

Education and Sexualities: The Next Generation

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Introduction

When Peter Aggleton kindly invited me to write the concluding piece to this impressive set of volumes, he suggested that I might like to title it 'Education and Sexualities: Beyond Debate'. For those of us who feel as though certain issues in the field of education and sexualities never seem to go away but recur, apparently endlessly, the title is an attractive one. One thinks of Nietzsche's dismal notion of eternal recurrence – explored in such films as *Groundhog Day* and, more obliquely, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Surely any field worth its salt should put certain issues to rest, rendering them 'beyond debate', and thus move forward to the consideration of new issues, controversies and sites of contestation?

Well, yes, but, of course, the disciplines (or field(s)) of education and sexualities are not like those of the natural sciences, though they are informed by advances in them. While in the natural sciences, most readings of the history of the field would agree that there has been progress (without needing to embrace a naively positivist or Whiggish approach to the growth of knowledge), with certain old controversies being long settled (causes célèbres include the disappearance of the phlogiston theory and vitalism, and the triumph of heliocentrism), the social sciences (and education and sexualities largely lie within the social sciences) generally eschew such clear notions of progress.

Accordingly, I have adopted the more modest and descriptive title 'Education and Sexualities: The Next Generation'. The qualifier The Next Generation is meant to suggest a number of possibilities. First, to many readers, and certainly any Trekkies, it references the Star Trek series set in the 24th century. I have been reading more fiction recently and fiction, of course, including science fiction, affords one of the great ways of exploring issues of sex and sexuality. In fact, hard science fiction does this rather less than might be supposed (and there are no LGBT issues raised in any of the Star Trek television series or films, though species are featured that have but one gender or three, and tribbles are hermaphrodite), whereas classical fiction does it endlessly and inventively. I have just finished reading *Orlando* (Woolf, 1928), famously described as being 'the longest and most charming love letter in literature', in which (spoiler alert) Virginia Woolf brilliantly explores and plays with notions of sex and gender (without even referencing Judith Butler) as the main character changes from a man to a woman half-way through the novel.

Secondly, the sub-title The Next Generation at least hints at the way in which conflicts in the field are often between those of one generation and the next, both within families and more widely in society. What one generation thinks radical the next considers unexceptional – and *vice versa*. An essay I wrote while training for ordination that seemed fairly progressive at the time (as indicated both by its rapid

publication when I submitted it to a journal and by it being awarded the lowest mark I got for any of my assignments in the three-year course) seems now both cautious in its argument and old-fashioned in its language (Reiss, 1990).

In any event, having been asked to write this epilogue gives me a certain freedom. I have hugely enjoyed reading the many wonderful pieces in this four-volume collection and, after a personal note, structure my thoughts under three headings: 'Education', 'Science' and 'Morality and values', hoping thus to say something worth reading without simply repeating other contributions.

A personal note

In September 1998, having been encouraged by Mark Halstead, then at the University of Plymouth, I submitted a proposal to Carfax (now part of the Routledge / Taylor and Francis group) for them to publish a journal titled *Sex Education* (Reiss, 2001). One of the things Carfax asked me to do was to provide a list of 'dream' article titles appropriate for the new journal. I came up with the following:

- A comparison of sexual activity and conception rates among teenagers in the Netherlands, the UK and the USA.
- Abstinence education: a review of the arguments.
- Access to pornographic Internet sites by schoolchildren: an empirical study.
- An argument for homosexuality being given equal time in school sex education classes.
- Are politicians moral educators?
- The Clinton affair.
- Dressed to kill: a comparative study of the sexual behaviours of Glasgow and Tokyo teenagers on Friday nights.
- Foucault revisited.
- How was it for you, Miss? Should sex educators be personal?
- Representations of gender in modern language textbooks.
- Sex education as narrative.
- Sex education in primary schools.
- Should sex education in schools only be provided by a minority of teachers?
- The effectiveness of HIV/AIDS education: the results of a longitudinal study.
- The relationship between sex education and education for citizenship.

Inevitably, after nearly 20 years, some of this detail looks dated – it may be that some readers do not even realise to what 'The Clinton affair' refers – but, perhaps substantiating my decision not to use 'beyond debate' in the title of this chapter, quite a bit of it looks current. I would still like to read a good paper, for example, on access to pornographic Internet sites by schoolchildren as I remain unsure as to how sex educators should view the consumption of pornography by young people (cf. McKee, 2016). Some things change only slowly, if at all.

One area where I do feel more positive about how things have changed is how research in education and sexualities is viewed within the academic community (cf.

Aggleton, 2016). On 31 May 2000, I received an e-mail from the Administrative Secretary of the British Educational Research Association (BERA). It read:

BERA Council members have read through the abstracts submitted for the Cardiff Conference and have identified a shortlist of papers which they consider might attract a positive interest from the press. Your paper entitled *Gender Issues in Science Lessons as Revealed by a Longitudinal Study* is one.

Would you be willing for your paper to be considered for press release? ...

Enthusiastically, I wrote my paper rather earlier than I would otherwise have and e-mailed it off. On 28 July 2000, I received the following e-mail in reply:

Dear Dr Reiss

Thanks for your paper sent to [BERA's administrative secretary] for consideration for press releases. In the event yours was one of the papers not chosen for the press – really on the grounds that it might attract negative publicity which might backfire on BERA, Homerton [the institution where I then worked] and yourself! The fear was that some of the sexually explicit references might turn into tabloid headlines – thus totally distorting the intent and value of your paper. This is the sad thing about working with the press – reporters need handling with extreme care! This is of course a comment on the modus operandi of the press and in no way a comment on the scientific merit of your paper. I hope you get a good audience at the conference.

With best wishes ...

Those who work in sex/sexualities education are likely to be familiar with such experiences. On other occasions I have been advised at one of my appraisals against continuing in sex education and have been told at a debrief following an unsuccessful job application that my choosing to give my presentation on issues in sex education was probably not wise. Presumably, what is going on – at least in part – is that a not insignificant number of people feel uncomfortable at too much (? any) mention of sex. However, I do think this is less now than was the case: cf. White (1991), 25 years ago, with her wonderful account of how “As I read Ruse's *Homosexuality* with its dustjacket facing fellow passengers there was much frowning and tutting on the Northern Line of the London Underground” (p. 408). In my experience, this sort of reaction is far rarer now.

Education

I am interested in the practices of education, but before practices come aims. What then should be the aims of education in general and of education about sex and sexualities in particular?

Some philosophers of education have argued that education would do well to have no aims (Peters, 1959; Standish, 1999). Peters maintained that if a teacher really

understands what 'education' means, they do not need to ask about its purposes; indeed, it would not make sense for them to do so. Standish was exercised in part by what he saw as a 'grammatical oddness' here: asking what the aims of education are is like asking about the aims of a town. There is not much sense, he thinks, in asking 'What are the aims of Aberdeen?'

However, it is difficult to defend the notion that education should be aimless (Reiss & White, 2014), even if it sometimes feels that aspects of it are. People do, with purposes in mind, design school curricula, write textbooks, develop assessment systems, run schools and decide how to train teachers. And one can see from even a cursory survey that education has been credited with diverse aims over the years. As Harris has put it:

... in the very first lecture of every course I give, I stress that 'education' is a changing, contested and often highly personalised, historically and politically constructed concept. To illustrate this I read a few dictionary definitions of 'education', as well as a selected set of stated 'aims of education'. When students hear that D. H. Lawrence claimed education should aim to 'lead out the individual nature in every man and woman to its true fullness', that for Rousseau the aim of education was 'to come into accord with teaching of nature', that R. M. Hutchins saw the aim of education as 'cultivation of the intellect', that A. S. Neill believed the aim of education should be to 'make people happier, more secure, less neurotic, less prejudiced', and that John Locke claimed 'education must aim at virtue and teach man to deny his desires, inclinations and appetite, and follow as reason directs'; hopefully the penny has dropped.

(Harris, 1999, p. 1)

Nevertheless, even though the examples that Harris cites have been chosen to represent their diversity, they in fact indicate considerable congruence. We can discern two broad groupings. First, there are those where the intention is to develop the individual for her/his own benefit; secondly, there are others where the intention is to develop individuals so that they can collectively contribute to making the world a better place. We may note that this is typical of much social policy in many countries. So, for example, under-age parenthood, illicit drug misuse and speeding in cars are generally seen as bad both for the individuals concerned (loss of opportunities, mental and physical harm, risk of injury or death) and for the rest of society (financial cost, more burglaries, harm and upset caused to families and friends).

With John White I have put the proposition more formally: our contention is that there should be two fundamental aims of school education, namely to enable each learner to lead a life that is personally flourishing and to help others to do so too (Reiss & White, 2013).

What constitutes a flourishing life?

In the West, the notion that humans should lead flourishing lives is among the oldest of ethical principles, one that is emphasised particularly by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. There are many accounts as to what precisely constitutes a flourishing life. A hedonist sees it in terms of maximising pleasurable feelings and minimising painful ones. More everyday perspectives may tie it to wealth, fame, consumption or, more generally, satisfying one's principal desires, whatever these may be. Admittedly, there are difficulties with all these accounts (White, 2011). A problem besetting desire satisfaction, for example, is that it can endorse ways of life that most of us would deny were flourishing, a life wholly devoted to spread betting, for instance.

A life filled with whole-hearted and successful involvement in more worthwhile pursuits – such things as significant relationships and meaningful work (Freud's, possibly apocryphal, *lieben und arbeiten*) – is on a different plane. Virtually all of us would rate it fulfilling. At the same time, most of us in a modern society presume it is largely up to us to choose the mix of relationships and activities that best suits us (certain family obligations are generally excepted from this generalisation, though less than in the past). Unlike many of our ancestors, nearly all of us are deeply attached to personal autonomy as a value, and feel that we have a right to this attachment.

A central aim of education should therefore be to prepare learners for a life of autonomous, whole-hearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences. In formal school education, this aim involves acquainting students with a wide range of possible options from which to choose both now and once they leave school. With their development towards autonomous adulthood in mind, schools should provide students with increasing opportunities to choose among the pursuits that best suit them. Young children are likely to need greater guidance from their teachers, just as they do from their parents. Part of the function of schooling, and indeed parenting, is to prepare children for the time when they will need to, and be able to, make decisions more independently.

Equipping every learner to help others to lead personally fulfilling lives

We want people to want other people, as well as themselves, to lead fulfilling lives. Negatively, this means not hurting them, not lying to them, not breaking one's word or in other ways impeding them in this. Positively, it means helping them to reach their goals, respecting their autonomy and being fair, friendly and cooperative in one's dealings with them. Formal education can reinforce and extend what parents and others in families do in developing morality in children. Schools can widen students' moral sensitivity beyond the domestic circle to those in other communities, locally, nationally and globally. They can also help them to think about moral conflicts in their own lives and in the wider spheres just mentioned. They can encourage students to reflect on the basis of morality, including whether this is religious or non-religious.

As part of their moral education, schools should help students to become informed and active citizens of a liberal democratic society. Dispositionally, this means encouraging them to take an interest in political affairs at local, national and global levels from the standpoint of a concern for the general good, and doing this with due regard to framework values of a liberal democracy, such as freedom, individual autonomy, equal consideration and cooperation. Young people also need to possess whatever sorts of understanding these dispositions entail, e.g. an understanding of the nature of liberal democracy in general, of divergences of opinion about it, and of its application to the circumstances of their own society.

Applications to sex education

So far in this section on Education, I have said almost nothing about sex education. Yet the notion of human flourishing, for oneself and for others, seems a good basis on which to ground sex education for all students. Back in 1993 I wrote a paper titled 'What are the aims of school sex education?' (Reiss, 1993) and the ones I identified as being the aims of existing sex education programmes – 'Stopping girls getting pregnant', 'Reducing the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases', 'Decreasing ignorance', 'Decreasing guilt, embarrassment and anxiety', 'Enabling students to make their own decisions about their sexuality', 'Helping students develop assertiveness', 'Helping students question the present role of women in society', 'Helping students question the present role of men in society' and 'Providing an ethical framework for the expression of sexuality' – can, with some updating and repositioning, be each seen as contributing towards human flourishing.

Since 1993, much has happened in school sex education, however, as the papers and other contributions in these volumes attest. Encouragingly, these developments have very largely been in the direction of the promotion of human flourishing. If writing now on the aims of sex education, I would, for example, be able to review approaches to tackling gender and sexual violence (cf. Maxwell, 2016) as there is now more of an acknowledgement in an increasing number of countries about the prevalence of this, particularly for women and for LGBT youth (e.g. Rivers, 2016). As Davies (2016) points out, schools too often are heteronormative. Successful approaches to improving matters include ones based on a notion of inclusion, helping to build safer and more supportive school environments. Ingham (2016) argues that it remains the case that school sex education is expected to be effective in a way that is rarely demanded of other subjects. One problem with this is that too narrow a range of possible outcomes are evaluated; it is easier to count pregnancies than to determine whether young women's capacity for enhanced sexual pleasure has increased.

Science

As a number of papers in these volumes attest, many sex educators view science rather negatively when considering how sex education might best be taught. The

'plumbing and diseases' approach is rightly criticised. As Albury (2016) points out, such a presentation of the science of sex education has a number of shortcomings. One of these is that students have to seek information on the specifics of sexual practices and relationship skills from other sources; some of these sources are of high quality but others are not.

I want here to suggest a more positive role that science can play in sex education. My argument is that what sex/sexualities educators are (quite rightly) rejecting is not science but the rather poor science that often passes for science when teaching about sex and sexualities. Consider how sex is all too often presented in school science classrooms. School biology typically examines issues of sex through the lens of reproduction (Reiss, 2007). This immediately tends to assume heterosexuality. Biology is all too often presumed to be a neutral subject, so that many biology teachers in schools continue to teach gender and sex as unquestioned facts. In particular, differences between females and males are often presented as clear-cut and inevitable, and the study of school biology textbooks has shown that they are often sexist and typically ignore lesbian and gay issues (Reiss, 1998). For example, biology textbooks in England for 14-16 year-olds often omit all mention of the clitoris and, when they do refer to it, frequently talk of it in a belittling way as the female's equivalent of a penis. Males are rendered visible, females less so; and the female exists by virtue of comparison with the male – though such language, unless continually challenged, buys into an acceptance of a clear-cut, even essentialist, division into females and males. When the possibility of being gay/lesbian is addressed (the furthest that school biology textbooks ever get from heteronormativity), the impression is generally given that this is a sort-of second-best option which the reader may well grow out of. We are a long way here from queer theory; as Marshall (2016) asks, '... what would a world which cherished and hoped for queer children look like?'

However, closer examination of sex in human biology provides plenty of space for critical reflection and allows for a richer understanding of what it is to be a sexual person. Emily Martin has shown that while menstruation is often viewed in scientific textbooks as a failure (you should have got pregnant), sperm maturation is viewed as a wonderful achievement in which countless millions of sperm are manufactured each day (Martin, 1991). Furthermore, sperm are viewed as active and streamlined whereas the egg is seen as large and passive, just drifting along or sitting there waiting for sperm to arrive.

It was back in 1948 that Ruth Herschberger argued that the female reproductive parts [it is difficult in the scientific discourse around sex to avoid referring to reproduction!] are viewed as somehow being less autonomous than those of the male. The way the egg is portrayed in science textbooks has been likened to that of the fairy tale *The Sleeping Beauty*, in which a dormant, virginal bride awaits a male's magic kiss. However, biologists have long seen both egg and sperm as active partners. Just as sperm seek out the egg, so the vagina discriminates between sperm, and the egg seeks out sperm to catch. Nevertheless, as Martin points out, even when acknowledged, such biological equality is still generally described in a language that gives precedence to the sperm. When the egg is presented in an active

role, the image is one of a dangerous aggressor “rather like a spider laying in wait in her web” (Martin, 1991, p. 498).

Social historical research on sex hormones has also shown how the way that such hormones are presented in textbooks and scientific papers gives messages that go well beyond what the data indicate. Despite the fact that it has been known since the 1920s that each sex contains the ‘other’s’ hormone – so men produce oestrogen and women testosterone – school textbooks typically ignore both this fact and the close chemical similarity between oestrogen and testosterone (Roberts, 2002). Indeed, a different reading of the data to that usually presented in school textbooks – but one more in line with the scientific evidence about the working of sex hormones – is that femaleness and maleness lie on a continuum. Such a model of the consequences of the actions of the sex hormones became common among endocrinologists in the 1940s.

While this model can lead to an essentialist understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation – and it was developed at the same time as a rise in the number of studies of the presumed femininity of gay men (Oudshoorn, 1994) – it can also be seen as allowing a far more fluid understanding of sex, accommodating, for example, some forms of intersexuality (cf. Callahan, 2009). The principle of intersexuality dates largely from Magnus Hirschfeld’s pioneering work in the first three decades of the twentieth century on sexual difference. By rejecting the discrete categories of male and female, arguing instead that each of us sits on a continuum, Hirschfeld laid the foundation for a radical deconstruction of the sexual binary (Bauer, 2003).

One of the things good teaching can help students to appreciate is the way in which boys/men and girls/women are pressured, respectively, to perform maleness and femaleness, discourses that are structured largely in opposition to each other (cf. Butler, 1990; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). My experience of teaching a non-binary version of human sex to school students is that many of them find it fascinating; it can help them to see the world, and themselves, in a new light. Indeed, enabling students to see classifications that relate to gender, sex and sexualities less categorically has the potential to lead students to question, even disrupt, other rigid typologies, facilitating the beginnings of an intersectional analysis (cf. Giffney, 2009).

Biological indicators of sexual orientation have long been sought and continue to fascinate commentators, while worrying many in the gay, lesbian and transgender communities. Hardly a month goes by without a report of some such indicator. Precisely which indicator is flavour of the month (a hormone, a gene, parental upbringing, relative finger length, etc.) may tell us more about research fashions and the power of statistical analysis than much else. Around the middle of the twentieth century, hormones were widely thought to be all powerful and responsible for our sexuality. Towards the end of the twentieth century the focus shifted to genes. Genes are responsible for the chemicals, including hormones, made in the body and a reductionist perspective sees them as determining not just sex and sexuality but almost all of what it is to be ourselves.

Much of the literature about the 'causes' of sexuality concentrates on gayness, though Lynda Birke, a biologist as well as a feminist and a lesbian, provides a valuable review about lesbianism and over the years has "spent much time and energy refuting the allegations that any social categories (of gender, race or sexuality) are fixed by biology" (Birke, 1997, p. 58). However, as Birke points out, there are, of course, a number of reasons for hesitating in entirely rejecting biological notions of sexual orientation/preference. For one thing, some have used such notions politically to argue for gay rights (though this approach is hotly contested – see Schüklenk & Brookey, 1998); more prosaically, it may well yet turn out that there is / are biological bases to at least some people's sexual orientation/preference.

All of which leads us on to how might biology be taught better in schools for the purposes of sex education. Much biology teaching is focused around the use of textbooks yet "Teachers can read subtextually and resistantly and can help their students to do likewise. Too rarely are students encouraged to critique their science textbooks; too often are textbooks used as if they contained only unquestionable truths" (Reiss, 1998, p. 148). This is a simple message but one that provides a teacher – and her/his students – with a powerful tool, for it avoids buying into the general assumption of teacher as the expert repository of facts, instead sitting more comfortably with critical and emancipatory understandings of education. This can be more satisfying for teacher and students alike and fits well with an information society which proves students with opportunities to obtain much of the knowledge they want/need to know at the right pace for themselves.

A fuller illustration of what biology teachers can do is provided by Anne-Marie Scholer in her description of her teaching programme for a two-semester intermediate-level college course in anatomy and physiology, required for first-year students in nursing, athletic training and physical therapy majors (Scholer, 2002). Scholer begins with the idea that male/female is not a dichotomy. Here she draws on the various causes of indeterminate gender in humans, the sex hormone story outlined above, the existence of breast cancer in men, and transgender. As she says "While the foregoing material is undoubtedly familiar to individuals in the fields of sexuality education, it is quite new to most of my students and peers. I have found such examples to work well in class, creating vocal displays of cognitive dissonance" (Scholer, 2002, p. 78). As every teacher knows, cognitive dissonance, if well handled, can be a powerful incentive to learning. (Handled badly it can merely reinforce prejudice or be rejected as confusing.) Scholer goes on to challenge the prevailing stereotype of eggs as passive objects, to discuss how sex is not just anatomy and hormones, to avoid heteronormativity and generally to "create an inclusive environment in my classroom" (p. 82).

There may be some who think that school and college biology is not an important battle ground, even that to fight discrimination and injustice on this front is to risk allowing the discourse to be pre-determined by the other side. However, as Mariamne Whatley pointed out in a chapter in Debbie Epstein's and James Sears' *A Dangerous Knowing*, "Using science to attack comprehensive sexuality education

and to support abstinence-only education is one strategy being used currently” (Whatley, 1999, p. 238).

Similarly, Will Letts (2001) has explored how school science structures and is structured by norms of heterosexual masculinity. Letts’ work is particularly valuable as he focuses on classroom examples of primary school science – when some might assume that at this age science is fairly neutral (but see the work of the *No Outsiders* Project: DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). He argues that science, including school science, functions as a grand narrative that seduces students and teachers; he concludes:

As a plan of action, I advocate that school science becomes an active and generative site for critical science literacy. The words ‘science literacy’ in this phrase are intended quite differently than popular utterances of them have come to mean. ‘Science literacy’ does not simply mean an intake and consumption of science texts and ‘facts’, either purposefully or through acts of seduction. I am using critical science literacy to denote something akin to critical media literacy.

(Letts, 2001, p. 270)

A school science classroom for critical science literacy, at any age, would be one in which the traditional virtues of science – its open-mindedness and refusal to accept tradition on trust – were more widely (reflexively) applied. It would allow young people to think about themselves and their sexualities more meaningfully. It would help those uncomfortable with traditional descriptions of masculinity and femininity to realise that they are not alone in their rejection of such simple dichotomies. All this can be achieved without harming those students who are comfortable with such conventional descriptions. Sadly, such classrooms are still rare. In the long run such teaching, idealistic though this may sound to some, would contribute to making the world a better place both overall and for the many individuals who otherwise feel or find that they do not fit (cf. Britzman, 1995).

Morality and values

The last thing, it might be thought, that students learning about sex and sexualities would want is teaching on morality and values. Yet that is to conflate good teaching about morality and values with moralising – passing judgement on others and telling them, generally without adequate warrants, how they should behave. In fact, many of the issues that are core to sex/sexualities education are ones where a moral / values dimension is evident: At what age is it right to have a sexual relationship? Is the notion of consent the be all and end all for determining when sexual activity is right? Should one always be faithful to one’s sexual partner? Has religion anything positive to contribute to sex education or is it simply always a constriction on sexual behaviour (e.g. *in vitro* fertilisation, abortion, any expression of sexuality other than heterosexuality within marriage)?

Before deciding how such questions might be answered, it is worth asking whether there is such a thing as a *distinctive* sexual ethics or not. At first the answer may seem obvious. Surely sexual behaviour has its own ethics! People, at different times and in different cultures, argue about the acceptability of polygamy and homosexuality and the age of consent and whether rape can exist within marriage and so on.

However, it can be argued that sex has no particular (i.e. distinctive) moral significance. Igor Primoratz (1999), for example, holds that sex is morally neutral, so that moral guidance regarding sexual behaviour is provided by the same general moral rules and values that apply in other areas:

Thus adultery is not wrong as extramarital *sex*, but only when it involves breach of promise, or seriously hurts the feelings of the non-adulterous spouse, etc. Prostitution is not wrong as commercial *sex*, but if and when the prostitute is forced into this line of work by the lack of any real alternative. Pedophilia is not wrong as adult-child *sex* but because even when the child is willingly participating, its willingness is extremely suspect in view of the radical asymmetries of maturity, knowledge, understanding, and power of children and adults. Sexual harassment is not wrong because it is *sexual*, but because it is *harassment*. Rape is not wrong as *sexual* battery, but as *sexual battery*.

(Primoratz, 1999, pp. 173-174)

The argument is a powerful one and has much to commend it. After all, if there is something 'special' about sexual ethics, from where does this specialness come? Of course, there are particular ethical questions that it only makes sense to ask in the context of sex and in that sense there is a sexual ethics, but in the same way there are, for example, business ethics, environmental ethics and reproductive ethics (governing *in vitro* fertilisation, surrogacy, designer babies and so on). The issue at hand is whether there is anything distinctive about sexual ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics and reproductive ethics beyond the localised application of more general forms of ethical reasoning – such as the use of the principles of autonomy, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, the avoidance of harm and, as argued above, the promotion of human flourishing.

Recent perspectives on moral reasoning have been somewhat suspicious of what is sometimes referred to as 'principlism' – i.e. the notion that right actions can be deduced from such fundamental principles as those of autonomy, utilitarianism or justice. Laden (2014) argues that we learn to reason through living with others. Reasoning is held to be a species of conversation; it is social and ongoing. A now-classic example of the shortcomings of principlism in understanding how people make moral judgements is provided by Haidt *et al.* (1993). Haidt and his colleagues provided stories about what they term victimless yet offensive behaviours (e.g. cleaning a toilet with a national flag, eating one's dog after it has been accidentally run over) to children and adults in Brazil and the USA. One of their findings was that while college students at elite universities in both countries were prepared to

consider such behaviours to be matters of social convention or personal preference, most other interviewees considered them to be morally unacceptable.

With Mark Halstead I have argued that, in any event, what is clear is that there are certain limits to acceptable sexual behaviour set by the harms caused to others (Halstead & Reiss, 2003). In some cases, such as rape and sexual abuse, these harms are clear-cut; in others, such as visiting sex workers or leaving one sexual partner and changing to another, there are arguments on both sides. What one surely wants is for young people, at the appropriate age, to reflect on and discuss their developing sexual values. There is much, therefore, to be said for them considering such issues. One of the great things about schooling is that teachers are given the authority to promote discussion and get students to think. Schools can therefore add to and shape what children learn from their parents (cf. Dyson, 2016). As Allen (2016) points out, what happens in the sexuality education classroom is key to how and what students learn about sexuality at school. Done well, in a safe environment, teaching can enable students to develop age-appropriate skills rather than being the object of a patronising and fear-driven narrative in which adults try to keep them for as long as possible in a presumed world of childhood innocence (cf. Robinson, 2016). Indeed, Lamb (2016) argues that a focus on ethical sex education encompasses care, an acknowledgement of emotions and thinking about society.

Finally, a word about religion and sex/sexualities education, in the context of morality and values. Until fairly recently, relatively little had been written in any detail about religious values and school sex education. In recent years, though, there has been an increasing acknowledgement from all sex educators, whether or not they themselves are members of any particular religious faith, that religious points of view needs to be taken into account, if only because a significant number of children and their parents have moral values significantly informed by religious traditions (e.g. Yip & Page, 2013).

Religious believers need no arguments to be voiced in favour of taking religious values seriously, both generally and with particular reference to sexual ethics and behaviour. However, those without a religious faith can often be frustrated at what they perceive as the sexist and heterosexist views of those in religious authority. There is much truth in this. However, things can change and there are pockets of encouragement. Indeed, it is an oversimplification to see religion as always associated with sexual conservatism (Rasmussen, 2016). More will be gained by working with those of a religious faith than by excluding them. Of course, it is important that all those participate in such working commit to listening and are open to the possibility of change.

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