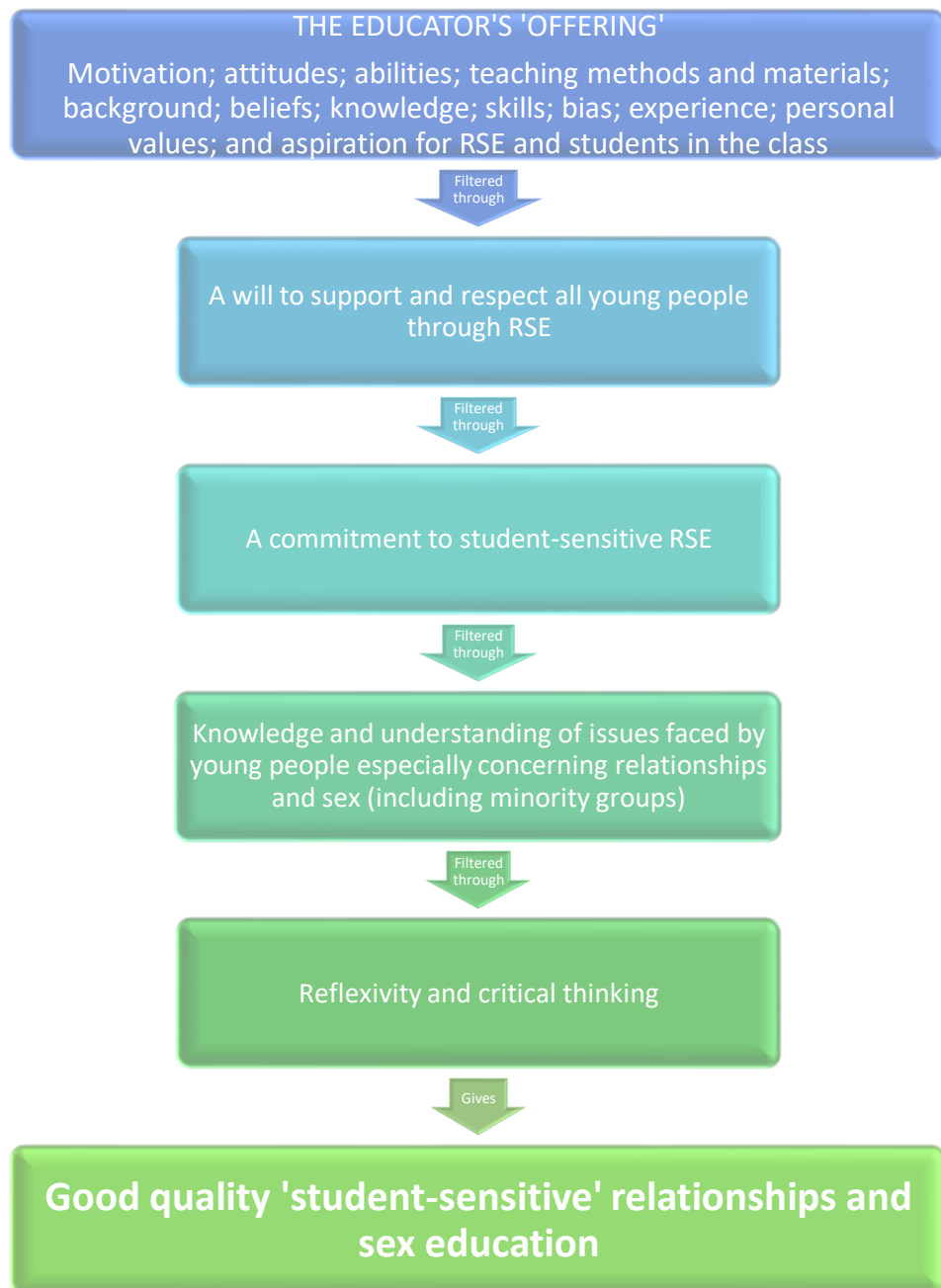


Figure 5.3 Model for 'Student-Sensitive Filter' for Relationships and Sex Education

5.4.3.1 Observers and actors: Research, teaching, impression management

It needs to be stressed that any theory or methodological ideas generated from this study have emerged from my interpretation of the data and are generated with the practical delivery of RSE lessons in mind. As such, the value of any theory is to a

large extent entwined with and will be demonstrated by any changes in future practice that take place in RSE.

Bassey (1990, p. 161) writes that “Academics are watchers of the world: teachers are actors in it. Teachers make decisions and search for ‘right’ decisions”. When studying how teachers can be reflexive and sensitive to the needs of their students it is necessary to stop and ponder, a little, on how teachers are seen by students. Educational academics and researchers may be observers and produce data and even theory, but it is how those data and theory are acted out in the classroom that makes a difference in the lives of students. The work to produce ‘The Student-Sensitive Filter’ is only as good as the ability, and will, of practitioners to apply it to their work in schools. All educators manage the impression (Hammersley & Atkins, 1983) they give to their students in the classroom. Being reflexive helps educators to manage their impression and enhances their ability to become sensitive to the needs of the students.

This impression is what the students see in a classroom where the teacher is sensitive to or attempts to be sensitive to the needs, backgrounds and identities of the students. The application of the ‘Student-Sensitive Filter’ in teaching does not turn a religious teacher into an atheist so that they can be sensitive to the needs of those students with no religious background, or an able-bodied teacher into one who is physically disabled so that they can understand some of the relationship challenges faced by less physically able students. Equally, it does not mean that an educator has to use condoms in their personal lives to be able to teach about safer sex and condom use or that they need to contract HIV to understand what students who are HIV-positive might find difficult to cope with. Being student-sensitive is more about the impression given by the teacher and how their ‘offering’ given to the class is managed by that teacher. “When an individual appears before others he [/she] will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation” (Goffman, 1956, p. 8).

All educationalists manage the impressions they give in the classroom. This is used to assist classroom management but can also be used to create an understanding of

teacher sensitivity on the part of the students. Impression management described by Hammersley and Atkins (1983) is something that we easily incorporate in everything we do, whether at home, at work and especially for teachers in schools. Most of the time individuals attempt to convey who they want people to see and have an array of masks depending on the audience they, as actors, find themselves before. However good the impression management in the class room may be, the respect and care for students needs to be genuine if it is to be seen by students as meaningful.

It is important for teachers and educators to remain, to a certain extent, in control of what happens in the classroom. This handling of the situation should not be controlling or manipulative but used to help keep the lesson on point as much as is needed, and also to help the teacher to be mindful of the time and the lesson content that needs to be conveyed. The control must also extend to conduct within the class if it is to remain a safe space. Indeed, some of my participants felt that, especially with RSE, classroom management skills were particularly important: one agnostic boy wrote that teachers need: "To be comedic about it [RSE] to lighten the mood and to know when to be serious".

By applying all four stages of the Student-Sensitive Filter, that commitment to student-sensitive RSE will be viewed by the students as genuine. Goffman (1956, p. 220) in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* maintains:

The impressions that the others give tend to be treated as claims and promises they have implicitly made and claims and promises tend to have a moral character. In his mind the individual says: "I am using these impressions of you as a way of checking up on you and your activity, and you ought not to lead me astray".

No teaching in the classroom and no impression management performance is, can be, or, I sense, should be value-free (Halsted & Reiss, 2003), but the values held by the teacher can affect the quality of the RSE lesson for good or ill. An educator by filtering their 'performance' can produce a presentation sensitive to and worthy of the students they are teaching. Students are always the best judge of an impression

management performance. The more educators commit to supporting young people and being sensitive to their differences and needs, the more educators know about aspects of the students' lives and the more critical and reflexive they can be about their own views and values, the greater the integrity will be sensed by the students. The integrity they deserve.

5.4.3.2 Possible strengths in the Student-Sensitive Filter Model

The student-sensitive filter model is not limited to the classroom teaching of RSE, although for it to be valuable the filter certainly needs to be implemented effectively at classroom level. There is no reason why this model could not be used to scrutinise Government policy or be adapted to allow organisations to analyse their stance, materials or pedagogies when campaigning on issues or producing resources for use in RSE.

Two obvious examples of this might be the campaigning groups 'Education for Choice', which focuses on 'abortion education' or pregnancy choices and abortion education as it is now, their materials for schools made available through Brook, and Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), one a self-described 'pro-choice' group, the other a self-described pro-life organisation. Both offer materials, advice and speakers to schools and their joint input in schools could lead to interesting and possibly fierce debates in lessons like ethics or RE. It would be important, though, to question how unbiased either group were in teaching a lesson on unintended pregnancy choices as part of RSE when they have such strong feelings on each side of the abortion debate. It would be interesting to know if either were to evaluate their materials or their educators' work using the Student-Sensitive Filter Model how different their lessons and resources would need to be, to become student-sensitive.

Government, local authorities, academy trusts, schools and organisations supporting or influencing RSE in schools, the community and our society need to:

- Evaluate their 'offering' in the same way as teachers, to understand how their political, campaigning or ethical position concerning RSE may bias or affect their involvement with the subject.
- Have a genuine will to support all young people through RSE, regardless of the needs and backgrounds of the young people.
- Have a commitment to student-sensitive RSE that seeks to serve young people, not a political or campaigning agenda.
- Develop a knowledge and understanding of the issues faced by young people and, if in a position to do so, encourage and resource others to do the same.
- Think critically and be honest and open with others concerning their own 'offering' and bias and be prepared to be inclusive and sensitive to all students and consider the views of other organisations and groups, seeking to work together with them even if they have differing political or moral values, for the good of young people.
- Different providers of RSE who want to see good quality RSE delivered in schools consider that RSE should be taught with varying emphasis such as rights-based RSE; public health-based RSE and pleasure-based RSE. I would argue that while good quality, truly comprehensive RSE is likely to include and embrace elements of all of these approaches, for RSE to inform, empower and support young people efficiently it needs to be student-sensitive. The Student-Sensitive Filter proposed here will enable educators and policy makers to evaluate what is needed from them, their schools, organisations involved in RSE and Government to provide RSE suitable for young people in the 21st century.

5.4.3.3 What are the limitations of these three models?

For the three models to work effectively, they have to 'buy-in' from people who may not want, or feel the need, to apply the Faith-Sensitive, LGBT+, or Student-Sensitive models to their practice.

It may take training for some teachers or policy makers to understand that teaching, and policy change is likely to impart values and possibly bias to students. Values can enhance a lesson, policy, or pedagogy; however, they can also diminish the content and alienate, indoctrinate, or manipulate students, so reducing the usefulness of RSE in schools.

Some educators may be reticent to submit to the scrutiny that could come from applying these models to their values, teaching and practice.

5.5 Limitations of the research

This research was undertaken with students from four diverse schools in England: one rural school with low levels of religious faith and three inner-city schools in areas of high religious observance – one all boys' faith school, one mixed-sex school and one all girls' school. Although the inner-city schools were very different in nature, all contained high numbers of students from religious and Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. The fourth school in a rural area was populated by students from mostly white British, non-religious backgrounds. The findings from this 'Rural School' were similar to those of the three inner-city schools in terms of the wish of students for RSE to be faith-sensitive and so it would seem possible to make a tentative generalisation that RSE should be faith-sensitive in all schools. Students demonstrated a wide range of responses on many other issues, such as the age at which they would expect young people to have sex for the first time. Where opinions within the whole group of students are more varied, then generalisations are more tentative, meaning that policy makers, at all levels, will need to view the findings taking this into account.

Other aspects of the study are limited by the emphasis on young people of faith. Much of the research was carried out intentionally in an area of high religious

observance due to the need for, and lack of, research concerning the juncture of faith and RSE. However, whilst this may limit generalisability it does not diminish the 'wider conclusions' that it is possible to draw from the findings. The value of the study is furthered by the inclusion of the contrasting Rural School as a research site (Fendler, 2006; Walters, 2007).

If using the 'Scale of Religious Importance' developed for this study in the future, it would be helpful to provide better descriptions for two of the labels on the 'Likert'-type scale, as it seemed some students may not have been clear what was meant by 'reasonably important' and 'moderately important'. 'Very Important' (it influences everything I do), 'not very important' and 'not at all important' were more straightforwardly understood by students. The lack of clarity here didn't seem to invalidate the analysis of students' responses, as the most useful responses for analysis were at the opposite ends of the Likert scale which, it seems, were well understood.

Another possible limitation in the data collection was the binary nature of the gender identity question. Students were asked, in question 2, to indicate if they were male or female. When carrying out this kind of study in the future, a simple open-ended question asking students for their gender would give those taking on a non-binary gender identity an opportunity to articulate their gender identity in whatever manner they might see appropriate.

It could be argued that more contextual information, such as the schools' RSE policies, resources used or teaching pedagogies employed, should have been sought as part of the data collection. It is true that comparing what a school wishes to teach 'students' could be an interesting and valuable research topic. If I were doing more research in this area it may be a rich vein to explore, however, the focus of all data collection in the research reported in this thesis was the views of young people in schools not the intentions of adults.

5.6 Recommendations

Like many generations before them (Lee, 1983; Pilcher, 2005; Ofsted, 2013), most students whose voices were represented by this study wanted more time for and content in relationships and sex education in schools; they also wanted it to be better taught, by teachers who are more sensitive to their needs. What was known as SRE, now officially named RSE in England (although many of us have been using that term for years), is currently being scrutinised and consulted on afresh by the Department for Education (2018) and others. As children and young people develop from baby to child and child through adolescence to adulthood, there is an opportunity to create a system of RSE to better inform, empower and support children and young people in our schools and communities through the provision of high quality RSE. There will be much debate concerning what constitutes 'high quality' RSE, as the Department for Education decides how RSE might be taught as a statutory part of the school curriculum. The recommendations arising from the voices of young people in this study have a valuable contribution to make to that discussion.

The recommendations below are directed at the differing groups who could be involved in RSE. The models and ideas devised, as part of these recommendations, have been prompted and directed by my participants' views and the findings of the study. These recommendations, whilst possibly limited by the scope of the research, express the voices of the participating young people, which deserve to be heard by those involved in education at all levels of policy and practice as they take the opportunity to formulate RSE suitable for the flourishing of young people in 21st century Britain.

5.6.1 *Recommendations for students*

5.6.1.1 Questions to ask

Students in the study stated that some schools deliver first class relationships and sex education, while others don't teach much relationships or sex education at all.

There is also great variation in the content and pedagogy of RSE. Students can profitably analyse the content and of RSE in their school by asking a few questions:

- Does your school teach RSE in an effective and an appropriate way for you? (Remember, people's views on what is appropriate may differ.)
- Does your school teach what you want or need to know in RSE?
- Is RSE in your school sensitive to the needs and identities of all students?

5.6.1.2 Have your voice heard in an appropriate way

If the answer to these questions is yes, great; if not then students can make their voices heard in an appropriate way. School Councils are often good places to make sure the voices of students are heard. Talk to the teacher who provides oversight for RSE or who is sympathetic to the views of students and enlist their help to bring about change. It is possible for students to do some simple research to find out what the wishes of students are concerning RSE; this can encourage a school to improve its provision.

5.6.2 *Recommendations for parents*

5.6.2.1 Communication

Many participants in the study wanted effective communication and good relationships with their parents and to learn about relationships and sex from them, but most found this problematic. The development of positive and honest conversations about relationships and sex between parents and their children needs to start much earlier than in the teens. Students reported that they often had "awkward" relationships with parents, meaning that they were more likely to learn about relationships and sex from their friends and the internet, even though many understood such sources to be inferior to learning from their parents and from school.

5.6.2.2 Family shame and religious ignorance

A high number of students thought that if they did anything wrong, especially concerning relationships and sex, they might “shame the family”. Some thought that they would rather have, or encourage their girlfriend to have, an abortion, even though they understood it to be against their religion, rather than bring the ‘shame’, of having a child at an early age outside marriage, on their family. Parents need to consider how their children’s perceptions of parental views on relationships, sex and morality can influence actions in a negative as well as a positive way. Many young people saw their families, and parents in particular, as important in their lives, often more important than the religion they espoused. If parents can become knowledgeable about current issues that will be discussed in RSE, these topics could also be discussed at home where parents are able to inform their children about what their family, culture or religion sees as important, enriching and contextualising the content of school RSE lessons for their children.

Young people wrote that they wanted to learn about sex and relationships from a faith perspective. Parents could work together with faith leaders to bring this about. The study showed that a number of those students who considered themselves very religious were still not sure what their religion taught concerning relationships and sex.

5.6.2.3 Parental involvement

If parents start to become involved in the debate concerning RSE and develop skills to be able to talk to their children about relationships and sex, they and their offspring can become empowered in this area.

Parents can also become involved by standing to become parent governors. All schools should have an RSE policy. This is the responsibility (in 2018) of the governors, although it is likely to be drafted by senior staff at the school. Being a parent governor means there can be a direct influence on the RSE policy of the school. Some schools offer classes to parents or share materials used in RSE before they are used in the classroom with students. If parents are unsure regarding the

content or context of materials being used in their child's school, they can ask for information.

If parents decide to try to understand the complexities of modern life in Britain and any dilemmas and conflicts that may be present for their children and want to discuss values, religious or otherwise, with their children, then there is scope for parents to interact with both their children's school and their children alike.

5.6.3 Recommendations for the Government, Department for Education and Ofsted

The UK Government, Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted have a specific duty to ensure that the education in English schools is of a high standard regardless of whether the subject being taught is examined or not. RSE, although not an examination subject (yet), is important for the health and wellbeing of the nation and as such should be taught to a high standard and the quality of its provision assessed with rigour and effectiveness by those teaching RSE in schools, supported by the DfE, Ofsted and others.

5.6.3.1 What should high quality RSE be?

According to participants in this study, high quality RSE should:

- Be of a higher quality than that experienced by students in many schools.
- Be taught by teachers who are knowledgeable about relationships and sex education and who are confident and comfortable teaching RSE and able to address the classroom management issues that may arise during lessons. The need for these abilities should lead to an understanding of the importance of initial and continuing teacher training in RSE.
- Be taught by teachers who are sensitive to the needs of all students and are able to contextualise RSE for students in a way that make RSE relevant to the lives students live.

- Include all aspects of RSE, incorporating a wide range of topics, taught in an age appropriate way.
- Involve parents in the formation of policy and practice concerning RSE.
- Empower parents to engage with their children about issues of relationships and sex.
- Accept that RSE may need to be taught in same sex groups for some students to interact with the subject matter of RSE in a positive way.

One of the main reasons for undertaking my study at the intersection of religion and RSE was the dearth of research in this area despite the increasing numbers of students from religious backgrounds in our schools, especially in inner-city areas. By making RSE faith-sensitive, it may be possible to give more parents and communities confidence in the content and methods of teaching employed in RSE lessons. This could in turn encourage parents, especially religious ones, who are considering removing their children from school RSE to allow them to attend, hopefully removing the suspicion that schools may be (to use a term used by one of the students in my study) “polluting” the minds of the students by talking about sex. Parents who are worried by school RSE may move their children into a fundamentalist faith school, thereby isolating those children and giving them a narrow education (Spielman, 2018).

5.6.3.2 Who decides what and how RSE should be taught at a local level? RSE Local Advisory Boards (RSE LABs)

The Government’s policy statement (DfE, 2017a) stated that RSE needs to be: ‘age appropriate’ and ‘of high quality’. Several agencies concerned with the content of RSE consider that RSE should be ‘comprehensive’ in nature (Brook, 2018; Sex Education Forum, 2018). But who decides the detail of the provision?

Given that the Government has stated: “The guidance will support schools in how to approach teaching these subjects and set out the core pillars the subjects should cover” but that they don’t want the legislation to be too “prescriptive” and want to

work “with a wide range of experts and interested parties” (DfE, 2017a, p. 2), but who might these interested parties be and how will they be consulted?

One possible way forward could be the development of local bodies to discuss the content, policy and teaching of RSE. For clarification, I will give these local bodies the working title of ‘RSE Local Advisory Boards’ (RSE LABs). These RSE LABs could be made statutory and produce an agreed syllabus for an area. If RSE LABS were set up in a similar way to the local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) with various interest groups being included, then they could consult with local groups, parents and interested parties and faith groups where appropriate to prevent duplication of development work and allow for a wider and more comprehensive consultation within communities.

It would make sense for areas with a comparable demography, to work together or to ‘buy in’ to agreed syllabus from a similar area, making adaptations and improvements where needed, remaining responsible for the quality of the agreed syllabus in that particular borough or authority area, but reducing duplication of work and waste of public money. Schools with differing ethos from most main stream schools such as faith schools, could still be involved in the consultations, but may of course choose to deliver RSE differently as long as their provision of RSE is still in line with Government guidance (DfE 2017).

If this system were to be set up, those on such RSE LABs could include:

- A head teacher and/or RSE adviser from the Local Authority, where they still exist
- Parents
- Personnel from the NHS, e.g. a young person’s sexual health provider
- A local authority representative, perhaps the director of education
- A school governor
- A representative from a relevant academy trust

- Faith leaders, if appropriate
- A small number of local councillors
- One or two representatives from agencies providing RSE in schools or non-NHS sexual health advice and support
- An academic from a university in the locality, especially if it carries out research that can be used to inform the development of the agreed syllabus and the schemes of work for RSE in their area
- A small number of student representatives.

It would also be possible for student RSE LABs to be set up to consult with students and have their findings included in any consultations.

The composition and responsibilities of the RSE LABS would need to be directed by Government to ensure they remain balanced and inclusive as part of the Government's support to schools, while setting out the 'core pillars' (DfE, 2017a, p. 2) as guidance.

There would need to be some funding either from national or local government to ensure that the work of the RSE LABS was organised and driven forward by someone in a paid post, but this could be paid for on an hourly contract. Once they are set up and running effectively it is possible that just a few meetings a year might be adequate to keep the work of the RSE LAB moving forward, although there may also be a need for smaller groups of people to work on sections of the agreed syllabus or scheme of work, which could then be bought back to the RSE LAB for ratification.

5.6.4 Recommendations for teachers, schools and local policy makers

Many of the issues to be considered by schools have already been mentioned in the recommendations for the Government. However, it is worth noting a few additional aspects of RSE that need to be addressed at a more local level, especially when

making choices about RSE policy, content, ethos, and materials used in schools.

Findings from the research that are relevant to these recommendations are:

- Teachers, schools and local policy makers need to gather and pay serious attention to the views of the students in their schools. Participants were able to demonstrate with clarity, ingenuity and common sense during their involvement in this study, so consultation with students may be the most effective tool to use when formulating local policy, content and determination of what age to teach various topics in RSE.
- Students understood school to be the best and most trusted place to learn about relationships and sex. It has been shown by the study that high quality, student-sensitive RSE can aid the wellbeing of students, as such schools and the way in which RSE is delivered in schools is fundamentally important to welfare of young people.
- By being sensitive to the needs of individuals, teachers can help students access RSE and be given the capability (Sen, 1985) to gain most from their RSE.
- Outside agencies coming into schools to teach RSE can be a positive addition to any RSE provision, but they need to be scrutinised carefully for hidden agendas or inability to contextualise their lessons.
- Students favoured a spiral curriculum taught regularly and often, rather than drop-down days.

Teachers, senior management teams in schools, local authorities, academy trusts and school governors all make policies that will affect the quality of RSE in their schools or in their area. It is possible that other agendas, political positions, organisational or personal, can take precedence over good quality truly comprehensive RSE. By including local people, minority groups, educationalists, service providers and others in the formulation of local RSE policy and teaching, RSE could become more sensitive to the needs of students, which in turn could encourage greater participation in, and understanding of, the importance of RSE. It

could encourage 'buy in' from groups such as parents and faith groups, enabling community support for truly comprehensive RSE.

5.6.5 Recommendations for faith leaders and others in faith groups

Faith leaders can take on important roles in some young people's lives. Faith leaders have the chance to encourage and inform young people and their parents concerning all aspects of relationships and sex; however, only 29% of the students in the study indicated that they felt faith groups were good at preparing them for a life that would include sex.

5.6.5.1 Religion seen as negative regarding relationships and sex

Most students from faith backgrounds understood their faith to say that there should be no sex outside of marriage, either before marriage or as an extramarital affair; a few said that there should be no LGBT relationships. Students saw religious teaching on relationships and sex as being about prohibition in sexual practise, with very little to say concerning relationships. With a few notable exceptions, students understood their faith to say very little that was positive about relationships and sex.

5.6.5.2 Students were confused concerning religious teachings about relationships and sex

The students knew little about where the teachings came from in the religious texts. They wanted to discuss these issues in a faith setting with those who would know where to find the writings, give guidance and signposts to places they could go to for support and advice. Whilst many students were happy to accept the teaching about not having sex until marriage in theory, many did not think it was likely to remain true of their lives, in practice.

5.6.5.3 Faith groups and faith leaders can support or hinder young people

During this very important time in their development, faith groups can give a strong sense of belonging to young people, a space to learn what their religion teaches and why, a safe place to explore who they are as young people of faith and who

they want to become. However, young people can also easily become alienated from their religious community.

5.6.5.4 Faith groups and faith leaders can support their young people

By being prepared to talk to young people positively about relationships and sex and what their religion teaches on these issues, would enable students to understand more readily their religious tenets, in the contexts of everyday life. Saying “just don’t do it”, without any kind of explanation leaves young people confused and, it would seem from some of the data in this study, quite angry. Many students from strong and sometimes strict, faith backgrounds explained that they had questions and conflicts around topics like peer, societal and media pressure, sexual urges, masturbation, pornography, and LGBT+ issues. Whilst it may need some training or at least some youth work experience for people in faith groups to talk to their young people concerning relationships and sex, it is important to understand that if not engaged by their faith group in dialogue concerning relationships and sex, young people may turn to their friends or the internet for advice, most of which is unlikely to be faith-sensitive in nature.

Each area of the country has a SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education). SACREs advise locally on Religious Education (RE) and collective worship in schools and are made up of various people from education, the community and faith groups. Meetings seek to agree the way in which RE should be taught in their area. Whilst SACREs have not been brought together to advise on RSE, they may have a range of views that could be useful in the discussions concerning faith-sensitive RSE.

SACREs could:

- Understand and support the notion that RSE is for everyone and seek to increase the quality of RSE for all students.
- Have discussions concerning the need for faith-sensitivity in RSE if it is believed that would be helpful in their area.

- Consult young people, including those of faith, regarding the content of and pedagogy for RSE.
- Feed back to the education committee of their local authority and advise academy boards or multi-academy trusts concerning RSE on issues of faith and its place in RSE.
- Be involved in training faith leaders concerning the needs of young people around issues of relationships and sex.

5.6.6 Recommendations for agencies, organisations, voluntary groups and businesses providing RSE

The use of outside agencies to provide RSE in schools was widely welcomed by students in the study, although there was some disagreement at the focus group stage as to which external speakers were most helpful.

5.6.6.1 Check motivations for providing services

Organisations of any kind that provide RSE lessons are likely to have a set of values they seek to espouse in their work; these may become evident in the RSE they deliver (even if they are unaware that is the case). This needs to be recognised and scrutinised to ensure that any RSE provided is suitable for all students. This scrutiny can be supported using the ‘Student-Sensitive Filter’. There needs to be transparency regarding any campaigns the organisations support and questions asked as to whether campaigning activity spills over into their teaching of RSE and if that creates unhelpful bias in the classroom. RSE cannot be value-free and there needs to be an understanding that not all bias is unhelpful, e.g. abhorrence of female genital mutilation.

5.6.6.2 Local agencies can use their local knowledge to better serve schools

Often, local organisations are well positioned to create high quality materials in line with the needs of students; local RSE providers may be especially attuned to the type of RSE that is most effective in any particular area.

5.6.6.3 National organisations can consult more widely and possibly use greater capital to produce good quality resources

There should be awareness of all players and voices in the realm of RSE provision to avoid consultation with a narrow group on the production of materials. Students' needs and wishes for RSE need to be kept at the centre of all RSE provision.

5.6.7 *Recommendations for sexual health service providers*

The work undertaken in the community by sexual health services is vitally important for young people and their provision of RSE can be very effective.

5.6.7.1 Sexual health service providers can link students to their services

Ideally, their involvement in RSE would always be desirable.

5.6.7.2 Specialist lessons need to be part of a comprehensive course of RSE

Lessons with only sexual health messages have been criticised by students in the study as not containing enough emotional or relationship content and context. Schools should be providing this alongside any sexual health messages.

5.6.7.3 Guard against making assumptions about how sexually active students are

While most young people who come in to a sexual health clinic will be sexually active, that is not true of most Year 10 and 11 students, given that the average age at first sex in Britain is above 16 and only 29% of girls and 31% of boys had sex before the age of 16 (Mercer et al., 2013). Lessons from sexual health providers should be sensitive to the different needs of the students in the classroom who, including some of those who have already accessed sexual health services, are likely as yet not needed those services.

5.6.8 *Together – for everyone*

The navigation of what should constitute RSE in schools is no easy task for educators. The needs of students, the politics of adults and the rights of LGBT+

students, religious students, parents, disabled students, looked after children and other minority groups are complex and will only be met through the development of carefully negotiated RSE. Foresight and wisdom are needed, but if issues are worked through in a spirit of co-operation and not alienation, then together, students, national Government, local policy makers, service providers, RSE facilitators, schools, faith groups and parents can work to provide RSE that will best serve and enable the next generation to flourish.

5.7 Further research

This study has been a privilege to undertake; however, it has also led to a number of unanswered questions that need further investigation.

The conflict felt by many of the young people was palpable in the responses they gave to the study at every stage of the data collection, especially when discussing religious beliefs, their relationships with parents and how their religion fits in, or not, to their lives being lived in Britain. The research has demonstrated that there is tension caused in young people by living in one world at school, in another in the community and yet another out on the street, and then entering a different world at home or in a place of worship, triggering stress within their identity development and how young people see themselves. The study has demonstrated that there is room for parents and faith groups to better support young people. Discovering an effective way for them to do this would be a very worthwhile additional study.

Probably the most helpful research project for school RSE would be one to better understand how to train and equip teachers to be 'student-sensitive' within RSE in such a way that the identities of young people can be supported and nurtured, giving them the space and confidence to be who they want to be. It is important to inspire young people to develop relationships that are healthy, positive and caring and a personal identity that they can both be proud of and comfortable with. This is likely to include their ethnicity, faith, gender, sexuality and ability among other characteristics. Students need to be empowered to be who they are and

encouraged to move towards who they want to be. RSE has a role to play in that self and identity formation.

5.8 Conclusion of the study

Most students in my sample wanted RSE to be taught in a more systematic way, covering a greater range of topics to include online engagement, e.g. pornography and social media, how to manage and end romantic relationships, as well as LGBT+ issues and religious and cultural aspects of relationships and sex. Students wished to be taught by expert teachers who could tackle what some students saw as ‘awkward’ lesson content and possibly challenging classroom behaviour. Students wanted teachers who were emotionally and religiously literate, knowledgeable about the issues faced by and sensitive to the needs of individual students, especially those from various minority or silent majority groups. Students, like everyone else involved in RSE, considered that RSE should be age-appropriate, but there was some disagreement, amongst students, as to the ages at which it was appropriate to teach various RSE topics.

Students of high, low and no religious observance considered that all RSE should be faith-sensitive, which they took to mean that RSE lessons would include and be respectful of religious doctrines concerning relationships and sex, where appropriate, as part of the content of RSE lessons. Faith-sensitive, LGBT+-sensitive and Student-sensitive filter models have been developed in the light of the findings of this study to support teachers as they strive to make their RSE lessons sensitive to all students.

More students wanted to learn about RSE from their parents than actually did, most considered that their school RSE could be improved and students were not sure if faith groups or faith leaders were good at preparing them for a life that would include sex.

Students’ identities were found to be fragile and fluid as they tried to work toward developing their own personal identities and were influenced by the media, peers, family, religion, culture and societal pressure.

It would seem that some of those who should be in the vanguard of teaching RSE to young people are not rising to the challenge. Those who could, maybe should, be supporting young people of faith and no faith through the vagaries of adolescence, i.e. parents, schools, local and national policy makers, RSE and sexual health providers and faith and community groups, could work together to equip young people for a life that is likely to involve intimate relationships and sex. There is work to be done, but as, in 2018, I look back at the battle there has been to bring about statutory relationships education into primary schools and relationships and sex education in all English secondary schools, I also look forward to what might happen in the future, so that together the aforementioned parties are equipped to assist young people in their move towards positive relationships, sex and life in 21st century Britain.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 - List of verbatim questions provided for the study by students in the formative semi-structured focus groups

1. Did the school inform you beforehand? [about the sex education lesson]
2. Does [talking about] sex make you feel uncomfortable?
3. Where you informed about same sex marriages, in your Sex ed lessons?
4. Do your parents talk to you regularly about sex?
5. Are you proud of your views on sex and religion?
6. Does your religion impact your views on sex and religion?
7. Do you feel comfortable with seeing [pictures of] diseases?
8. Does your faith affect your view on sex?
9. Have you felt pressured by the school to study sexual education?
10. Have you had any sex education before?
11. Are you comfortable speaking about sex and relationships
12. Does your religion affect your view on sex?
13. Do you feel pressured into learning about or coming into contact with sex?
14. Do you feel comfortable talking about sex?
15. Have your parents spoken to you about sex and relationships? If so how much detail did they go into?
16. How do you feel about sex?
17. Have you been exposed to sex?
18. Do you know what contraception is and how and when to use it?

19. How far do you think you have control of your opinion towards a certain topic without the/your religion interfering?
20. What are your beliefs about sex before marriage?
21. Did you have any previous experiences about this topic?
22. Although you may have a different point of view, do you agree with the religious sexual intercourse rules?
23. Do you agree with your own religion's sex rules? E.g. gays getting married?
24. Should schools teach sex education more frequently?
25. Although it may affect your religion, should you choose when you should have sex and what contraception's to use?
26. How does the media effect your opinion on sex?
27. What does your religion say about pregnancy and rape?
28. How is sex for you, it is a problem doing it at this age?
29. How important is your faith to you?
30. If you want to know what they think their religion says about sex.
31. How important is sex to you? You would want to know what their religion has to say about sex.
32. Some people would know and some wouldn't what their faith said about sex.
33. Who considers faith a priority and if so does your faith hold you back from going into relationships?
34. Is sex an issue in your faith? For example, some say the Bible says that you shouldn't have sex, it is forbidden before marriage, but quite a lot of people don't listen to that. Is there a conflict between your morals and your religion? It is a conflict in the moral and

religious. It is because the Bible says you shouldn't have sex before marriage?

35. Who would say that their religion is a root for their relationship?
36. How easy is it to get a good balance to get a healthy in a relationship and lifestyle?
37. Did anything that I did in my previous relationship have anything to do with my religion?
38. Could you use faith as a guideline in a relationship?
39. Is religion important in your relationship?
40. If you have a relationship with someone of a different religion would this affect your relationship?
41. Does faith restrict or guide you in being in a relationship?
42. Is sex a priority in a relationship?
43. If your relationship is with another sort of religion, does this affect your relationship?
44. What does your faith leader say about having a sexual relationship?
Does your faith make you feel guilty in a (sexual) relationship?
What faith groups think about relationships and sex.
45. If this is their true view rather than just a cultural one?
46. Do faith group ready their young people for a life that will probably include sexual activity?
47. What do faith groups think about SRE in schools?
48. Should sex ed be compulsory with no opt out for parents?
49. What do YP think of Sex ed in schools?
50. Get young people of faiths views on SRE.
51. How many parents withdraw their children from Classes?

52. Are there things you might learn in SRE that you would rather not hear about?
53. If later on you decide you do want to know about these things then where would you go for advice?
54. What qualities should a teacher have?

7.2 Appendix 2 - Scenarios for workshops

1. Jay has just found out that his girlfriend is eight weeks pregnant. He likes her, but doesn't feel they will be together long term. He is not ready to be a Dad.
2. Chantelle has been going out with her boyfriend for about two months. They expect to go to university in 18 months' time. Chantelle's boyfriend keeps asking her to have sex with him. She doesn't want to as she would rather wait a bit, but she doesn't want to lose him.
3. Marcus is almost 17. He has a group of friends who talk about their sexual activity all the time. They asked him if he had had sex. When he told them that he hadn't they laughed at him. Since then they keep teasing him and ask him if he is gay. He doesn't want to cope with their jokes anymore.
4. Raj and Isaac both have a personal faith and come from very religious families. They are in the third year at university. They are very attracted to each other. Both have close friends that are girls and Isaac had a girlfriend for a short time, but they have both known for a while now, that they are only attracted to people of the same gender. Their families have made it very clear that a homosexual relationship would be unacceptable and they love and respect their parents.
5. Magdalena has been living with her boyfriend for around a year. Her family disapprove of them living together. The first three months were lovely, but then one night she burned the dinner, he threw the saucepan across the kitchen only just missing her. Since then he has become more aggressive, checks her phone and won't let her see her friends. Last night he forced her to have sex with him. This is not what Magdalena had expected. She still loves him, but she wants the abusive behaviour to stop. She feels her family will not be very understanding.
6. Sam has just found out that she is pregnant. She is expected to be a virgin when she gets married and feels very worried about the shame she may bring on her family. She thinks that her boyfriend is finding it very difficult and is not sure that he will stay around.

7.3 Appendix 3 - Workshop - Personal Response Form

Thank you for taking part in this research project, it may help influence the teaching of Relationships and Sex Education in our schools.

The answers you give will be totally confidential. I am the only person who will know what you have written. All information or opinions you give will be anonymised before being shown or presented to any other person. Your name will be removed from this form.

This first stage of the workshop is short and answers given in just note form will be fine.

1. What age are you (in years)?

2. Male Female (Please circle your answer)

3. What is your faith, religion or belief system? E.g. Hindu, atheist etc.

4. What is your original family nationality?

5. What is your nationality?

6. How important is your faith, religion or belief system to you? (Please circle your answer)

Very important. (It influences everything I do)	Reasonably important	Moderately important	Not very important	Not at all important
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7. Is your faith, religion or belief system important to? (Please circle your answer)

Your family

Yourself

Both

Neither

Scenarios

Please read the following situations and write your brief thoughts on each one. (Just notes, no sentences needed)

7. Jay has just found out that his girlfriend is eight weeks pregnant. He likes her, but doesn't feel they will be together long term. He is not ready to be a Dad.

What should he do?

Why?

8. Chantelle has been going out with her boyfriend for about two months. They expect to go to university in 18 months' time. Chantelle's boyfriend keeps asking her to have sex with him. She doesn't want to as she would rather wait a bit, but she doesn't want to lose him.

What should she do?

Why?

9. Marcus is almost 17. He has a group of friends who talk about their sexual activity all the time. They asked him if he had had sex. When he told them that he hadn't they laughed at him. Since then they keep teasing him and ask him if he is gay. He doesn't want to cope with their jokes anymore.

What should he do?

Why?

10. Raj and Isaac both have a personal faith and come from very religious families. They are in the third year at university. They are very attracted to each other. Both have close friends that are girls and Isaac had a girlfriend for a short time, but they have both known for a while now, that they are only attracted to people of the same gender. Their families have made it very clear that a homosexual relationship would be unacceptable and they love and respect their parents.

What are the issues they face?

What should they do?

Why?

11. Magdalena has been living with her boyfriend for around a year. Her family disapprove of them living together. The first three months were lovely, but then one night she burned the dinner, he threw the saucepan across the kitchen only just missing her. Since then he has become more aggressive, checks her phone and won't let her see her friends. Last night he forced her to have sex with him. This is not what Magdalena had expected. She still loves him, but she wants the abusive behaviour to stop. She feels her family will not be very understanding.

What should she do?

Why?

12. Sam has just found out that she is pregnant. She is expected to be a virgin when she gets married and feels very worried about the shame she may bring on her family. She thinks that her boyfriend is finding it very difficult and is not sure that he will stay around.

What are the issues she faces?

What should she do?

Why?

7.4 Appendix 4 - Workshop - Group Response Form

Scenarios

Please read the following situations and write your brief thoughts on each one.

(Write what you have decided together as a group)

1. **Jay** has just found out that his girlfriend is eight weeks pregnant. He likes her, but doesn't feel they will be together long term. He is not ready to be a Dad.

What should he do?

Why?

2. **Chantelle** has been going out with her boyfriend for about two months. They expect to go to university in 18 months' time. Chantelle's boyfriend keeps asking her to have sex with him. She doesn't want to as she would rather wait a bit, but she doesn't want to lose him.

What should she do?

Why?

3. **Marcus** is almost 17. He has a group of friends who talk about their sexual activity all the time. They asked him if he had had sex. When he told them that he hadn't they laughed at him. Since then they keep teasing him and ask him if he is gay. He doesn't want to cope with their jokes anymore.

What should he do?

Why?

4. **Raj and Isaac** both have a personal faith and come from very religious families. They are in the third year at university. They are very attracted to each other. Both have close friends that are girls and Isaac had a girlfriend for a short time, but they have both known for a while now, that they are only attracted to people of the same sex. Their families have made it very clear that a homosexual relationship would be unacceptable and they love and respect their parents.

What are the issues they face?

What should they do?

Why?

5. **Magdalena** has been living with her boyfriend for around a year. Her family disapprove of them living together. The first three months were lovely, but then one night she burned the dinner, he threw the saucepan across the kitchen only just missing her. Since then he has become more aggressive, checks her phone and won't let her see her friends. Last night he forced her to have sex with him. This is not what Magdalena had expected. She still loves him, but she wants the abusive behaviour to stop. She feels her family will not be very understanding.

What should she do?

Why?

6. **Sam** has just found out that she is pregnant. She is expected to be a virgin when she gets married and feels very worried about the shame she may bring on her family. She thinks that her boyfriend is finding it very difficult and is not sure that he will stay around.

What are the issues she faces?

What should she do?

Why?

7.5 Appendix 5 - Research instrument – Questionnaire

Name

Relationships and Sex Education in British Schools:

Should it be faith-sensitive?

Thank you for taking part in this research project, it may help influence the teaching of Relationships and Sex Education in our schools.

The answers you give will be totally confidential. I am the only person who will know what you have written. All information or opinions you give will be anonymised before being shown or presented to any other person. Your name will be removed from this form.

Please answer the questions in as much depth as you can, to help me (the researcher) understand the reasons for your answers. This will help inform the analysis of the data gathered.

Where there are multiple choice questions, please circle the answer or answers that best reflect your views.

1. What age are you (in years)?
2. Male Female (Please circle your answer)
3. What is your faith, religion or belief system? E.g. Hindu, Atheist etc.
4. What is your original family nationality?
5. What is your nationality?
6. How important is your faith, religion or belief system to you? (Please circle your answer)

Very important. (It influences everything I do)	Reasonably important	Moderately important	Not very important	Not at all important
--	----------------------	----------------------	--------------------	----------------------

7. Is your faith, religion or belief system important to? (Please circle your answer)
Your family Yourself Both Neither
8. Where or from who would you **like** to learn most of your relationship and sex education?
(Please circle your answer/s)

Your parents	Your friends	Your school	The media and the internet
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Other (Please specify)

9. Where do you **actually** get most of your relationships and sex education from?
(Please circle your answer/s)

Your parents	Your friends	Your school	The media and the internet
--------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------

Other (please specify)

10. Should relationships and sex education (RSE) be compulsory (**have** to be taught) in **all** schools?

Yes No (Please circle your answer)

Please give a reason for your answer to the question?

.....
.....
.....

11. Should parents have the right to take their children out of RSE lessons?

Yes No Maybe (Please circle your answer)

Please give a reason for your answer to the question?

.....
.....
.....

12. Should Students have the right to take themselves out of RSE lessons?

Yes No Maybe (Please circle your answer)

Please give a reason for your answer to the question?

.....
.....
.....

13. What characteristics would you want a teacher to have, if they were going to teach you RSE?

.....
.....

14. What topics ought to be taught in RSE at some point in schools?
 (Give an age when you think it should be taught or put X if you think they should **not** be taught)

Topics (Primary and Secondary)	At what age should this topic be taught in schools?
a. What should a good friendship be like?	
b. Family and friends are important	
c. What are the characteristics of a relationship which is not healthy?	
d. What body changes happen at puberty (Puberty happen between 10-14)	
e. Menstruation (periods)	
f. The biology of sex	
g. The emotional side of having relationships and sexual relationships	
h. Choices about sex, where to go for help and support and the joys and possible consequences of having sex.	
i. Homophobia	
j. Lesbian, gay bisexual, and transgender issues (LGBT)	
k. Pregnancy	
l. Unintended pregnancy choices (adoption, abortion, keep the baby and where to seek support and help)	
m. Parenting	
n. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)	
o. HIV/ AIDS	
p. Contraception and protection against pregnancy	
q. What the law says about relationships and sex	
r. Abuse and domestic violence, forced marriage etc...	

15. What else do you think should be taught about relationships and sex, in schools?

.....
 Why?

16. Is there anything that you would rather not learn about relationships and sex in any part of the school curriculum?

.....

Why?

.....

17. Where do you think you might be able to get information about relationships and sex, when you have left school and are older?

a.

Would you rather learn about relationships and sex education now, in school?

b. Yes No Maybe (Please circle your answer)

c. Why?

.....

18. How do the media and popular culture influence your ideas about relationships and sex?

.....

.....

.....

b. If you think the media does influence you, is it in a positive or negative or neutral way?

.....

c. Why?

.....

.....

19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

(Please tick one of the boxes for each statement, whichever is most applicable)

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Not sure Or not applicable	Disagree	Totally disagree
a. My parents are happy to talk to me about relationships and sex.					
b. I am comfortable talking about sex with my parents about relationships and sex.					
c. My religion gives me a code (set of standards or rules) to live my life by.					
d. Sometimes I find it hard to live by that code.					
e. I don't believe in a religion but I still have a code that I live by and it is important to me.					
f. Faith groups and faith leaders are 'good' at preparing young people for a life that will involve sex.					
g. My faith or beliefs don't affect what I decide is right about relationships.					
h. I think we should learn what different religions say about relationships and sex, even if we don't have a religion ourselves.					
i. My religion or beliefs affect the way I think about sex and relationships.					
j. I think it is important to show respect to different religions in relationships and sex education.					
k. I feel the pressure to have a boyfriend or girlfriend.					
l. I am comfortable seeing pictures of sexually transmitted infections, even though they are not very pleasant.					
m. I feel pressured by friends to learn more about sex and relationships than I want to.					
n. I feel pressured by school to learn more about relationships and sex than I want to.					
o. I think we should learn more about relationships and sex at school					

20. Would you happily have a serious romantic relationship with someone from a different faith or belief system to your own?

a. Yes No Maybe (Please circle your answer)

b. Please give a reason for your answer

.....
.....
.....

21. What do you understand your religion/belief system says about relationships and sex?
Give what you see as the three most important points or guidelines

a.....

.....

b.....

.....

c.....

.....

22. Do you want to live your life according to these guidelines?

a. Yes No Not sure (Please circle your answer)

b. Why?

.....

.....

23. Do you think that people of faith can feel guilty about sexual relationships before they are married?

a. Yes No Maybe (Please circle your answer)

b. Why?

.....

24. Is guilt always a bad thing?

a. Yes No (Please circle your answer)

b. Why?
.....
.....

25. Do you feel there is a conflict between what your religion/belief system considers is right or wrong about sexual relationships and the way you want to lead your life?

a. Yes No Not applicable (Please circle your answer)

b. Why?
.....
.....

26. What have you found helpful in the Relationships and Sex Education you have received in school?

a.
.....
.....

b. Why?
.....
.....

27. How could Relationships and Sex Education be improved in your school?

- a.
.....
.....
- b. Why?
.....

28. What sort of relationship do you think people should be in, before they have sex?

- a.
.....
.....
- b. Why?
.....
.....

29. At what age do you think it would be OK for someone to have sex for the first time?

- a.
- b. Why?
.....
.....

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Jo Sell Relationships and sex education researcher and specialist

7.6 Appendix 6 - Example transcription from interviews

Student no: 191

A 15-year-old Muslim boy from Fitzgerald School. His family originally came from Bangladesh and he understands himself to be British Bangladeshi. He wants to learn RSE from his school, but writes that he learns mostly from his friends.

Researcher: Hello, thank you for agreeing to come and do this interview.

Your questionnaire was really interesting for me because I felt that you had articulated everything really well, thank you very much, it is why you are here for interview.

I am going to ask you firstly questions because of the way you answered some of the questions in your questionnaire and then some that I will be asking all students taking part in the research so that I can compare different answers.

Except for parenting you make it clear that everything, even difficult issues, should be taught by the age of 14 and that everything is important. Why did you think that?

Student: Because by the time of 14 everyone's hit puberty, so it is important to know that kind of stuff and our parents don't always teach us because it's kind of embarrassing, so it is best to learn it from school than your friend because your friend might lie.

Researcher: Brilliant, OK. And what about the things that are maybe difficult for some religions about HIV and homosexuality?

Student: Why they teach it at school?

Well like I said for example my parents don't always talk about sex because it is really embarrassing for me and for them, so it is important to learn it at school.

Researcher: Right OK so you would because want to learn everything, some other people have said that they didn't want to learn about homosexuality and ...

Student: For me personally I want to learn it.

Researcher: Why is that?

Student: Because I want to know what's going on out there. I want to learn from reliable sources such as my teacher.

Researcher: OK, Brilliant. You say that you are not sure if students should learn about what religions say about relationships and sex education. Why is that, given that you feel that religion should be respected in RSE?

Student: I am not sure because every religion has a different say and some of the younger kids might get confused and that causes problems.

Researcher: That's a really good answer. Thank you.

OK I've got a personal question for you so please feel free not to answer it if you don't want to. I want to thank you for being honest in your questionnaire so please feel free not to answer this question but you said that sometimes you found that there is a conflict between how you want to live your life and what your religion says so can you just explain a bit more about that.

Student: So, I am a teenager who is going through puberty and obviously I have hormones and I want to have sex, but I can't because my religion says no.

Researcher: OK and so how do you manage that in real life?

Student: Say I am walking along the street and I see a good-looking girl, my religion teaches me to put my head down and just keep on walking. That's how I do it.

Researcher: Right and what about going forwards. Have you had a girlfriend yet?

Student: No.

Researcher: Right and do you think you will have a girlfriend?

Student: Probably not.

Researcher: What would your parents expect?

Student: They would probably kill me if I had a girlfriend! (said in a jokey way)

Researcher: So how will it play out for you do you think in the future?

Student: If I ever liked a girl I would tell my Dad first. I wouldn't have any relationship with her and I would go to her Dad and ask for her hand in marriage.

Researcher: Okay, so we are talking about really serious stuff right at the beginning.

Student: Yeah.

Researcher: How old do you think you might be?

Student: I want to get married young, 24, 25.

Researcher: OK so 24, 25 is young? You said here (showing script) that you wanted to have sex in a marriage relationship because of your religion which is obviously what you have just said but you also said that 15 to 16 was an OK age to have sex. You can't even get married at 15.

Student: Technically in my religion you can, I don't know if you know that. To get married in my religion you just have to go through puberty and you are an adult.

Researcher: So when we talk about marriage we are not talking about a legal ceremony as such.

Student: No, a religious ceremony.

Researcher: But you have just said, 24, 25 and you have put 15 to 16. Is this for you or is this...

Student: I actually do know 15-year olds in my school who have had sex but I am not going to mention their names.

Researcher: That's fine. I wouldn't expect you to. Just to let you know though that there are sexual health services open to anybody regardless of their age so if somebody is sexually active even if they are only 13 then they can access those services without their parents even knowing. Right OK I think you have explained that one.

I have got three questions now that I am going to be asking everybody. I want you to imagine what kind of Relationships and Sex education would you want for a younger brother or sister?

Student: If I had a younger brother I would teach them all the stuff that they need to know because I have an older brother and he did the same for me but if I had a sister I would let my older sister do that. I wouldn't do that, it's too embarrassing.

Researcher: Fair enough. What about in school? What do you think it should be like in school for them?

Student: I wouldn't want them to know till Year 7, maybe Year 9.

Researcher: When you say want them to know, want them to know what?

Student: Everything there is about sex, the dangers and how to be safe.

Researcher: And what about what you have received in school. How do you feel that that has worked for you?

Student: Once in Year 8 we did PSHE and we learnt about sex like condoms and everything, stuff like that.

Researcher: Yeah and that's it, is it?

Student: Yeah, we do some in RS and we did once in Science.

Researcher: OK. Would you want more than that for your younger brother or sister in school?

Student: Definitely, because we only learnt a bit and we didn't learn much so I want them to know more about it so that if they have any questions they know the answers.

Researcher: What do you think they should know more about than maybe you have learnt in school?

Student: Like why you have sex because some people have sex just because they are hormonal. You should have sex because you love the person.

Researcher: So, would that be more sort of relationships rather than just sex?

Student: Yeah relationships and sex.

Researcher: Right, what do you think about learning about different religions and what they think about sex?

Student: It's interesting because in RS our topic is Christianity and sex and it's pretty similar to my religion, so it links in well.

Researcher: Right OK, so do you feel that maybe those things should be learnt within RS?

Student: Maybe, I am not too sure.

Researcher: All right. Relationship wise where do you hope to be in ten years' time?

Student: I would like to be married. Not kids yet. Bit too early.

Researcher: All right, so you would be what, 25? And how do you think relationships and sex education can equip you better for that in school?

Student: If I learn about it in school you know when I grow up I won't have to ask my wife and that's embarrassing if I don't know anything so if I know stuff now I will be ready for in the future.

Researcher: OK. What else would you like to learn from school that maybe you think you don't know?

Student: About sex and relationships?

Researcher: Mm

Student: (No audible answer but nodding, obviously meaning yes)

Researcher: OK. One of the questions in here is about faith groups and faith leaders are good at preparing young people for a life that will involve sex. Now you have put 'agree' in there. How do you feel your faith-group, or your faith leaders have prepared you for a life that might end up, well probably will end up being sexual?

Student: I have an Islamic teacher at the mosque. I have known him for pretty much all of my life and he has told me quite a lot about going through puberty and sex and all that stuff.

Researcher: Right OK, so what sort of things have you learnt in mosque?

Student: For example, you can't masturbate and if you have wet dreams you need to have a shower in the morning or you can't pray and after you have sex with your wife you also have to have a shower.

Researcher: OK and so those things are taught in mosque. What about relationships and about how you treat each other and that kind of thing?

Student: We are taught to have to treat them with respect, nothing patriarchal, you can't boss your wife around; you can't beat her, stuff like that.

Researcher: Right OK and what about relationships before marriage? What do you feel is the Muslim view on that?

Student: I've been told that it is completely wrong. It's not the way to go about it. If you like a girl, you go to her Dad and ask for her hand.

Researcher: Right OK. So no getting to know her or anything before?

Student: You can get to know her, but you can't be alone. Her father has to be there or her brother.

Researcher: OK. Fair enough, sounds like a good idea for me. Anything else you want to talk to me about? What else would you like to say to teachers that may be delivering this?

Student: I would like to tell teachers to be more confident in doing it because sometimes I've seen teachers do get embarrassed and to be honest I think you shouldn't be embarrassed because it is a natural thing you should be mature about it.

Researcher: Anything else?

Student: No.

Researcher: Thank you very much for your help, really appreciate it.

Student: That's OK.