



Catholic parents' perceptions of young people's learning about sex and relationships

BURNS-O'CONNELL, Georgina <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6430-8627>>

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**Catholic Parents' Perceptions of Young People's Learning
about Sex and Relationships**

Georgina Burns-O'Connell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2018

Abstract

It is widely accepted that sex and relationships education (SRE) is an adversarial subject. Though there is ample evidence of its significance for young people's sexual health and wellbeing, the subject is entrenched in political and cultural conflict and differences of opinion from parents, teachers, governors, religious organisations, and young people.

Many Catholics' beliefs regarding sex differ from those of the Catholic hierarchy. My thesis explores this issue from the perspectives of Catholic parents in England and focusses on their views of young people's learning about sex and relationships, and how Catholicism has influenced this.

Using a qualitative methodology informed by feminist research principles, Catholic parents' perceptions of SRE were explored using in-depth interviews. A variety of Catholic parents' voices (11 participants) were identified using existing networks and snowballing techniques. The reasoning behind parents' choices and views relating to their children's learning about sex and relationships was explored using an interpretivist approach.

The empirical findings from this study contribute unique insights to understanding Catholic parents' support for young people's learning about sex and relationships. Subjective factors (for example, the experience of divorce) influenced the way many of the participants thought about, or provided, SRE for their children. Although they had little knowledge of school provision, most supported unbiased, compulsory SRE curricula. Learning about sex and relationships within the family often relied on an opportunistic and open approach, however many of the participants identified their own poor SRE as a barrier to the education they (aimed to) provide for their children. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the findings from this project suggest that Catholicism influenced some of the participant's thinking about SRE. Additionally, this was also evident in those who no longer practiced as a Catholic.

Overall, this study brings to light the complexities, contradictions, and subtleties regarding Catholic parents' views on young people's learning about sex and relationships.

Acknowledgements

To my participants whom this research would not have been possible without, there are not the words to thank you enough for sharing your experiences and deepest thoughts and feelings with me especially since they were about two of the three subjects you should *supposedly* never discuss: religion and sex! It was an honour and privilege to have met you all and I will not forget you or what you have taught me. I hope I have done your words justice and that I have given your voices the acknowledgement they deserve.

Sincerest thanks to Sheffield Hallam University who funded this research and who provided me with encouraging and supportive supervisors. Julia, thanks for the sex education in 'Power, Sex and The Body' which enabled me to see the world more holistically and, as a result, gave me the inspiration to research this topic. Eleanor, I am beyond grateful for your positivity and for how you communicated things in a way that I could always understand. This was invaluable in enabling me to make sense of academia and research. I could not have completed this project without either of you.

I want to give special thanks to my partner, Patrick, for your unwavering dedication and also to the rest of my Lambe family for all of your support.

Mum and Kev, thanks for helping to guide me with your treasured advice. To my inspirational sister, Hayleigh, thank you for never losing faith in me.

To those of you in room HC2.05 (past and present), thank you for the numerous coffee and cake breaks accompanied by invaluable philosophical discussions. There is a special bond formed between PhD peers and I hope ours continues to grow as we move onto our next "chapters."

And last but definitely not least, "Gramps", your encouragement and confidence in me have been such a comfort through the challenging times and I will treasure your sagacious words forever. Without inheriting your outlook on the world, I probably would not have gone to university let alone submitted a PhD about Catholicism. We did it, "Nonno", an O'Connell submitted a thesis. As you say: "not bad for a kid from a council estate", hey? Well this one's dedicated to you, Thomas William O'Connell.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is about how Catholic parents perceive the way young people learn about sex and relationships. It is a qualitative, interpretative inquiry (Given 2008) that seeks to understand the experiences and opinions which Catholic parents form in relation to young people's education about sex and relationships, and the meanings and interpretations they offer. In this inquiry I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Catholic parents. I built a rapport with each participant as their experiences of being raised Catholic were explored and how this might have influenced their views about sex education. I developed four topics for the participants to explore when thinking about their perceptions of young people's learning about sex and relationships: You and Religion, Child(ren) and School(s), SRE in school, and SRE out of school/at home.

Literature aimed at parents to help educate their children about sex was developed in the 19th Century and there was little formal sex education in English schools before the Second World War. The post-war years led to increased sex education provision within schools with a focus on hygiene and disease prevention due to the increased rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), particularly syphilis and gonorrhoea. The increase in STIs was attributed to the mass movement of soldiers and others affected by the war (Pilcher 2004).

Sex education is an important addition to the school curriculum and is now a legal requirement for schools, yet information about sex and relationships is mostly obtained from friends, family and increasingly through various types of media (Davies and Robinson 2010). The first study to research young peoples' views on school-based sex education was undertaken by Schofield in 1965. Schofield's findings were little different from those nearly six decades later; that is, young people stated that they did not receive (enough) sex education and when they did it was too late (Schofield 1965, Hirst 2004, Blake 2008, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, UK Youth Parliament 2008, OFSTED 2010, Pound, Langford and Campbell 2016). The provision of sex education and, more recently, sex and relationships education (SRE) has been a topic of enduring debate ever since.

Current guidance for schools was published nearly two decades ago (DfEE 2000) but this is due to change with the introduction of compulsory relationships and sex education (RSE) from 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). The UK Government is currently conducting a consultation with key stakeholders to advise on the content and approaches to implementing this new RSE curriculum.

Religious bodies are one such stakeholder and are often cited by the media and others as objecting to young people being provided with SRE at school. Catholicism has many teachings which could be contradicted by a

comprehensive and sex positive¹ approach to teaching young people about sex and relationships. For example, the Catholic doctrine has key relevant teachings that include no sex before marriage, it does not support the use of contraception because it views sex as purely for the purpose of procreation, and it does not allow abortion. At present, faith schools do not have to provide young people with SRE, therefore, some young people are deprived of their (legal) rights regarding sex and relationships (school requirements regarding SRE are discussed further in chapter two).

Within the Catholic Church, marriage (also referred to as matrimony) is viewed as a 'holy sacrament' meaning it is regarded as being particularly important and divorce is not permitted within the Church. Society's views towards premarital sex and cohabitation are less strict than earlier times and by implication there has been an increase in divorce and a decrease in re-marriage (Office for National Statistics 2016). Additionally, young people are more likely to have higher numbers of sexual partners than previous generations (Hinchliff 2009). Given parents' unique position of authority whereby they have the right to withdraw their children from SRE, and faith schools privileged position of being allowed to opt out of teaching SRE, it is fundamental to ask Catholic parents questions and listen to their experiences and perceptions. This knowledge could then be used as an evidence-base for developing policy and practice, as opposed to reliance on the problematic assumption that religious parents object

¹ A sex positive approach means prioritising positive aspects over negative ideas about sex and relationships (Dent and Maloney 2017). Being sex positive means acknowledging the sexual agency of young people and the importance of diversity, inclusion and equality in sexual identities and practices.

to their children learning about sex and relationships, and the default position of allowing opt out.

Religious affiliation and identity, similarly to views about sex and relationships, are viewed by some as personal and private topics. Both issues are based on individual belief systems, traditions and lived experiences. Together, views on sex, sex education, and religion and adherence to faith may form a tangled web of ideas and beliefs. This might make it difficult for parents, including my participants, to articulate their views. As single and separate issues they are complex and can be difficult to understand and interpret in the context of an interview for the participant and researcher. These issues reveal a matrix of belief systems that can be challenging to self and one's former and current identity and practices. To compound this conundrum of complexity, parents' perceptions of their children's knowledge of sex and relationships and the knowledge many children already have on such matters are not consistent. Young people's health and well-being rely on them having information and awareness about topics relating to sexuality and relationships and this is critical because of the benefits this can have for their sexual health, now and as they approach adulthood and later in life (Davies and Robinson 2010). In this respect, approaching this topic with parents is challenging because of the diverse opinions and encounters each parent may have experienced through their own growth and their children's development.

Research Focus

This project focussed on Catholic parents who currently live in England. They identified as a practicing Catholic at some point in their life but the changeable nature of religious affiliation is acknowledged and so a variety of both lapsed and practicing Catholic parents were invited to participate.

It is important to highlight the contradiction and subtlety with which some Catholic parents approach their views on sex education. The analysis draws out the complexities of the everyday experiences which the parents have lived and will continue to experience throughout theirs and their children's lives.

This study focusses on parents' perceptions because their children's education hinges on their preferences for education about sex and relationships. This is because parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from SRE and this has been confirmed to remain a legal requirement for the implementation of RSE in 2019. It is also because parents choose which school their children attend which influences the SRE their children receives, if any.

This thesis aims to make a contribution to SRE policy in the UK at this pivotal time.

Personal Research Motivation

My interest in the intersection of religious beliefs and sex education kindled when I undertook an undergraduate sociology degree elective module 'Power, Sex and the Body'. This module explored ideas about gender and sexualities and provided me with my first opportunity to learn about sex and relationships from an unbiased position (as I had been raised Catholic and attended Catholic primary and secondary schools). I was, and still am, interested and at times conflicted by the complexities of views on sex and relationships, and how these may be influenced by a Catholic upbringing. The contradictions I experienced through being educated about sex and relationships in a Catholic context left a lasting impression on me. For example, the little SRE I received was provided by celibate Catholic teachers who had no lived (or disclosed) experience of sex or romantic relationships. I had peers who became pregnant at a young age and who were reprimanded and commanded to sit through an anti-abortion video which identified women who had abortions as 'murderers'. The Catholicism I was taught was used as a way of guiding young people to be 'good people', but at the same time it was teaching us from a young and impressionable age to make judgements, mostly on women and girls' behaviours, even when they had acted within UK law (i.e. had an abortion or engaged in sex outside of wedlock). Such contradictions left me puzzled and led me to question how such teachings may have impacted on those who have children and their views on learning about sex and relationships. These experiences led me to form the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What are Catholic parents' views on young people's learning about sex and relationships?
2. What are Catholic parents' perspectives on young people's formal learning about sex and relationships within schools?
3. What are Catholic parents' perspectives on young people's informal learning about sex and relationships within the family?
4. What are Catholic parents' perspectives on young people's learning about sex and relationships within the context of Catholicism?

Key Contributions

This study makes the following key contributions to the study of sex and relationships education (SRE) and the place of parents in this learning.

Regarding empirical contributions, this qualitative research project contributes a small-scale, in-depth study to the existing body of work on SRE which currently

includes little research exploring religious parents' experiences and perceptions of young people's learning. Although there are a few studies which explore religion and SRE, this is the first known qualitative study to explore Catholic parents' perceptions of SRE in England.

Of the studies that exist within the field of sex education, there tends to be a focus on formal curricular-led education in schools, whereas this thesis explores learning in both formal and informal (i.e. within the family) settings.

The data are theorised through a feminist lens and social constructionist ideas on the body, sexualities, gender and workings of power. As such, this synthesis of empiricism and theory offers new ways of discerning and constructing Catholic schools' teachings and families' positions within it. In turn, this could contribute to more meaningful policy developments and guidance for faith schools on sex and relationships, and the role of parents.

Thesis Outline

This chapter (Chapter One) has introduced the research topic, provided some context and stated the research aims.

Chapter Two provides a backdrop for the more specific focus on SRE within the following chapters. It is divided into four sections, the first being 'Sources of

Learning/Influence'. This section highlights the importance of recognising the broader context and many other sources young people may use to learn about sex and relationships, in addition to school and/or their parents. In the second section of this chapter, the possible changing forms of religious affiliation, practice and belief are considered. Thirdly, it provides key definitions and outlines policy guidelines and educational approaches relating to SRE and, finally, topics debated within government and related social concerns are discussed.

Chapter Three provides an overview of relevant literature within the field. First it focusses on young people's views on SRE and how adult-conceived ideas are often inconsistent with these. Following this, parental views on education about sex and relationships are discussed in generic terms (i.e. not specific to my participants) together with an outline of parents' preferences and approaches before more detailed discussion on the parental right to withdraw child(ren) from SRE. The focus is then narrowed to consider the small amount of existing literature relating to religious parents and SRE. This is followed by a description of relevant Catholic teachings and frameworks for positioning Catholic perceptions of sex and SRE.

Chapter Four offers justification for the methodology used and positions the study epistemologically. My position within the research and the ethical considerations are discussed. The second half describes the study and the procedure undertaken to conduct the fieldwork and analysis. The chapter

concludes by introducing the participants to offer a sense of their subjectivity and lived experience (Hekman 1997).

Chapter Five is the first of four chapters which discuss the findings from this study. This chapter focusses on the factors which influence Catholic parent's view of young people's learning about sex and relationships, including both factors that might not be unique to these participants insofar as other parents may share similar challenges and concerns. Secondly factors specific to their lifeworld (Smith 1978) are documented.

Chapter Six explores Catholic parents' views on formal learning about sex and relationships as provided for their children in school. The parent's experience of their own sex education is explored along with their preferences regarding how they think SRE should be taught within schools, what content it should include, and by whom it should be taught. Finally, parental knowledge regarding SRE provision at their children's school is explored.

Chapter Seven focusses on how Catholic parents provide education about sex and relationships within the family and the factors that both facilitate and challenge their intentions and approaches to education in the 'family' context.

Chapter Eight explores Catholic parents' perceptions of young people's learning about sex and relationships in the context of Catholicism. It starts by exploring

the intricacies of religious practice and affiliation and then explores why these parents (my participants) chose to include Catholicism in their children's lives and how it influenced their choices and opinions. Finally, there is a discussion about the changing nature of religious practice and what this meant for my participants' experiences.

Chapter Nine is the concluding chapter which brings together the findings from this research. It draws out the key features that contribute to the existing literature and highlights the limitations of this project. After discussion of the potential policy and practice implications, ideas for further and future research are highlighted.

Chapter 2. Setting the Context for the Study

Introduction

This chapter discusses the wider socio-political context for sex and relationships education which situates this research. Whilst it acknowledges the many sources that can influence young people's learning about sex and relationships, this chapter primarily focusses on three key influences that are particularly significant to this project. They are, the changing nature of religious affiliation, practice and belief and the implications for the selection of my participants; definitions of sexual health and an overview of SRE policy in schools; the variances between definitions and practices of 'sex education' and 'sex and relationships education' (SRE). An overview of SRE provision and legislation is then provided to establish its current tentative political status, followed by related discourses and approaches to SRE. Key debates in government and broader society concerning notions of 'childhood innocence' and the 'sexualisation' of young people complete the chapter, since these are salient to debates on SRE provision and issues raised by my participants.

Sources of Learning/Influence

As briefly mentioned above, formal school-based sex education is not the only way young people learn about sex and relationships. To capture a range of potential influences, this study took a broad approach to researching sex education by using White's concept of 'sexual knowledge building' which was cited by Naezer, Rommes and Jansen (2017, p 713). Sexual knowledge

building is an inclusive term that encompasses all learning about sexual knowledge including and beyond formal learning that takes place in school.

I have depicted in figure 1 (below) the plethora of sources that young people can be influenced by, and use to lesser or greater degrees, when learning about sexualities and relationships. The purple circles show the sources/influences that were the focus of this research and informed the interviews which I conducted, whilst those in green are other possible sources of learning that are discussed in other literature (see for example Burns 2018, Kehily 1999, Masanet and Buckingham 2015, and Yu 2010). The influences in the green circles below were briefly mentioned by my participants but due to the scope of this project these were not explored further. The focus of the analysis was on the influence of religion on parents' perspectives of SRE at school and their experiences of providing education within the family.

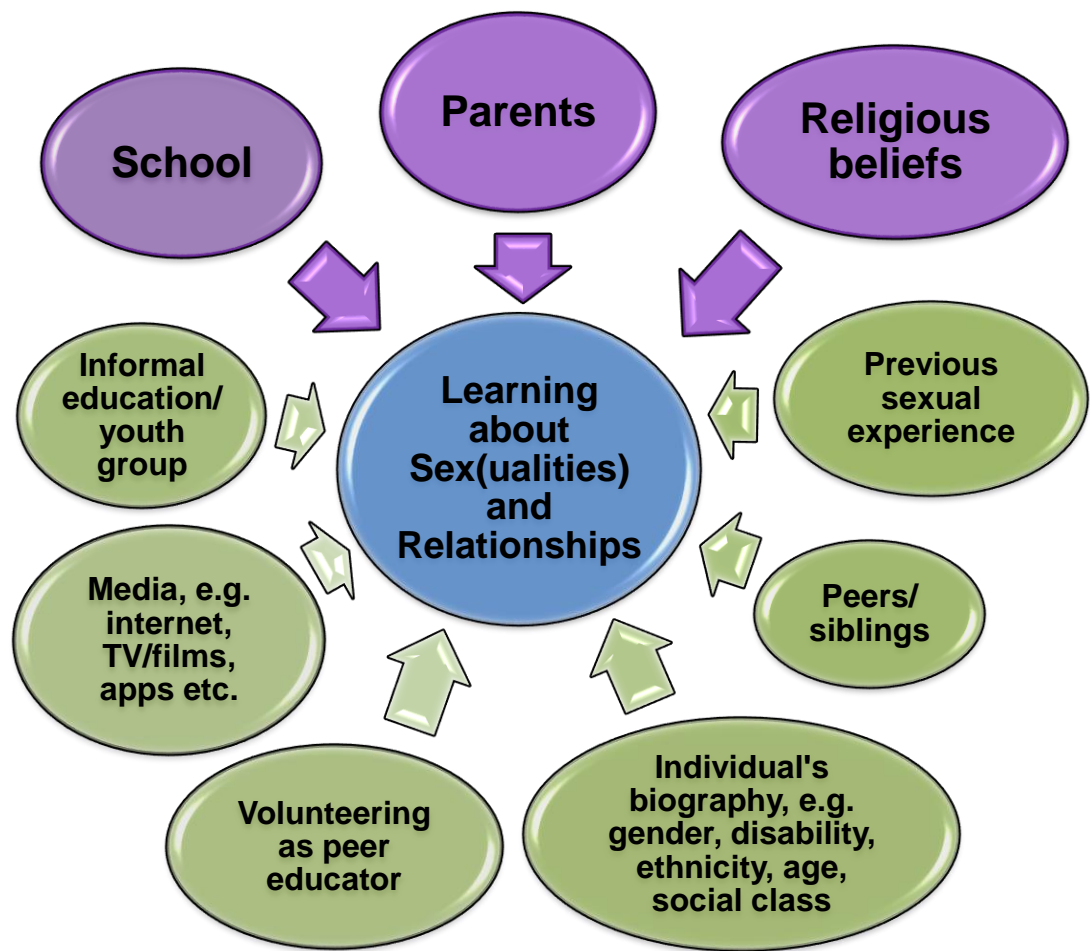


Figure 1: Young People's Sources of Learning about Sexualities and Relationships.

Changing Forms of Religious Affiliation, Practice and Belief

Religious belief and affiliation have a variety of different perspectives and forms which are relevant to individuals and institutions who observe religious practice. As a functionalist, Durkheim viewed religion's purpose as a way of providing social order and unifying members of society. Durkheim (1976, p47) described religion as:

‘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 a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.’

For much of the 20th Century, sociologists considered that religion in the West would become gradually less important to people’s lives and as a result many sociologists ignored religion as a social process. In the later 20th Century, this became known as the ‘secularisation hypothesis’ (Bruce 2002, Dobbelaere 1981). This is a process whereby religious beliefs, practices and institutions lose social and cultural significance and are less important on a national or collective level. Many sociologists of religion are firmly persuaded by the secularisation paradigm (see Wilson 1998, Bruce 1995, 2002, Casanova 1994, 2001) and it has been the lens through which the relationship between religion and modernity has been viewed in the social sciences (Casanova 1994, 2001, Dobbelaere 1981, 2002).

For almost a century there was agreement amongst sociologists about the nature and future of religion, and these debates are once again at the forefront of the discipline (Davie 2013, 2007). Religion, in contemporary contexts, is less focussed on notions of a united ‘moral community’ and more focussed on the needs of the individual.

Relevant examples of secularisation for my project could be the decline, on both micro and macro levels, of the Roman Catholic Church and their involvement and influence over school policy.

As noted above, importance was held by religion in earlier eras, or more specifically the Church, because it took responsibility for providing certain key roles and welfare services which were offered to affiliated individuals. For example, they had a medical function in terms of healing, they provided basic training to acquire skills, acted as a meeting place, and organised and hosted social events. Presently, the state fulfils these 'functions' meaning the Church is no longer responsible for providing society with these services, aside from a few cases (Davie 2007, Dobbelaere 1981, 2002, Wilson 1998). There is a sense that the Church has lost its implicit societal importance and that society's interest in wanting to reproduce ideas of community (specifically through religion) has diminished. In many parts of Europe, however, the Church owns and manages a substantial number of schools (Davie 2007) and in England faith schools make up about a third of the 20,000 state-funded schools (Harrison 2011), including 2134 Catholic schools in England (CES 2018).

In asking Catholic parents about their opinions of SRE, this project also explored the influence of parents' religious affiliation on their experiences and opinions. Whether their sense of their religion's 'moral community' and cultural purpose has declined, as the secularisation debate asserts, is discussed in Chapter Eight.

In opposition to the idea that secularisation means society has become less religious entirely, Bruce (1995) argued that rather than subscribing to a shared religion, people are instead selecting the parts of religion that appeal the most to them, therefore, taking a 'pick and mix' approach to religion. This signalled a move away from practising organised religions to a more diverse and individualistic religious affiliation. Berger's (1999) writings show clearly the considerable changes that developed regarding the secularisation hypothesis in the later decades of the 20th Century. Similarly to Bruce, Berger (1999, p2) critiqued the theory of secularisation by saying:

'the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false. The world today, with some exceptions...is furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.'

Berger's view became increasingly shared within the discipline with the privatisation of religion being recognised as the continuation of religion but in the private rather than public sphere (Wilson 1998). In addition, Rasmussen (2010) identified that the secular/religious binaries are not useful in the pursuit of exploring the complexity and diversity of religious identities. Religious heterogeneity is a significant theme in the secularisation debate and specifically relevant to my project because of the potential barriers it placed on accessing participants. This individualistic approach to religion proved to be somewhat of a challenge when analysing the data conducted in this project because of the

diverse intricacies and changeable nature of personal religious affiliation and identity.

When discussing religious pluralism, Davie (2000, p120) identified that European people were increasingly building their own 'religious packages' which resulted in high levels of belief but low levels of practice. Europe maintains a high-level of private individual belief even though much of the population have not participated in traditional religious practices on a regular basis since the 1960s (Casanova 2007). My study was based in an English setting, therefore drawing on studies which focussed on a broader European context has relevance. In England and Wales, when asked 'what religion are you?' as part of the Census (2011) 59%, the largest group within the population, self-identified as 'Christian'. Even though this was the largest group, it had decreased by thirteen percentage points since 2001. All other groups, including the second largest which was the response group 'I have no religion', had increased between 2001 to 2011 (Office for National Statistics 2012). These figures support the argument for religious pluralism in that those who have mostly 'picked' Christian beliefs and practices would likely still identify as 'Christian' when given arbitrary categories to select from.

Correspondingly, Davie (1994, p12-13) described modern Britain as 'unchurched' rather than 'secular' and defined the European situation as 'believing without belonging' with the European people who identified as religious being described as 'detached'. Here Davie is referring to the practice

of private participation in religion without attending or belonging to a church parish or community. In opposition, Hervieu-Leger (2006) offers another description of Europe's situation by describing it as 'belonging without believing'. This means that people recognise an affiliation with a religion but they do not practice or believe in the teachings of the Church.

There are, of course, differing levels of religious affiliation, belief and practice, otherwise known as 'religiosity' (Manlove, Logan, Moore and Ikramullah 2008). Casanova (2007, p14) explains that "secular' and 'Christian' cultural identities are intertwined in complex ways'. The progressively personal nature of religiosity may permit a more fluid approach to religion which could result in increasingly changeable religious affiliation(s) and practice(s). Varying levels of religiosity can be subscribed to and customised to suit one's lifestyle to fit in with an ever-increasing focus on consumerism within society. In the context of conflicting religious and secular discourses between sex-positive and Catholic beliefs, it is important to explore how the secularisation debate impacts on Catholic parents' decision-making regarding their children's learning about sex and relationships. The criteria for selection of my participants was that they identified as 'Catholic' at some point in their life; many of the resultant participants said they no longer belonged to a parish or congregation but still identified as being affiliated with Catholicism. Their current affiliation and practices, if any, were discussed during the interviews.

Definitions, Policy and Provision

Constructions of Sexual Health, Sex Education and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)

To understand the importance of SRE it is necessary to identify what healthy sex and relationships are and to recognise what is meant by 'sexuality' and 'sexual health'.

When the term 'sexuality' (or sexualities) is used within this thesis it is referring to a broad and inclusive definition which is not limited to 'orientation'² but it also encompasses the way we dress, walk and talk amongst many of our other traits and characteristics (Lee 2011). The concept 'sexual cultures' refers to how people learn, discuss and practice sex and how they engage with sex in society in general (Formby 2011a). Wilson (2009, p298) notes:

‘...to understand a group's sexual culture is to examine the ways people speak about sex and sexuality, as well as the messages they report hearing from various institutions (e.g. family, school, religion).’

In a similar vein of inclusivity to the above definitions, when referring to 'sexual health' one (unofficial) definition that seems appropriate to draw on is the World

² Orientation refers to the gender(s) which a person might be romantically or sexually attracted to, if any.

Health Organisation's (WHO) definition because it has influenced most national and regional sexual health documents (Ingham and Hirst 2010):

'Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.' (WHO 2002, p5)

This definition offers a positive and extensive perspective for thinking about sexual health in addition to the (often emphasised) negative outcomes of sex, such as unplanned pregnancy and STIs. It acknowledges these but within the wider framework of wellbeing and the potential for pleasure, relationships, mutual safety, respect and regard for rights. This is known as a 'rights-based approach' to sexual health (Berglas et al. 2014). This definition also recognises the risks that are associated with sexual relationships such as discrimination, coercion and violence, making this approach 'realistic' and 'useful' for introducing conversations with young people (Ingham and Hirst 2010, p100).

In exploring Catholic parents' views on how young people learn about sex and relationships, this study acknowledges the influence of sexual cultures, religion and Catholicism in shaping participants' experiences and understanding. In

parallel, the influence on parents' opinions and decision-making regarding their children's learning by the Roman Catholic Church and cisnormativity and heteronormativity within schools (Callaghan 2016, Formby 2011a, Jackson 2006, Jiménez 2009, Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen and Palmer 2012, Loutzenheiser 2015, Macintosh 2007) will be briefly considered.

SRE Policy in Schools

All previous legislation was consolidated in the Education Act (Great Britain 1996) which became the core legal framework along with the Learning and Skills Act (Great Britain 2000) which states what schools must adhere to. At present, it is mandatory for state-maintained schools to provide some biological aspects of sex education (not relationships) within the National Curriculum for Science. These elements cover subjects such as anatomy, puberty, biological characteristics of sexual reproduction, and the role of hormones to influence fertility (DfES, 2001). The government *recommends* that secondary schools provide SRE embedded in the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education framework. However, PSHE education and Citizenship are not statutory at Key Stage 1 or 2 and only Citizenship becomes mandatory at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) and Key Stage 4 (aged 14-16) leaving PSHE as only 'recommended' (DfEE 2000, FPA 2012). Citizenship can occasionally relate to SRE in that it may cover some relevant topics such as young people's sexual safety, sexual rights and responsibilities (Ingham and Hirst 2010).

The Learning and Skills Act (Great Britain 2000) requires young people to learn about marriage and the importance of family life and raising children. It also

requires young people be protected from 'inappropriate' teaching materials, whilst 'having regard to the age and the religious and cultural background of the pupils concerned' (Great Britain 1996, c.56). The Department for Education and Employment (now Department for Education) released guidance on the delivery of SRE through the PSHE framework (DfEE 2000). This guidance aims to help schools with their SRE policy and practice via teaching strategies, confidentiality and working with parents. It states that there should be a focus in schools on developing knowledge, skills and attitudes through a suitable teaching scheme meaning 'personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers will not influence the teaching of sex and relationship education' (DfEE 2000, p14).

Content to be covered during SRE lessons includes puberty, menstruation, contraception, abortion, safer sex, HIV/AIDS and STIs (though schools are *required* to include some of these topics in the national science curriculum). It also proposes that SRE should '*consider the needs of all pupils*' regardless of sexual orientation or ethnicity (DfEE 2000, p10). However, despite this inclusive recommendation, the binary view of gender used in the advice that primary schools should inform 'boys and girls' of puberty before they experience it for themselves (DfEE 2000, p9) could exclude gender fluid or non-binary identifying people. The guidance also states that '*children should be taught about the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and for bringing up children*' (2000, p11) highlighting that this guidance could encourage schools to reinforce the heteronormative convention of marriage between man and woman because

same-sex marriage was legalised 13 years after the government guidance was published (Great Britain 2013).³

Currently, there are no PSHE education specific qualifications in training institutions for (trainee) teachers to specialise in PSHE. This lack of mandatory teacher training in this subject area has resulted in differing teaching structures and approaches that are dependent on specific schools. Some schools have specialist PSHE teachers and others rely on form tutors or other teachers who specialise in other disciplines (Formby, Hirst, Owen, Hayter and Stapleton 2010). Ingham and Hirst (2010, p113) propose caution in 'the use of outsiders' because they could 'present a specific ideological or moral position which is intended to increase feelings of guilt and/or shame.' They use the example of abortion which, within specific guidelines, is a legal act in Great Britain (1967) though some (religious) schools choose to teach it as a moral issue, which is a particularly relevant example for my project. Jackson (1982) argues that, even in an attempt to reduce SRE to the biological aspects, these cannot be divorced from moral values. To overcome this obstacle to obtaining objective information, Ingham and Hirst (2010) suggest that outsiders who enter schools to teach parts of the SRE curriculum should agree to follow the school's SRE policy, and agree to provide unbiased, evidence-informed information, which is of particular relevance in the context of faith schools.

³ Since legislation on equalising the age of consent, civil partnerships, same sex marriages and same sex couples' rights to adopt children, there has not yet been an official government statement clarifying whether 'family' now extends beyond the nuclear, heterosexual family.

At present, in parallel to secondary schools, primary schools are required by the government (Great Britain 1996) to produce a policy on SRE which is regularly monitored and available to parents. It stipulates that the SRE policy is up-to-date and outlines the organisation's approach and the content of SRE taught in the school (FPA 2012, DfEE 2000). However, schools can simply produce a policy which states a decision not to provide SRE (FPA 2012). The policy is the responsibility of the school governors, in consultation with parents and teachers (DfEE 2000, Great Britain 1996, Great Britain 2000), however, because SRE is not required within schools, many parents are unaware of the requirement for a policy document.

Despite SRE not being required in schools, justifications for it being included in the curriculum have been well documented. Ingham and Hirst (2010) acknowledge the rights of young people to sufficient information, knowledge and support to enable them to make informed decisions relating to their sexual health. This 'right' is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK is a signatory (Unicef 1989). This is relevant to my project because all young people, regardless of religion or cultural background, should have their rights honoured and supported through provision in schools. Another reason these rights are significant is the practical outcome that SRE is effective in improving sexual health (Kirby 2002), though it has been noted that the evidence for this is not particularly strong (Ingham and Hirst 2010). In part, this is due to the various confounding factors that can influence learning and outcomes on sex and relationships (i.e. the factors depicted in figure 1) together with differing SRE frameworks within schools, such as differences in the

school's age of delivery, SRE content, teacher training, and the school's relationship to other sexual health services and SRE agencies. It is hard to assess provision within schools because of the inconsistencies taught in SRE, if a school chooses to provide it at all. Irrespective of inconclusive evidence on whether SRE 'works' or is effective, young people have consistently expressed that they want comprehensive SRE throughout their schooling (Blake 2008, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, UK Youth Parliament 2008).

Defining Sex Education and Sex and Relationships Education

It is fundamental for this project to highlight the difference between sex education, and sex and relationships education (SRE). Sex education has a more conservative content and structure. Content tends to be limited to the biological aspects of sex which are legally required by schools to be delivered as part of the science curriculum and can also be delivered annually in one off sessions as part of a dedicated 'dropdown' day. At present, however, SRE is delivered in some schools as part of the PSHE curriculum (Macdonald 2009) which attempts to adopt a broader, more holistic and liberal perspective that also includes content about relationships (Formby 2011b). This is provided alongside more traditional sex education content on the biological aspects of sexual health, for example disease and pregnancy prevention. Though Macdonald (2009) reported pockets of good practice, much provision is unsatisfactory, and as Formby (2011b) noted, it is lacking in importance due to its non-compulsory status in the curriculum.

Notwithstanding the theoretical differences between sex education and SRE, what happens in practice in schools is not universal. This could result in some schools identifying the curriculum they provide as 'sex education' but in practice it may be more comprehensive and inclusive and therefore more aligned with the definition of SRE, and vice versa. However, regarding best practice, the Sex Education Forum⁴ (SEF 2011a, p 1) is an umbrella body which represents different organisations and viewpoints and its definition of SRE in the UK is widely regarded:

‘Lifelong learning about sex, sexuality, emotions, relationships and sexual health. It involves acquiring information, developing skills and forming positive beliefs, values and attitudes.’

This definition identifies the social and emotional aspects of sex and relationships that need to be considered in SRE programmes rather than only the biological aspects of sex education. SRE is a broad subject area which could be challenging for both parents/carers and teachers yet operationalising this definition relies on parents, carers and young people to be open to learning (Walker 2004). It is not only a subject that delivers an essential basis for early years development (Weare 2010) but it is also a lifelong process of learning for adults (Goldman 2008, Hinchliff 2009, Walker 2004).

⁴ The Sex Education Forum (SEF), which is part of the National Children's Bureau, is a unique UK national collaboration of organisations and individuals committed to improving sex and relationships education for children and young people.

When discussing research from other countries that my study draws on, authors use equivalents to SRE. For example, research from New Zealand or Australia refers to 'sexuality education', and 'sexual health education' is used in Canadian research.

SRE is the preferred term in this thesis as it aims to encapsulate and evaluate parents' opinions on all aspects of sex and relationships including the biological and physical aspects and extending to the emotional and social matters of relationships. SRE is a more realistic and inclusive term that aims to reflect the range of identities and practices which exist in society (Ingham and Hirst 2010).

The children of the participants in this study had received sex education in school and some may have received SRE in PSHE but, even though it was asked as part of the interviews, the exact nature of content is unknown and unpredictable. This is because different schools adopt different content and approaches, and participants were unable to offer more specific information in this respect (see further discussion in Chapter Six).

Compulsory Relationships and Sex Education for All Young People?

As mentioned, the current policy situation for PSHE leads to variations in delivery and quality of SRE. This has resulted in OFSTED (2010) criticising sex education in schools, explaining it was not of a good enough standard in one-quarter of the schools they inspected in England. The standard of SRE is

dependent on the importance the subject is granted at an individual school and the attention it is given by individuals within the school (i.e. school governors, teachers and those responsible for policy development). Consequently, after campaigns and sustained appeals⁵ to the government it was announced that compulsory relationships and sex education (RSE) in secondary schools and relationships education in primary schools are to be implemented from September 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). However, the wider political context has since become unstable with suggestions of another general election being held before 2019, therefore, uncertainty surrounds SRE provision as it remains in a state of flux.

At present parents have the right to withdraw their child from all SRE outside of the national science curriculum until the age of 19 and schools must include a statement about parental withdrawal in their SRE policy document (Great Britain 1996, Monk 2001, Walker 2004). The government has confirmed that the 'parents' right to withdraw their child from sex education within RSE' will be retained once statutory RSE is implemented in 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017, p4) and have qualified this:

'Parents should have the right to teach this themselves in a way which is consistent with *their values*. The Secretary of State will consult further in order to *clarify the age* at which a young person *may have the right to*

⁵ See the Women and Equalities Committee, a cross-party governmental committee appointed by The Houses of Commons who published a report in 2016 on sexual harassment in schools which led to calls for compulsory SRE; see also the relating #SRENow on social media started by Laura Bates of the Everyday Sexism Project in 2016.

make their own decisions...We are also committed to ensuring that the education provided to pupils in Relationships Education and RSE is appropriate to the age of pupils and their religious background.... This provision enables faith schools to teach these subjects according to the tenets of their faith, whilst still being consistent with requirements of the Equality Act.' (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017, p4, my emphasis).

Much of the lobbying and campaigning to the government in support of provision for all, argues that all young people have access to unbiased information about sexual health regardless of their religious background. However, as the above quote indicates, once RSE and Relationships Education are implemented in schools standardised provision remains tentative for those young people whose parents choose to send them to faith schools.

Educational Discourses and Approaches to SRE

This section will identify discourses and approaches that SRE programmes are delivered through. Some of these are developed in the next chapter in relation to positioning Catholic views on SRE, whereas they will be explored here to think about ways in which generic SRE programmes are delivered. Some methodological limitations and issues surrounding the measurement of effective school SRE programmes are highlighted, for example there is a discussion about missing discourses and how these are relevant to young people when applying their learning in their everyday lives.

To make SRE more memorable, future models of SRE programmes should aim to prompt greater interchange between the teacher and student. Producing fun, consciousness raising SRE programmes, which teach skills to enhance self-esteem and achieve aspirations, could positively impact on young people's current and future decision making (Hirst 2004).

The aims and existence of SRE in England have been the focus of much public and political debate (Kidger 2006). Kidger (2006) identifies three discourses through which this debate can be understood: (i) moralistic, (ii) harm reductionist and (iii) empowering. The moralistic discourse emerged from fundamental right-wing ideology which views the sexual behaviour of young people as morally wrong. Advocates of this discourse fear SRE will encourage sexual activity and consequently prefer a curriculum that equates sex with reproduction and only within the sanctity of heterosexual marriage. This is visible in English policy which states the rights for parents to withdraw their child from SRE and with continued emphasis on the 'importance' of marriage (and raising a family) as evidenced in the current guidance (Great Britain 1996, DfEE 2000) mentioned above.

The harm reductionist discourse is a perspective which focusses on the negative or harmful health outcomes that SRE is often associated with, such as teenage pregnancy rates and STIs, making acknowledgement of young people's sexuality and sexual practices more challenging (Allen 2005). There is

still a key focus on preventing teenage pregnancy which enables some teachers to shape SRE provision through a more health-related or risk reductionist approach in which young people are perceived as at risk (Abbott, Elis and Abbott 2016). Those associated with this approach position themselves as scientific, objective, and endorsed by medical and scientific models that endeavour to prevent disease. Its primary emphasis is on delaying sexual activity and promoting barrier contraceptives. The harm reductionist discourse is evident in English policy and practice, for example regarding contraception and abortion (DfEE 2000). This discourse is often justified by its aim to meet key governmental targets, such as those on targets to reduce teenage pregnancy (SEU 1999). This is also evident in the SEF's (Martinez and Emmerson 2008) survey on young people's views on SRE at school which found that the topics young people reported to be taught most frequently included STIs (80%) and contraception (87%). The topic reported as covered least frequently was skills for coping with relationships (21%).

In comparison, the empowering discourse takes a more liberal and radical position with a focus on sexuality being an essential feature of young people's identities, rather than a negative focus on it being harmful, either morally or regarding health outcomes. The proponents of this discourse regard SRE as a young person's 'right' because it provides young people with skills and knowledge to manage their own sexual lives and to experience these positively. The SEF tends to reproduce and reinforce this empowering discourse, however, in comparison to the other possible educational discourses, this approach is not prominent in SRE policy and official documentation. Whilst the most recently

published SRE government guidance (DfEE 2000) shows the empowering discourse has historically been absent from policy, there is scope for the development of this discourse (Kidger 2006, Monk 2001).

In the attempt to define these discourses individually, Kidger (2006) highlights the difficulty in measuring the effectiveness of SRE. A key issue to recognise when investigating the effectiveness of an intervention is the aim of the school's SRE programme, thus possibly encompassing the school's ethos. One reason why measuring the effectiveness of educational discourses is important, as Kidger (2006) acknowledges, is because they can overlap and in practice most SRE frameworks will usually draw on elements from more than one of these discourses (outlined above).

One main concern relating to the effectiveness of SRE in relation to young people's opinions is how much of the information provided during programmes is absorbed and whether this is applied in practice (Allen 2001). Many young people still do not practice safer sex thus suggesting a fault in the purpose of SRE where it is assumed that knowledge taught will turn into practiced behaviour. This has been identified as the 'knowledge/practice gap' (Allen 2001, p110), however, no other subject in the curriculum has to be enforced in this way.

It has been noted in previous research that the scientific position of sex education (Jackson 1978, Parker and Gagnon 1995) results in the discourse of

pleasure as being omitted from sexual health education (Fine 1998, Hirst 2004). A 'discourse of desire' was identified as missing from sexual health narratives by Fine (1998, p38). Even though the topic of pleasure is missing from many SRE programmes, young people have reported finding discussion about desire and pleasure more interesting and thus want to talk about it (Hirst 2004). Practitioners involved in sexual health and SRE echo this finding (Hirst, Wood and Burns-O'Connell 2017). Using a 'discourse of erotics' (Allen 2001) provides the potential to engage young people in exercises and discussions about positive sexual health, agency and care, which danger or harm reductionist discourses on disease and pregnancy prevention have failed to achieve.

Allen (2001) explores how young people conceptualise sexual knowledge and differentiate between what they learn in theory and in personal practice. It was found that young people privileged knowledge gained through personal experience compared with knowledge gained from secondary sources, such as SRE. This perhaps accounts for why some programmes and the messages that are promoted may be ignored. One reason why young people may disregard secondary sources is because they are lacking the discourse which is more familiar to them. As Allen (2001, p115) notes there are two types of discourse within secondary sources: 'official discourses of knowledge' and a 'discourse of erotics'. The discourse that young people were most interested in, spent more time discussing and was most lacking from sexuality education was the 'discourse of erotics.' Allen explains that by adding this discourse to school taught SRE and teaching the key messages (practicing safe sex) within this discourse, the 'knowledge/practice' gap may be narrowed as what is taught

through secondary sources will be more identifiable to the lived or desired practises of the young people, both currently and in the future.

Wider Political and Societal Discourses that may Influence Parents' Views

Previous discussion has pointed out that since the mid-1980s sex education has been the topic of broad and frequent statutory amendments. This, along with unclear SRE provision, has not assisted teachers to manage this multifaceted subject (Monk 2001). Like teachers, parents are not immune from broader debates that might shape their thoughts and actions. The ensuing section looks at key political moments and socio-cultural discourses emanating from media, academia and religious groups that could also impact on parents' feelings and opinions regarding SRE for young people, and ultimately the disclosures they made in their interviews.

SRE Legislation Overview

By providing an overview of SRE legislation to date, this study is positioned within the formal political framework. To reiterate, the current legal structure for sex education was established in the Education Act (Great Britain 1996). The subsequent election of the Labour government in 1997 raised the hopes of many advocates who had campaigned for many years (mostly unsuccessfully) for children's rights and for sex education policies which reflected the views and sexual health needs of young people (Monk 2001).

The Labour government commissioned a report by the Social Exclusion Unit into teenage pregnancies (SEU 1999) and released the Learning and Skills Act (Great Britain 2000) which amends the Education Act (Great Britain 1996). This stated that the Secretary of State must release guidance for sex education which schools are required to 'have regard'⁶ to (Great Britain 2000). However, governors only have to 'have regard' for the guidance and consequently little is known of whether the guidance is operationalized within SRE provision and practice because the regulating legal framework remains the same as before this guidance was issued (Monk 2001).

In 2008 the Labour government (specifically, Jim Knight, the Minister for schools in England) proposed that Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, which includes SRE, would become part of the national curriculum at all key stages in all state-maintained schools from September 2011 (Ingham and Hirst 2010, Formby 2011b). Whilst there would have been compulsory content for state-maintained schools, faith schools would have been allowed to (continue to) teach the SRE content in line with their ethos. This announcement was received positively by many organisations (for example the SEF) but in contrast this raised concerns from other organisations and groups, notably religious groups (Ingham and Hirst 2010). For example, in response to the proposal for statutory SRE, Stannard (2010), the chief executive of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales, recommended 'all Catholic schools to continue to impart authentic Catholic teaching under the Children,

⁶ To 'have regard' for the guidance means there is no legal requirement for schools to implement the recommendations;

Schools and Families Bill', particularly relating to SRE. Stannard (2010) confirmed that Catholic schools 'robustly teach...about the sanction of life and do not and would not promote abortion.' This was extended to further explain that Catholic schools would not withhold facts in SRE and that sensitive issues would be discussed. An aim of Catholic schools is to ensure that young people understand differing viewpoints but ultimately their purpose is to ensure their students understand what the Catholic Church teaches and expects from those who are affiliated. This primary purpose of ensuring young people (whose parents chose to send them to Catholic schools) know what the Church believes has implications for my study. However, the proposal for SRE to become compulsory failed to become legislation before the general election in 2010 when it was abandoned by the Labour party. When the coalition government came to power at this time, they confirmed their decision not to make PSHE education (including SRE) compulsory (Formby 2011b).

SRE was illustrated as an area of political interest during the 2015 general election when four out of the five main political parties mentioned SRE specifically in their manifesto (Emmerson 2015). Whilst there has recently been more political focus on implementing SRE initiatives, with RSE and relationships education scheduled for implementation in 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017), it remains a contentious subject which fuels political and social debate (Hirst 2004, Walker 2004). Even though RSE is to become statutory (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017), the rearranging of the words 'sex' and 'relationships' (so that 'relationships' comes before 'sex'), and the removal of the word 'sex' from primary school education so that

‘relationships’ is given primary position, could imply that sex education could be overlooked, even more than it currently is. This is relevant for faith schools where relationships and marriage may already be prioritised over inclusive and varied educational content about sex.

‘Childhood Innocence’ and ‘Sexualisation’

As mentioned above, education for young people about sex and relationships stimulates debate within the government but it also galvanises, often polarised, views within the rest of society about young people and ideas about the construction of ‘childhood’.

‘Childhood innocence’ is a concept that has been constructed by, and is often conflated with, parental fears about the influence of sex education on children’s sexual development (Goldman 2008, Lenskyj 1990), with some suggesting sex education encourages sex and early sexual debut (this is discussed below).

‘Childhood innocence’ is often framed as needing protection from the ‘sexualisation’ of children. The term ‘sexualisation’, in popular discourse, refers to children becoming sexual when they are deemed to be too young. The two reports that the government released on ‘sexualisation’ (Papadopoulos 2010, Bailey 2011) were, however, highly criticised (Smith and Attwood 2011). One of the criticisms was that the reports were carried out with adults instead of children, which gave weight to adults’ concerns about the ‘sexualisation’ of children rather than evidence of it. Such criticisms are in keeping with other academics and practitioners who argue that adult notions of sexuality are

prioritised over young people's ideas and experiences (Allen 2005, Hirst 2004). However, for my research, in the context of discussing SRE, it felt important to explore parental views because the onus lays with them as to whether their children receive education about sex and relationships or not.

Fears about the 'sexualisation' of children, which have sometimes been heightened by political, media and religious debate (HC Deb 2011, Kirby 2017, The Christian Institute 2011), could be viewed as having become embedded into popular thought and have augmented the perception that sex education equates with sexualisation. This objection to young people learning about sex and relationships, which is often cited as a parent's main reason for opposing SRE, has been referred to as having an impact on the provision of young people's formal sex education (Hirst and Ingham 2010, Smith and Attwood 2011).

Smith and Attwood argue:

'There is a view that sex education is an incitement to underage sex and in and of itself an attempt to sexualize the child, hence the frequent recourse to ideas of "children being forced to grow up too quickly" and the calls to "give children back their childhoods".'

(Smith and Attwood 2011, p11).

Yet, to date, there has been no research that explores if there is a relationship between parental perceptions of 'sexualisation' and sex education provision within the family.

As mentioned above, access to sexual information by young people is viewed as 'risky' in many cases, with increasing concerns that this knowledge may lead to sexual experimentation (Egan and Hawkes 2008, Renold 2005, Taylor 2010, Davies and Robinson 2010). This means parents are left to decide what information is adequate or appropriate with little guidance, leaving some parents fearful that they will destroy their child's 'innocence' (Morawska, Walsh, Grabski and Fletcher 2015, Davies and Robinson 2010). For parents with a religious affiliation there is guidance available in terms of what their religion advises. Traditionally within Catholicism, young people are perceived, and expected to be, sexually innocent until they enter the institution of marriage.

Here I offer an example of religious objection to sex education based on the perception of 'sexualisation'. In 2010, images of teaching literature used to teach primary school children (Key Stages 1 and 2) were obtained by the media. These images consisted of a cartoon of a couple having sexual intercourse in different positions (See Appendix A). The images led to negative responses from religious organisations voicing their disapproval over the use of such teaching literature. The Christian Institute released a report in response titled 'Too Much, Too Young' (2011, p3) which stated:

'at a time when there is growing alarm at the sexualisation of childhood, using sexually explicit resources in schools can surely only make things much worse.'

It has been suggested that many of the advocates objecting to SRE on religious or cultural grounds may do so because they believe sex education is likely to be harmful (Ingham and Hirst 2010). The Christian Institute report identified debates relating to the age appropriateness of the content of SRE lessons and the sources used to teach SRE in schools. In summary, sex education was conflated with the 'sexualisation' of children and young people.

When gender is included into the conversation regarding 'innocence', it becomes apparent that young girls' sexual identities are unequally surveyed and policed because they are viewed as more vulnerable than their male counterparts (Abbott, Elis and Abbott 2016, Bragg and Buckingham 2013). The 'sexualisation debate' arguably supports antiquated moral and religious agendas which place women and girls as responsible for male sexual harassment, coercion and violence, based on their everyday practices, for example what they choose to wear (Bragg and Buckingham 2013). For those who are in favour of comprehensive and inclusive education about sex and relationships, it is advocated that all young people have a right to sexual knowledge and this should not be denied because of adults' desire to protect their 'innocence' (Hirst 2013).

Amongst parents, and society more generally, it has been reported that there are increasing concerns for young children who are being exposed to assumed 'problematic' messages and standards relating to sex and sexuality (Bragg, Buckingham, Russell and Willett 2011, Morawska et al. 2015, Papadopoulos

2010, Walker and Milton 2006). For example, it is argued that artificial, and often unobtainable, images and sexual behaviours influenced by pornography started to increasingly appear in mainstream popular culture, referred to as 'pornification' (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007). It was suggested by some, including politicians, that 'pornification' was part of the cause of the 'sexualisation' of children (Attwood and Smith 2011, Mason 2013). However, even though young people have asserted their desire for SRE, where provision for this is absent and/or deficient, young people could resort to using pornography as a resource to subsidise their desire for knowledge. Yet the anxieties surrounding young people's access to pornography and its related images and messages have been critiqued. Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa (2007) suggest that by giving sex a public status, pornography could play a significant part in curtailing the taboos which surround sex in society. In a bid to prevent young people from accessing pornographic websites, however, the government implemented the Digital Economy Act (Great Britain 2017) which, from 2018, will require users to evidence that they are over 18 years of age. It is currently thought that, once website age-verification is implemented, users will have to submit their credit card details as proof of age to access websites containing 'pornographic' material. As well as providing the potential to reinforce any societal concerns relating to (young people and) sex, little reassurance has been provided to assure access to educational websites, which may be deemed to contain 'pornographic' content, will not be hindered.

To illustrate the importance of providing young people with access to information and knowledge, Goldman (2008) uses an example of teaching young people about road safety. By providing information and practical skills to young people promoting road safety, this discourages them from going near traffic. Existing literature suggests that sexual knowledge protects young people from unwanted and risk-taking sexual behaviour and the negative implications associated with such behaviours (Goldman 2008). Concern about SRE may stem from the desire to protect young people from harm but Goldman (2008, p8) explains 'knowledge does not harm' and the prevention of SRE leads to an unsafe position of 'ignorance rather than of innocence'.

Moreover, despite the often-cited adult perceived fears that sex education will lead to the 'sexualisation' of young people and alleged loss of 'childhood innocence', the opposite is supported with considerable evidence. Bragg and Buckingham (2013) suggested that parents have a more multifaceted view of 'sexualisation' than is often portrayed by campaigns. They found that parents generally resisted the idea of the 'sexualisation' discourse for a more reasoned approach. Many parents reported finding communication about sexuality during childhood as necessary and appropriate to help encourage their children to talk about sexual matters (Stone, Ingham, McGinn and Bengry-Howell 2017). Furthermore, linked to parent-child communication and parental involvement in sex education, there has been reported reductions in risky-behaviours (Huebner and Howell 2003) and delays in first sexual intercourse (Lehr, Delorio, Dudley and Lipana 2000, Mercer, Tanton, Prah, Erens, Sonnenberg, Clifton, Macdowall, Lewis, Field, Datta and Copas 2013).

Maintaining that education could build young people's self-esteem and confidence and may help them to identify 'risky' scenario, it could also help to safeguard children from those who could exploit or abuse them. The high-profile sexual abuse scandal within the Catholic church, along with other cases portrayed in the media, for example, Operation Yewtree⁷ (2012), could act as justification for religious parents who advocate education about sexuality and relationships but may be faced with opposition from the Church. This could enable the purpose of SRE to be portrayed as a form of safeguarding and protection from (sexual) harm which may be received more positively by other parents and religious groups/elders. Though provision being positioned within a harm-reductionist/risk-prevention SRE model means that the SRE curriculum could be restricted to negative protectionist content.

It is a common belief that the provision of sex education at school is often influenced, or even blocked, because of parental and religious groups' objections (Jerves, López, Castro, Ortiz, Palacios, Rober and Enzlin 2014, Ingham and Hirst 2010). Reasons for objecting to sex education, either at school or at home, can be to protect 'childhood innocence' (Goldman 2008), as mentioned above. It is commonly considered that parents and religious groups who object to formal SRE might object to learning about sex in its entirety. Such parents may prefer to give sex education to their children at home so that can teach it in a way that adheres to their family's (religious) ethos (Turnbul, van

⁷ Operation Yewtree was a police investigation into sexual abuse, usually of children, by public media personalities, namely Jimmy Savile.

Wersch and van Schaik 2008, SEF 2011b). This is based on assumptions, however, because there is no available information about the profile of parents who opt to withdraw their children from SRE (OFSTED 2002).

The constructs of 'sexualisation' and loss of 'childhood innocence' have been at the centre of political and societal debate, and dialogue with parents has been identified by some as the solution (Bragg and Buckingham 2013). The relationships between Catholic parents' opinions about the construct of 'sexualisation' and the protection of 'childhood innocence' are explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Conclusion

In England, SRE remains one of the most politicised and contentious features of the school curriculum. Therefore, this chapter has identified some of the complex issues which help to demonstrate why SRE has been the focus of public and political debate for decades. Firstly, it has established that young people may use several sources to learn about sex and relationships and they may experience many factors influencing this learning. This project primarily focussed on the influence of parents, religious beliefs, and school. The summary of relevant SRE policy developments and broader societal debates concerning the construction of 'childhood innocence' and the 'sexualisation' of young people has provided a backdrop for a more specific focus on Catholic parents' opinions on SRE in the following chapters.

This chapter has briefly summarised some key terms, discourses, policy development, and some changes in religious affiliations, practices and beliefs in order to situate the participants' opinions and accounts and to highlight the intricacies of religious identity.

Chapter 3. SRE: The Key Debates Positioning Young People, Parents and Denominational Schools

Introduction

Decades of public and political debate stretch a continuum from SRE as an important and necessary curricular subject to SRE as 'dangerous' and potentially corrupting. Consensus among politicians and other institutional stakeholders has not been achieved and their views have superseded those of children, young people and families. Hence, what follows is discussion about some of the debates pertinent to this thesis that have not been centre-stage: Young People and Sex and Relationships Education; Parental views on Education about Sexualities and Relationships; Religious Parents and SRE.

Young People and Sex and Relationships Education

It is well documented that young people believe SRE, at school and within the family, needs to be improved (Foster, Byers and Sears 2011, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, Pound, Denford, Shucksmith, Tanton, Johnson, Owen Hutten, Mohan, Bonell, Abraham and Campbell 2017). As mentioned above, young people's opinions and experiences of sexual behaviour were first studied in 1965 by Schofield. Since then, young people have consistently stated that they have found SRE provision at school to be unsuitable (Schofield 1965, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, UK Youth Parliament 2008, Hirst 2004, OFSTED 2010, Pound, Langford and Campbell 2016), stating that SRE is often 'too little, too

late and too biological' (Blake 2008, p37). A quantitative study of young people's attitudes towards SRE, conducted by the SEF (2016), found that nationally 22% of young people aged between 11 and 25 thought their SRE was 'bad' or 'very bad' and just 10% thought it was 'very good'. Furthermore, a previous survey of young people's attitudes towards their SRE, conducted by Martinez and Emerson (2008), found that in comparison to those who attended non-denominational or Church of England schools, a larger percentage of respondents who attended faith schools reported their SRE as bad or very bad (49 per cent). At the time of the publication of these studies, the approach to SRE, apart from that taught within science lessons, was at the discretion of the school, meaning faith schools could deliver SRE through their religious lens, if they chose to provide it at all. This could be one reason why young people who attended religious schools rated their SRE worse than those who attended other (non-faith) schools.

The Disparity Between Young People's Needs and Adult Conceived SRE

International health education, and sexual and reproductive health literature, frequently presents the assumption that young people's behaviours are relatively homogenous and risk-laden. Much school-based SRE content in the UK parallels this view with adults mostly framing both the content and delivery of SRE within their understanding of young peoples' needs, and assuming this is sufficient to provide an appropriate menu of options for the SRE curriculum content (Hirst 2004, Allen 2005, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, Attwood and Smith 2011).

Another reason why young people in general report SRE as poor could be because its content and desired outcomes are 'largely adult conceived' (Allen 2005, p389; see also, Allen 2011, Rasmussen 2006 and Ringrose 2013). The success of an SRE programme therefore tends to be evaluated via a focus on a decrease in negative outcomes of the 'unplanned/unwanted', for example, a lower teenage conception rate or a decrease in STI rates (Lees 1993, Kidger 2006). Allen (2005) investigated whether young people prioritised these same (adult-identified) negative measures when identifying what constitutes a 'successful' SRE programme. When reviewing SRE's effectiveness in relation to young people's opinions, Allen's research on young New Zealanders' opinions highlighted important ideological issues which were also relevant in a broader geographical context. For example, the 16-to-19-year-old New Zealanders did not think a reduction in STIs and unplanned pregnancy were appropriate measures of effective sexuality education; rather they identified curriculum content and teacher competency as measures of effective sexuality education (Allen 2005). The difference between adults' requirements for SRE (particularly the UK government in my study's context) compared with young peoples' requests are represented by the youth parliament's vote for compulsory sex education in primary schools where 214 members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) voted in favour, compared to 104 who voted against it (UK Youth Parliament 2010).

In contradiction to young people's opinions, the content of SRE in relation to the age of the young person has also been questioned. In response to the government's plans to make SRE compulsory, The Catholic Herald (2017), a

leading Catholic publication, expressed concerns over (unsubstantiated) 'calls to teach masturbation to four-year olds'. Likewise, as discussed above, other Christian organisations have openly challenged the age-appropriateness of some SRE teaching literature (The Christian Institute 2017, Hancock 2011). Nadine Dorries (Conservative MP) also argued it was inappropriate for children aged seven to be shown this teaching material, declaring that it had resulted in children being removed from schools because 'some children were left frightened, alarmed and distressed by the videos' (HC Deb 2011, column 680). To reiterate, the examples above evidence that in contrast to adult conceived notions, young people have persistently said that they feel if/when they receive SRE either at school or home it is often too late (OFSTED 2010, Blake 2008). The SEF found that young people wanted to receive SRE regularly throughout secondary school instead of in the format as a one-off lesson and they wanted it to be taught from primary school age (Martinez and Emmerson 2008). Likewise, the UK Youth Parliament (2008) found that 73 per cent of respondents felt that SRE should be delivered under the age of thirteen. Irrespective of opinion and survey findings, age appropriate content should at minimum match the age of puberty; boys reach sexual maturity at the average age of 12 years old and girls reach puberty at the average age of 11 (NHS 2016), though this varies widely and can also be younger. This is reflected, to some degree, in the UK government guidance (DfEE 2000) which recommends the subject of puberty should be taught before young people reach puberty in primary school. The discussion of age appropriateness is returned to in Chapter Seven.

Students have stated they want their sexuality recognised, for example, in their desire for more discussion on the logistics of sexual activity and for this to be framed positively (Allen 2005). This requires acknowledgement of young people as sexual beings who already have sexual knowledge and are requesting further detailed (and accurate) information. Subsequently, this invites adults, and schools, to recognise young people as legitimate sexual agents who hold knowledge that supports the right to positive sexual experiences (Hirst 2013, Allen 2005). Furthermore, by acknowledging student sexuality and respecting young people as 'sexual subjects' (Hirst 2013, p433), and consequently by emphasising young people's views of 'effective' SRE, sexual health and well-being outcomes could be positively influenced. To encourage young people to 'take charge' or rather to empower them to take responsibility for their sexual health and wellbeing means their input as sexual agents is a necessity when identifying measures of programme success. At present though, as already discussed above, the responsibility of whether a young person receives SRE legally rests with their parents and, because of the contradicting ideas of what makes effective or appropriate SRE between young people and adults, this entitlement to sexual agency might not be realised.

Young people's experience of pleasure and desire is a contentious area of SRE (Allen 2007, Hirst 2014). Official forums, such as WHO's (2000, p11) definition of sexual health, also proclaim the importance for a person's 'right to sexual pleasure.' Despite the dominant discourses of danger which currently run through sex education, many young people have an interest in the pleasurable aspects of sexuality. Literature concerning young people's views identified

pleasure and desire as missing discourses from SRE within school (Fine 1998, Allen 2007, Hirst 2004). Allen (2007) found that young people felt pleasure was relevant to their lives and they were interested in information about this subject being delivered during SRE. However, it has been highlighted that the inclusion of pleasure into the curriculum could lead to educators (unintentionally) situating pleasure as the goal to be achieved through sexual practices: this is referred to as the 'pleasure imperative' (Allen and Carmody 2012, Lamb 2014, Rasmussen 2014). Focussing on pleasure as central to sexual experiences could lead to problematic notions about why people may, or may not, be involved in sexual experiences (Allen 2012, Allen and Carmody 2012).

Pleasure as a necessary element of SRE is not recognised in most cultures (Ingham 2005) or religions but it is becoming increasingly indicated that public health outcomes may benefit from the acceptance of positive sexual experiences (Pound et al. 2017). Additionally, in contrast to the risk discourses in SRE often pursued by adults, including pleasure in SRE could allow young people to develop 'sexual competence' (Hirst 2013, p408). Young women in particular (who are often viewed as passive within risk discourses) could be supported to have more influence over their sexual experiences by developing their sexual competence and hopefully practicing safer sexual activities and behaviours (Hirst 2013, Ingham 2014). Whilst the tensions between 'pleasure' and 'danger' discourses are still present within SRE, advocates of comprehensive SRE maintain it is important for discourses of pleasure and desire to be included to ensure young people are viewed by adults, and themselves, as sexual agents who can make positive sexual health decisions

(Allen 2007). The significance of this for SRE within a traditional Catholic context are discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

Young People Want Improved and Applicable SRE

Though young people have stated that they want better quality and quantity of SRE (Martinez and Emmerson 2008, Foster et al. 2011, Pound et al. 2017, Blake 2008), embarrassment is one issue which could become a barrier to learning and teaching about sex and relationships and may restrict or hinder SRE lessons in schools (Martinez and Emmerson 2008, Pound et al. 2017). The issue of student and teacher embarrassment signals the necessity for training for educators to help ensure teachers are comfortable when discussing sex (Martinez and Emmerson 2008, Pound et al. 2017). Teachers need to be equipped with essential skills and confidence to enable them to deal with the possible challenges in recognising young peoples' sexualities and rights to sexual autonomy (Hirst 2004, Formby 2011b, Abbott, Ellis and Abbott 2016). Young people have stipulated the requirement for teachers and educators with real-life experience (SEF 2011a) and who can make the sessions interesting and fun with the use of innovative and engaging teaching methods (Stephenson, Strange, Allen, Copas, Johnson, Bonell, Babiker, Oakley and the RIPPLE Study Team 2008, Hirst 2014).

It is important to note that sex education should be taught in a way which can be applied to all young people's lives. Sanjakdar (2011) notes, according to

religious young people, secular sex education - which means religion is excluded from the school sex education curriculum resulting in unbiased provision - could be viewed as irrelevant to young people's lives. This sheds light on the complex nature of young people's identities and understandings of sex and relationships and highlights the balance teachers are required to achieve when teaching SRE. However, when thinking about sex education provided by parents or carers, it may often be assumed that their approach to SRE is simpler because of their understanding of their child's faith and their own religiosity. This has relevance for my participants because of their varying levels of religious affiliation and practice, and the possible influence this had on their children's experience of religion and sex education.

In comparison with parents, the nuanced 'balancing-act' which educators are expected to assume between the religious and the secular becomes recognised as a major challenge in young people's sex education (Ingham and Hirst 2010). External educators' roles become especially important when placed in the context of young people's description of the sex education their parents provide as being 'infrequent and of poor quality' (Goldman 2008, p7). This contradiction between religious beliefs, and comprehensive SRE holds relevance when discussing faith schools. To understand the complexity of young people's religious beliefs and for SRE to connect with young people's real lives, the development of the SRE curriculum requires consultation and collaboration with young people (Hirst 2013, Allen 2005).

Parental Views on Education about Sex and Relationships

There is a growing body of research exploring parents' views on education about sex and relationships and how they communicate with their children about sexualities. However, these studies tend to be based in other countries: McCormack and Gleeson (2010) in Ireland; Pop and Rusu (2016) in Romania; Sharifi (2016) in Iran; and Igor, Ines and Štulhofer (2015) in Croatia. Little research has been conducted in England. The key study which has most relevance to my research is Walker's (2004) 'Parents and sex education—looking beyond 'the birds and the bees'', which is a qualitative study that explored the views of parents in the context of northern England (see also Stone et al. 2017, McGinn, Stone, Ingham and Bengry-Howell 2016 and Stone, Ingham and Gibbins 2013). My research will add to this small body of research in English contexts and expand on previous research highlighting parents' opinions on their children's learning about sex and relationships. As opposed to the more general focus on all parents (in other research), this project has a focus on Catholic parents and how their religious affiliation may (or may not) influence their opinions and experiences of sex education.

Parental Preference and Influence on SRE

Involving parents in talking about sexual health with their children is important as it could influence the sexual health of future generations (Walker 2004). Parental preferences for formal SRE hinges on the level of knowledge parents have about the programme their child's school delivers, however, many parents

report little knowledge of what their children were being taught in school SRE classes (Fisher and McTaggart 2008, SEF 2011a). To complement the wider provisions offered to children, it was therefore recommended that school education should support learning about sex and relationships led by parents, and that schools inform parents about the content of SRE taught at each stage of their education programme in order 'to build a stronger dialogue between schools and home' (Fisher and McTaggart 2008, p1). Young people have also been clear about their parents' or carers' important role in their learning about sex and relationships (DfES 2001, SEF 1996, SEF 2011a). However, even though SRE is often developed and evaluated only by adults (for example policy makers, government, teachers, religious leaders, parent teacher committees) rather than young people, parents generally have little or no knowledge about what is being taught in school lessons (SEF 2011a). There is further discussion about Catholic parent's knowledge about the SRE their children receive within school in chapter five.

Despite the evidence suggesting that most parents support SRE, parental objection can influence formal SRE provision. There can be negative implications when a minority of parents or an interest group object to children being taught about sexualities and relationships (Jerves et al. 2014). Even though involving parents in SRE provision is encouraged officially by the government (DfEE 200, DfES 2001), some schools have previously kept parents at a distance. This distance was employed to prevent a small proportion of parents, or faith groups, from being affronted by SRE provision (Walker 2004, Ingham and Hirst 2010). The opinions of a minority of parents or

religious/interest groups can lead to the SRE framework in schools being altered or parts of the content being purposely ignored. Ingham and Hirst (2010, p102) shed light on an example where two parents objected to a best-selling Channel 4 sex and relationships video being shown to their children at school and thus it was not presented to the class, even though 158 parents had not protested. This highlights the fear of the reaction that many sexual educators and practitioners experience regarding sources used to teach SRE and the content within their SRE provision (Wood, Hirst, Wilson, Burns-O'Connell 2018). In exploring Catholic parent's opinions, the legitimacy in fearing a backlash from this specific group of parents is called into question by assessing whether they support or object to SRE and if they are interested in working in conjunction with schools to provide effective SRE; such matters will be discussed in chapter six.

As a suggested remedy to these situations of disagreement, the government call for collaboration and consultation within the community when developing school SRE frameworks by including young people, parents and governors (DfEE 2000). Furthermore, government guidance refers to a 'partnership' between parents and schools, encouraging input from both 'partners' when developing the schools SRE policy and for schools to offer support for parents, potentially resulting in improved consistency between home and school teaching (DfEE 2000, DfES 2001). Similarly, Dyson and Smith (2012) found that the parents in their study wanted to receive further information about the content and delivery of the sex education their child's school provided and they wanted the school to take an active role in communicating with parents. Foster et al. (2011, p63) also acknowledged the importance of the parent-school

contributions to their children's sexual health education and identified both as 'partners'. The different partnerships and relationships that exist between Catholic parents, and Catholic and non-denomination schools was further explored from Catholic parents' perspectives in this study.

It has been questioned whether there can be equality between the parent-teacher partnership, and subsequently Goldman (2008) called for quality school-based SRE as she rejects the recommendation for a combined effort between schools and parents. This is because, as stated above, despite parents' best intentions they provide 'infrequent' and/or 'inadequate' home-based SRE (Goldman 2008, p427). Ogle, Glasier and Riley (2008) found that parents experienced barriers in educating their children about sexual health issues. The importance of exploring such barriers, which are significant in influencing parents' communications with their children about sexualities, has also been recognised (Morawska 2015). A notable barrier identified by Walker (2001) was that a parent's own experience, or lack, of SRE influenced the sex education they provided within their family. As mentioned earlier in the context of school-based SRE, another commonly mentioned barrier to providing (good quality) education within the family is embarrassment (SEF 2011b, Stone et al. 2017, Farrington, Holgate, McIntyre and Bulsara 2014). Subsequently, because their study did not have the scope to investigate the subject further, Morawska (2015) makes a case for a qualitative exploration of parents' difficulties in parent-child communications about sex and relationships. My study explored such challenges using an in-depth, qualitative approach to establish Catholic

parents' unique barriers to providing SRE, which are discussed in Chapter Seven.

The aim to tackle teenage pregnancy rates in the UK has led to more pragmatic approaches to involving parents in SRE and developing partnerships (Walker 2004). Current debates between the government, Christian groups, feminists and pro-abortion activists about the content and delivery of school-based SRE, however, suggest there are still improvements to be made. Jerves et al. (2014, p24) identified 'the need for a learning space for parents' because of confusion regarding the sexual rights of young people which indicates parents' lack of knowledge. This ambiguity could be a result of parents being caught between (religious) traditions and their hope for better SRE provision for their own children. Such contradictions for parents, between secular and religious approaches, could act as obstructions in the provision of SRE for young people. It is therefore important that parents are provided with accurate information relating to sexual health, sexual practices and sexual identities, especially regarding issues that may conflict with the beliefs of their religion. This has repercussions for my study which aimed to explore the possible contradictions Catholic parents engaged with when considering what they deem to be the most appropriate approach for young people to learn about sexualities and relationships.

Approaching Education within the Family

Even though sex education provided by parents to their child is often referred to as ‘the talk’ (Kuhle, Melzer, Cooper, Merkle, Pepe, Ribanovic, Verdesco and Wettstein 2015), it has been found that there is little evidence of parents providing a significant one-off talk (Walker 2001, Stone et al. 2017). Morawska (2015) suggests using daily events to engage young people in conversations about sexuality and Kuhle et al. (2015) suggest this approach could encourage an on-going education rather than a less useful one-off ‘big talk’. Parents in Stone et al.’s (2017, p12) study reported providing sex education in a more gradual ‘drip-feed’ manner, with the content determined by the young person’s ability to comprehend the information being provided. Another approach used to initiate sex education within the family was to embrace everyday routine practices as ‘trigger moments’ which prompted regular discussion, for example, bath time and getting dressed (Stone et al. 2017, p12). Dent and Maloney refer to these opportunities for discussion as ‘teachable moments’ (2017). Chapter Seven illustrates the occurrence and nature of such ‘teachable moments’ that Catholic parents took to the provision of sex education within their family.

According to research, most parents feel children should have a right to SRE regardless of background and that SRE is significant to the overall development of their child (Sherbert Research 2009, Berne, Patton, Milton, Hunt, Wright, Peppard and Dodd 2000). Therefore, it is felt that to help their children make informed choices parents should strive to provide their children with knowledge and skills, and it has been viewed as ‘unethical’ and ‘futile’ to influence the sexual decisions of their children (Berne et al. 2000, p167). To assist with this,

Turnbull et al. (2008) found that parents requested that schools provided information about the content being taught at school to parallel their teaching at home. When exploring parent-child communication, however, both Stone et al. (2017) and Walker (2001) found that there was a lack of communication between parents about the sex education that was being provided within their family. To achieve effective sex education within the family, Jerves et al. (2014) suggested encouraging joint and supportive roles in providing education and communication about sexual matters. For my participants who had both parents present in their family unit, the communication between them is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Parent-child communication about sexual subjects may be influenced by how comfortable they feel during such interactions. Some parents have discussed either their own or their child's 'discomfort' in discussing sexual issues within the family (Stone et al. 2017, p10). In contrast, when asked how they felt when discussing sexual health issues with their children, the parents in Ogle, Glasier and Riley's (2008) study reported being 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable'. They felt discomfort, however, when discussing specific topics such as sexual intercourse and masturbation. Some parents have stated they did not want to learn about their child's sexual history (Foster et al. 2011), with mothers with high levels of religiosity identifying their discomfort as a barrier in discussing topics such as abortion and sexual assault with their children (Farrington et al. 2014). Despite these perceived barriers to communication, other research found that some parents have suggested that their own poor experience of SRE made them determined not to reproduce a generation with their same poor SRE

knowledge and that they wanted their own children to be better informed than they were as adolescents (Kirkman, Rosenthal and Shirley, Feldman, 2005, Walker 2001, SEF 2011b, Berne et al. 2000). Such issues are discussed further in Chapter Seven where my study uncovers the issues which Catholic parents identified as limiting factors in their provision of education about sex and relationships within their family.

In Morawska's (2015) study, parents felt they were lacking in confidence, knowledge and skills and, therefore, did not initiate conversations with their children about sex and relationships. In contrast, Ogle, Glasier and Riley (2008) found that the barriers experienced by parents in communicating about sexual health matters with their children derived from a reluctance from the young people rather than their parents. Stone et al. (2017) identified that parents could be grouped into either 'proactive' or 'reactive' sex educators based on who initiated the sex education provided within the family. The reactive parents provided communication when prompted by their child whereas the proactive parents, which were a much smaller group in their study, instigated communication. This might be because many parents did not feel confident enough to initiate communications about sex and relationships with their children (Morawska 2015). Those who were confident enough to raise discussions did so with their children before such matters had arisen, therefore, aiming to provide open education with the intent to prevent embarrassment (Stone et al. 2017). Similarly, Foster et al. (2011) suggested that parents could positively contribute to the instigation of SRE at home by encouraging their children to often ask sexuality related questions instead of postponing until the

young person asks questions or they show signs that their parents assume mean they are ready for sex education. Who initiated learning about sexualities and relationships within my participants' families is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Stone et al. (2017, p10) found that, in contrast with their own upbringing, parents often wanted to form 'strong' and 'open' relationships with their children where their children could speak with them about any subject matter. It is important, however, to include a cautionary note about when parents might define their approach to sex education as 'open'. The parents' definitions of openness may have somewhat restricted specifications when compared with the broad definition commonly used within the study of sex education (Frankham 2006, Stone et al. 2017). In the context of parents who have been educated via a religious doctrine, the parent's personal and family's biography and opinions could result in varied manifestations of 'open' sex education. When viewed in contrast with those who do not affiliate with a religion, it could be assumed that 'open' sex education might include particular limitations when referred to by parents who affiliate with a religious organisation. The preferred approach to providing education within the family and the Catholic parents' experiences of this are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Who Should be the Main SRE Educator?

The role that parents play in young people's sexual education and development is essential. Just as adolescents view the family as their primary source of sexual health information (Walker 2001, Berne et al. 2000), parents also think

that they are young people's main source of information about sexualities and consider their role to be essential (Morawska 2015). Furthermore, parents or carers have been regarded as the 'primary sexual educators' of their children (Turnbull et al. 2008), and schools viewed as an additional source (Dyson and Smith 2010). Within the existing literature, however, there is confusion regarding parental preferences about who should deliver SRE. Both school and parents have been considered to be the two main educators of SRE (Sherbert Research 2009, SEF 2011b), though there is a variety of other sources that young people employ to learn about sexualities and relationships as illustrated in the previous chapter. Most parents feel they should have a role in their child's SRE (SEF 2011b) and many parents see SRE as a joint task between themselves and their child's school (Ingham and Hirst 2010). This may be because parents feel able to maintain their own family's ethnic or cultural morals, values, and faith this way (SEF 2011b). Whether the parents in my study preferred schools or parents to be primarily responsible for the provision of young people's education about sex and relationships is discussed in Chapter Five.

In contrast to this view, elsewhere most parents have reported trusting their child's school to provide appropriate sex education and they identified a positive connection with comprehensive SRE programmes (Sherbert Research 2009, Berne et al. 2000). UK Parents have tended not to support abstinence-only SRE agendas due to their ineffective results of reducing sexual behaviour among adolescents (Turnbull et al. 2010, Berne et al. 2000). Previous research has found, however, that a small proportion of parents felt that values taught at

school may not be consistent with their own (Sherbert Research 2009, SEF 2011a). Some parents saw school SRE as an opportunity to provide young people with skills and knowledge and believed parents could instil the values that are appropriate to the family's religious or cultural preferences at home (SEF 2011b). Farrington et al. (2014) found, however, that where highly religious parents had found difficulty in discussing issues with their children which conflicted with their religious beliefs, there was an assumption that schools would provide adequate sex education. Bijelic (2008) argued SRE that reflects the value system of parents may lead to discriminatory teaching (for example, teaching about homosexuality). In a time of change within religious affiliation and practices, there is saliency in exploring religious parents' opinions on the consistency of messages being portrayed in sex education provided within the family and, more formally, within school.

Parental Right to Withdraw

In SRE legislation, parents are promoted as being the prime educators and teachers as an assistive and supportive role (Walker 2004). This perspective may be viewed as being supported by the parent's or carer's legal right to withdraw their child from SRE. The key point is that SRE is treated differently to other statutory subjects (UK Youth Parliament 2008). The SEF's (2011) response to the Education Act 1996 (which stated the parent's or carer's right to withdraw their child from SRE) argued that this contradicts the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Act (Unicef 1989), resulting in parents' or carers' rights being privileged over the children's right to appropriate information. In other words, parents should not be able to make the decision to

withdraw their child from SRE. Even though such concerns about disparities in the values of educators are also discussed above, it is important that they are also highlighted in this context because such discrepancies may result in the withdrawal of young people from SRE lessons. The most recent available data, however, shows that less than one per cent of parents choose to withdraw their children from SRE (OFSTED 2002).

The common notion that SRE may encourage teenage sexual exploration and experimentation is a (mis)conception which could lead to some young people being withdrawn from SRE (Lenskyj 1990). However, Goldman (2008) argues that a lack of school-based SRE causes harm directly to young people in the form of unwanted pregnancy and STIs. This harm can potentially be caused to wider society by the lack of SRE because it can result in illness, ignorance and even poverty. Furthermore, evidence from studies suggests that SRE does not encourage teenagers to experiment and if any effect can be observed it is increased use of contraception (i.e. condoms), and postponed initiation of sexual intercourse (Pound et al. 2017, Kirby 2002, DfEE 2000, Wellings, Collumbien, Slaymaker, Singh, Hodges, Patel and Bajos 2006). The parental right to withdraw their child from SRE is a key concern for my study because it means young people's eligibility to receive SRE, either at school or home, rests on their parents' decisions. Catholic parent's knowledge of their right to withdraw their children from SRE and their opinions and experiences of this are identified in Chapter Five.

Religious Parents and SRE

Exploring the views of religious parents is a growing area of research within the field of sex education, with key research being conducted by Sanjakdar (2009, 2011, 2016). Sanjakdar's work concentrates on Muslim identities and their influence on experiences and opinions about sexuality education. Research interested in the attitudes and opinions of Muslim parents has seen an increase in attention, which could be due to the globally increased media attention paid to Islam and Islamic beliefs. Whilst Sanjakdar's research concentrates on Muslim beliefs about sexuality education in Australia, some of what is discussed is relevant and can be applied to the context of my study. Similarly, Dent and Maloney's (2017) research entitled 'Evangelical Christian Parents' Attitudes towards Abstinence-Based Sex Education: 'I Want My Kids to Have Great Sex!'" is a key paper within this subject. Although it explored a different context of Evangelical parents in America, it highlights some relevant matters relating to religious parents and their views on sex education. Within research on Christian parents, there is a gap in knowledge regarding English Catholic parents' experiences and opinions on young people's learning about sex and relationships, consequently, which is the focus of my research.

Given that religion can influence parent-child communication relating to sexual matters (Regnerus 2005), it would be reasonable to presume by implication that parental support for sex education could similarly be affected by religious values. As Dent and Maloney (2017) argue, in wider society assumptions and stereotypes exist that portray religious parents as resistant to young people's learning about sex and relationships. As illustrated earlier, the fear that religious

groups or parents will oppose and challenge SRE can influence schools' provision (Ingham and Hirst 2010), and because SRE is not a legal requirement for faith schools⁸ this could be considered an incentive to withhold SRE in a bid to avoid anticipated opposition from religious parents. To date, there has been inadequate exploration of religious parents' views on SRE particularly regarding certain religions, for example Catholicism, meaning decisions could potentially be made based on assumptions. This research therefore aimed to fill this specific gap in knowledge by providing insight into some English Catholic parents' perceptions on their children's learning about sex and relationships.

Catholic Ethos and SRE in a Catholic Schooling Context

This section will identify and discuss Catholic beliefs and teachings which are relevant to education about sex and relationships.

'Ethos' refers to the range of values and beliefs which define the philosophy of an institution (Donnelly 2000). In Catholic schools, their 'ethos' is informed by the Bible and religious scriptures. As already stated, the Catholic Church teaches that sexual activity and intercourse should only happen within the institution of marriage, and sex is viewed as a means for procreation and therefore does not permit the use of contraception, though it is acknowledged that some groups have ignored this belief within the institution of marriage

⁸ As with non-denominational state-maintained schools, in September 2019 RSE could become a requirement in faith schools but this remains unclear because there has been no official statement of intent at the time of writing.

(Reuther 2008, O'Brien 2009). The Catholic Church teaches through a homogeneous discourse of heterosexuality and views gender as binary and, therefore, does not sanction LGBT rights. Increasing numbers of children are raised by lone, same-sex or divorced parents (Office for National Statistics 2015, Sandfield 2006, Smith 1997). This means that the structure of the family that young people may be raised within could be undermined by the relationships education they may receive within their Catholic school's teachings. If their parents have divorced or they are from a lone parent family, this could lead to feelings of being 'abnormal' as many proponents of SRE have observed (Goldman 2008). When discussing parents' opinions on SRE in Catholic schools, gender, sexual identity and sexual practices become central to the debate due to the salience of normative Catholic beliefs and Catholic teachings about sexualities and relationships, though there is little existing literature on such matters (Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand and Ham 1998).

The beliefs of Catholic people regarding sexuality and personal morality often differ from those of the Catholic hierarchy and their official teachings (O'Brien 2009, Clements 2014). Historically, the use of any form of birth control was viewed as sinful within the Catholic Church and this is still the foundation for teaching today, even within marriage, though the 'rhythm method', which endorses abstaining from sexual intercourse at the most fertile time of month, is now (questionably) permitted (Reuther 2008). O'Brien (2009) found, however, that congregations' behaviours did not adhere to the Catholic hierarchy's teachings in a survey revealing that 97 per cent of sexually active Catholic women had used contraception at some point in their life.

Catholicism embodies a patriarchal ethos (Reuther 2008) which views priests as representing Christ. It is believed only males can represent Christ because of their 'spirituality and rationality'. This means women cannot be ordained because they represent the body in the material world, whilst males represent humanity and spirituality (Reuther 2008, p2). The Catholic Church is 'Pro-life'/anti-choice meaning it believes life begins at the point of conception and it does not agree with human intervention in 'ending' a 'life', thus prohibiting abortion. There are exceptions in some countries where Catholicism permits abortion if the pregnancy is the consequence of rape, if the foetus is malformed, or if the mother's life is at risk (Reuther 2008).

There has been little scholarly attention paid to the social attitudes of Catholics as a religious group in Britain (Clements 2014). Nonetheless, a survey of the British public (Populus 2010) stated that they think the Catholic Church's official stance should be changed on issues such as ordaining female priests, homosexuality, abortion, and abstaining from sex outside of marriage. Earlier research (Rolston, Schubotz and Simpson 2005, O'Brien 2009, Rasmussen 2010) found the attitudes of those in the Catholic congregation towards sex, relationships and sexual practices are becoming more fluid in comparison to those of the Catholic Church. My research recognises the importance of identifying the changing practices of those who identify as Catholic, and how their relationship with Catholicism could impact on their expectations of their children's behaviour and compliance with Catholic beliefs.

Culture and religion are instrumental to the teaching and reception of SRE. Sexuality and sexual health are subjects that remain stigmatised in many schools and there is uncertainty about openly discussing 'sex' (Formby et al. 2010). The ethos of faith-based schooling is regarded positively by many policy makers (King 2010) and this is reflected in the section 28 Academies Act 2010 which places a focus on the importance of marriage and family, which was implemented before same-sex marriage was legalised (Great Britain 2010, Great Britain 2013). The introduction of this act caused concern amongst advocates for inclusive SRE due to the reminiscent tone of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which stated local authorities were not allowed to 'promote' homosexuality, thus encouraging heterosexuality to be promoted over homosexuality and LGBT rights. Such developments have relevance to the participants in my study and, considering these debates, this thesis recognises that questions about the content and approach to SRE in Catholic schools need to be situated in previous (and reintroduced) debates about changes to the SRE curriculum.

Frameworks for Positioning Catholic Perceptions of Sex and SRE

Rubin's notion of the 'Charmed Circle' (1984, see appendix B) is a useful apparatus for visualising the 'acceptability' or legitimacy of sexual practices and identities within dominant institutions. Sexual acts and relationships considered 'normal' or 'blessed' within society (for example, monogamous, heterosexual and reproductive sex) are positioned within the inner 'charmed circled'. Within the 'outer limits' of the circle, the practices and identities which are deemed to be 'deviant' (e.g. casual, homosexual or solo sex) are situated. The inner

'Charmed Circle' of practices and identities is consistent with those that the Catholic Church sanctions, and those in the outer limits represent those that are condemned.

Whereas Rubin's framework is useful in considering the general 'acceptability' of sexual identities and practices in society, both Lees (1993) and Kidger (2006) identified different approaches to providing sex education more specifically. These frameworks are useful for positioning the Catholic Church's approach to SRE and enables a comparison to be drawn with Catholic parents' positioning. Lees (1993, p216-218) identified three ideological approaches: feminist, liberal, and conservative. Firstly, the feminist stance which Lees describes as the 'most progressive' encourages critical thinking about sex and gender inequalities. In doing so it aims to challenge sexism and advocates equal responsibility within relationships. Secondly, the liberal approach to sex education focusses on ensuring young people are provided with information to enable them to make informed choices. Whilst the liberal approach is more concerned with educating young people about their choices regarding sex and relationships, a key aim is to preserve the traditional family unit which would most likely result in a heteronormative model of sex education. Lees' (1993) third category, the conservative approach, emphasises preserving the 'family', promoting sex only within marriage, and educating young people about their binary gendered roles to ensure these are fulfilled.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, other similar educational discourses have been categorised by Kidger (2006) with empowering, harm-reductionist, and moralistic approaches to SRE in England. Comparably to Lees' 'feminist' approach (1993), Kidger's notion of the 'empowering' discourse is the most liberal position. This has an inclusive focus on young people's sexualities, providing them with comprehensive information so they have the knowledge and what Hirst (2013) referred to as sexual competency as a means to support positive sexual lives. In contrast, Kidger's 'harm-reductionist' discourse refers to SRE programmes which prioritise health discourses to protect young people from disease. It opposes religious approaches and firmly places itself within the scientific model, to deal with SRE 'objectively' by using medical evidence. While there are some differences, this is most similar to Lees' 'liberal' approach which also fosters a scientific approach. However, it also places significance on the traditional heteronormative family unit. Finally, and similarly to Lees' (1993) 'conservative' approach, is Kidger's (2006) 'moralistic' discourse. Founded on right-wing ideology, young people's sexuality is prohibited and any sexual behaviours deemed morally wrong other than sex within the institution of heterosexual marriage for the purpose of reproduction.

UK sex education is dominated and positioned within moral and conservative discourses (Lewis and Knijn 2002). All of Lees' and Kidger's sex education discourses, with the exception of the 'feminist' and 'empowering' approaches, can be recognised within English SRE programmes which tend to focus on what are deemed to be sex-negative outcomes, for example unwanted pregnancy and STIs, as well as the prioritisation of heterosexual relationships. In providing

frameworks through which sex education approaches can be identified, Kidger (2006) and Lees (1993) also provide tools to identify the differing opinions about the purpose of sex education. Such 'moralistic' and 'conservative' approaches, and the types of sexual behaviours and identities they endorse, could be viewed as positioned within Rubin's inner 'charmed circle' (1984, see above). This illustrates Kidger's and Lees' SRE discourses within Rubin's more general 'charmed circle' framework which is useful for the purpose of my study. This highlights the assumptions which underpin traditional Catholic teachings about sex, relationships and gender

Secular, Sacred or Moral SRE?

Some parents may choose to send their children to religious schools to embrace their religion's doctrine as a guide for their children's broader learning about morality and respecting other people. Some scholars have referred to the latter as 'ethics-focussed sexualities education' (Allen, Rasmussen and Quinlivan 2014, p8). In particular, Lamb (2010) developed the Sexual Ethics for a Caring Society Curriculum (SECS-C) to encourage young people to apply the values of democracy, care and justice to issues of sex and relationships. Such approaches to SRE challenge the previously acknowledged common belief that young people participate in relationships to sexually experiment and that they are immature and lacking in emotional investment (Allen 2008). Berne et al. (2000) found that, like young people, parents have also spoken about the importance of learning about emotions and mutual respect in relationships and when engaging in sexual activity. Sanjakdar (2016, p2), however, argues that within some school SRE programmes religious and cultural difference were

seen as topics to be 'tacked on' to the main framework for sex education. In addition, Fisher and McTaggart (2008) stated that learning about practical skills was prioritised over education which focussed on morals and values. In exploring Catholic parents' preferences regarding SRE content, SRE that was founded on morals was viewed by my participants as being significant to their child's education. This is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Of the little research on religious parental attitudes to SRE, previous research explored whether parents preferred their children to receive sex education either through secular (non-religious) discourses or within the context of the parent's religious beliefs. When exploring religion and its (possible) influence on parental perspectives on sex education, it was found that religious parents favoured their children to be taught about sex and relationships within the context of their religious beliefs, and in a positive and comprehensive way (Sanjakdar 2011, Dent and Maloney 2017). The aforementioned study by Dent and Maloney (2017, p158) found that Evangelical Christian parents spoke of the pleasure for which God created sex and that they wanted to educate their children by explaining that God would want them to have sex as an enjoyable experience and, to quote, 'God's gonna love it' too. My research builds on these findings in exploring where Catholic parents position themselves along the spectrum from a staunch religious lens to a less biased approach. As Rasmussen (2010, p702) states, 'there is no one Muslim, Christian, secular or queer perspective, and these perspectives can be and are intermingled'. This means it is important to acknowledge the individual and complex nature of beliefs about sexualities and religion, hence the qualitative approach this

research has adopted to access the parents' rich, individual experiences and opinions.

Conclusion

Young people in general have repeatedly criticised their sex education (Blake 2008); even more so by those who attend religious schools (Martinez and Emerson 2008). Young people's views on religion and how this intersects with their sex education is under-researched.

Whilst research has rightly focussed on young people's opinions on SRE for decades (Hirst 2004, Jackson 1982, Measor 2000), there has been too little attention paid to parental attitudes towards sex education (Walker 2004, Walker and Milton 2006). Of the few studies available, findings are inconclusive and sometimes their reach is limited because they comprise small surveys which aim to grasp a snapshot of parental attitudes towards sex education, and often only found in grey literature. Notwithstanding these limitations, studies which took a more qualitative approach found that parents tended to have little knowledge about the education their children received and, because of a minority of incidents where parents have opposed SRE, educators may develop their SRE programmes within the context of assuming a potential backlash from parents. This fear may be cemented by the parent's legal right to withdraw their children from SRE, meaning SRE programmes can be influenced by parent's supposed opinions, when in practice very few parents act on this right.

Alongside this, in the private domain, parents view themselves as 'primary educators' and tend to desire continued communication within the family rather than reliance on the one-off 'talk' (Ballard and Gross 2009, Walker 2001). Furthermore, young people are encouraged to keep asking their parents questions, and for some, everyday tasks are embraced as ways of initiating communication about sexual matters (Dent and Maloney 2017). Within the literature, however, there is a recurring notion that adult conceived notions of effectiveness are inconsistent with young people's ideas (Allen 2005).

As highlighted above, the ways in which religion intersects with parental opinions and experiences are underexplored (Farrington et al. 2014). Of the limited studies available, SRE was endorsed within the context of the family religion, meaning parents preferred their children to be taught about sex through the framework of their religious beliefs. Gayle Rubin's (1984) 'Charmed Circle' has been used to illustrate the limited view of which sexual identities and behaviours are permitted by Catholicism, whilst Lees' (1993) and Kidger's (2006) frameworks have been used to identify the discourses which align SRE with traditional Catholic teachings. My study adds the perspectives of Catholic parents to the existing research on parental views on SRE; a literature that has largely been limited to the views of non-religious parents (Dent and Maloney 2017). This research offers insights into the meanings that learning about sex and relationships hold for parents who have been affiliated with a religion, and

the influence these meanings can have on moulding provision in schools and within the family.

This chapter provided a critical discussion regarding young peoples' and parents' views on SRE, along with presenting the key relevant Catholic beliefs which relate to learning about sex and relationships. In identifying the key debates relating to religious parent's and sex education, the gap on Catholic parent's views on young people's learning about sex and relationships has been established.

Chapter 4. Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This chapter begins by establishing the philosophical underpinning of the research and, in doing so, justifies the qualitative methodology used to explore parents' views on their children's learning about sexualities and relationships. It then offers a rationale for the implementation of semi-structured qualitative interviews as the method for exploring parents' perceptions and experiences. The processes used to help ensure an ethical approach was employed throughout the term of this study are considered, along with the implications of the reflexive nature of this project.

Next, this chapter provides an overview of the practicalities of methods employed, including the pilot study and design of the research 'tool', participant recruitment strategy, and process of conducting the interviews. To conclude this chapter, the method of analysis is detailed and justified.

Methodology

The exploration of parents' individual opinions and experiences was suited to a methodology developed from a social constructionist position (see Berger and Luckmann 1967 and Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Social constructionism emerged in response to positivism, which tends to use quantitative methods of research. The social constructionist perspective contrasts with positivist ideologies in its approach to exploring the world insofar as the positivist approach to research aims to achieve quantifiable and generalisable data, whereas constructionism is concerned with dealing with

data subjectively. Social constructionists have accepted their approach is not generalisable and they argue that humans can act on freedom of will and at times are unpredictable in their behaviour meaning they cannot be categorised and measured (Miles and Huberman 1994). For constructionism, reality is continuously reconstructed through language, discourses and interactions between individuals. As Burr (2003, p6) explains:

‘Social constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. In fact it might be said that as a culture or society we construct our own versions of reality between us.’

For social constructionist accounts, epistemologically constructed subjectivities are viewed as essential to the production of knowledge. Our shared visions of knowledge are constructed through the practice of every day interactions between people (Burr 2003). It is the subjective meanings that individuals develop from experiences socially and historically (usually through interaction) that are of interest (Creswell 2009).

This research used a social constructionist approach rather than, for example, grounded theory⁹ or a phenomenological approach.¹⁰ Phenomenology or grounded theory approaches supposedly start without any preconceived ideas about the subject being explored. As a result, these approaches were not suitable for this research because there were already established commonly-

⁹ see the work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss

¹⁰ see the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger

held assumptions about what Catholic parents think about how young people learn about sex and relationships. In exploring participants' lived experience of a shared phenomenon, phenomenology and grounded theory position the researcher as distinct from the participants and the construction of data. I am not a parent and therefore did not share the experience of raising children, however, using a social constructionist approach allowed me to acknowledge my position within the research and any preconceived ideas I held relating to Catholic parents and SRE.

This research explores the varied and unique experiences of Catholic parents relating to when their children have learnt about sex and relationships and also their own historical experiences of learning about these subjects. It acknowledges, and questions, whether the different experience of each parent has informed their decisions or opinions relating to their children's learning. This qualitative approach yields data that contribute unique perspectives of Catholic parents to this area of research and the existing studies within the field of sexualities and relationships education. In line with this, my role as researcher in interpreting the parents' opinions was acknowledged and considered throughout the research process (see next section for further discussion about reflexivity).

Participants' perspectives of phenomena, as well as their lived experiences and accounts of the world, were the focus of Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social constructionist approach to research. Their approach to social constructionism

was influenced by phenomenology¹¹. Crotty (1998, p9) argued the constructionist paradigm advises that 'different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon'. Therefore, when interviewing Catholic parents about their children's learning about sexualities and relationships, their everyday lived experiences and interactions with their children, teachers, priests, other parents/carers, their own parents and their partner (where appropriate) were fundamental to this study. Unearthing these multiple realities and various interpretations of those realities are well served by a research design underpinned by a social constructionist approach (Creswell 2009, Denzin and Lincoln 1998, Silverman 2005). This research aimed to explore descriptions of the participants' everyday worlds and opinions by exploring the Catholic parents' views on their child's learning about sexualities and relationships.

Social constructionism facilitates uncovering other possible sociological influences on the data produced during interviews. Relevant examples here include the concept of power and control, and the influence of gender. Important notions of power regarding potentially unequal macro structures include the relationships between the Catholic hierarchy and Catholic parishioners, communication between adults and young people, and decision-making between the Government and schools. The approach allowed for this research to be conducted through a feminist lens, allowing for gendered influences on and within the data to be identified. Thus, feminist ideas and research practices

¹¹ See the work of Husserl (1970) and Heidegger (1962).

are discussed throughout this thesis, in particular, in the analysis chapters (see Chapters Five to Eight).

Qualitative interviews were deployed as the method of data collection. As Smith (1987) contends, this allows access to understanding the plurality of themes within lived every day experiences from the participants' own perspectives; more holistic understandings (Bogdan & Biklen 1998); opportunities for rich, thick descriptions of parents' experiences and perceptions; and how these experiences and perceptions are developed and interpreted. A small sample size is therefore justified because qualitative interviews yield such thick, rich and detailed data (Mason 2010). Also, semi-structured interviews built in the opportunity for the flexibility, for both the participants and the researcher, to articulate opinions and prioritise matters of choice and significance. The varied lived experiences of Catholic parents were explored and these revealed variations in opinions and beliefs over time and access to the complexities and unique lives of the participants.

Reflexivity: Implications for the Methods Used

Reflexive researchers should examine the social position they occupy and the social forces that determine their attitudes and beliefs, rather than the attitudes and beliefs themselves (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). My position was acknowledged throughout the research process and it is understood that my cultural, personal and past experiences have shaped my interpretations

(Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000, Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). My own interpretations of the social world are acknowledged as a construction built on my past experiences and current context (Bryman 2008). Reflexivity encouraged me to ask questions such as: *Where am I situated in this research? (How) have my political, moral and lived experiences influenced my interpretations of the participants' lived experiences/opinions?* It encouraged me to acknowledge my position within the research and how this may have manifest in my approach to exploring the research topic. How I view the world, for example, is likely to have influenced the questions I asked the parents during the interviews, or even choosing the subject in the first place. Reflexivity is not the practice of 'neutralising' the researcher's subjectivities as a way to achieve objectivity in the researcher's approach by eradicating or erasing subjectivities. Subjectivity is, instead, a central feature of the qualitative process (Pink 2007, p23). Reflexivity questions the influence of my life experience on this research. Being raised as a Catholic but presently viewing gender and sexuality in a non-binary and LGBT inclusive way, for example, helped to construct my unique place and view of the social world. Furthermore, as a Catholic, cis female, educated, 30-year-old, pro-choice, unmarried woman who cohabits with her long-term partner, daughter of divorced parents, granddaughter to her staunch Catholic granddad and adopted Grandmother, who was born out of wedlock to the shame of her family, and as a relative of a child sexual abuse and rape survivor, being reflexive was crucial within this study.

On reflection, being raised Catholic in which I was made to declare, '*I believe in one God father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary...*' (The Apostle's Creed¹²) and as a result receiving very poor, biased sex education has influenced my perception. My own perceptions, experiences and beliefs, however, have changed since when I started to undertake this research. At the beginning of this project, my own beliefs and identity were restricted but have progressed (and continue to progress) to become more realised and fluid. Such a change in perspective is important to consider in relation to the approach to this project and, in particular, the analysis of the data. It could be viewed as a strength, as these changes in my views and identity may have enabled me to interpret the data from different perspectives.

I applied a '*critical perspective [to my] knowledge claims*' (Kendall and Wickham 1999, p101) by keeping a reflexive journal whilst conducting the fieldwork where I added entries before and after conducting interviews. This offered a kind of '*tracking*' mechanism which enabled me to see if my position may have altered questions that I asked or my reactions to disclosures. This was a valuable exercise to do because some topics discussed in the interviews were potentially sensitive for me due to the experiences of a close relative. Getting my thoughts 'down on paper' allowed me to gain some distance from them in order to identify my position within the research.

¹² The Apostle's Creed is a prayer which is recited by the congregation during Roman Catholic mass.

Drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) view on reflexivity, I will now discuss how my position in the research and any implications that have been identified throughout the research process. For example, firstly, the social origins and coordinates of the individual researcher, that is, my social class, gender, sexuality ethnicity and religious identity amongst other characteristics and demographic information, will have located my position within the research. As discussed above, being raised within the Catholic ethos at times hindered and/or facilitated my relationships with the participants. My familiarity with Catholic practices, teachings and terminology may have helped to construct in-depth, detailed and rich data. Although, researching as an 'insider' can result in epistemological assumptions being made about what knowledge is being sought and what is already known. Preventative measures were taken to ensure this did not impair the production of knowledge (i.e. the findings), for example, I prompted the participant for (more) information if something was referred to that was a 'given' between the researcher and the participant.

As Burr (2003) advises, social constructionism cautions us to question our assumptions about how the world appears to be. I was careful, therefore, to prompt the participant for further details rather than assuming I knew what they were referring to because although we shared the experience of being raised Catholic, it is likely our experience of this was different. Also, our differing current contexts and their influence on the construction of our interpretation of our Catholic upbringing were expected to differ. For example, life events such

as undertaking educational qualifications, having access to more readily available information via the internet and mobile phones, or past experiences of relationships and current relationship status could influence the memory of our childhood. Therefore, even though we share some similarities because we were raised Catholic, it is expected that our construction will be interpreted differently at present because of the influence of our varied past and present contexts.

Undertaking research about a familiar subject could have provoked personal prejudices and assumptions (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, Bryman 2008). In practice, it has resulted in me gaining an education about my own religious affiliation and beliefs and to develop a greater understanding of my view of the world. This '*education*' happened during the fieldwork process when most of my perspectives and opinions remained (intentionally) distant during the interviews. It was when I engaged more critically with the data during the analytical stage of the research process that I started to realise my changing position on topics relating to religion, and sex and relationships. Once I engaged more with academic debate, I realised I had moved further away from traditional Catholic teachings about gender and sexualities. The process of this PhD has provided me with holistic SRE which I did not receive as a young person. It revealed that Catholic teachings regarding sex and relationships were not the '*only truth.*'

A childhood and young adult life cloaked in Catholicism has (unintentionally) influenced every thought I have made, though now I am aware of this I can 'check myself' to consider the information available before settling on an

opinion. For example, making a judgement about someone who has displayed rude behaviour and then thinking I am a '*bad*' person, because as a Catholic I should be all forgiving and accepting of others, then leads to thoughts of punishment and being '*sent to hell*' for my own contemplations. '*Being sent to hell*' was a concept which was graphically described when at primary school as the outcome for any behaviour deemed to be bad within the boundaries of Catholicism.

Relationships with the Participants

As suggested above, my relationship with the participants was significant to the data collection process (Bryman 2008). Literature suggests, for example, that parents have little knowledge of SRE taught at school (Fisher and McTaggart 2008, SEF 2011a). This led to questions concerning how my knowledge of the subject influenced my relationship with the participants and the data that was constructed. Throughout each interview, I kept the tone informal and, in doing so, I strived for an equal and ethical partnership to try and minimise this possible influence. As Pink (2007, p24) contends, reality is created by both the researcher and the participant:

'It is not solely the subjectivity of the researcher that may shade his or her understanding of reality, but the relationships between the subjectivities of researcher and informants that produces a negotiated version of reality.'

In this sense, my participants were viewed as active contributors rather than subjects that are being measured and, as such, the resultant data are a product of these specific interactions.

Even though measures were taken to try to restrict any potential negative influence, it is important to acknowledge that there were potential power dynamics present during the interview process. To diminish any power 'at play', and in line with feminist research principles (Harding 1987, Oakley 1981, Reinharz 1992), I revealed parts of my own experiences and opinions if invited by the participant. Increasing the level of reciprocity by sharing some of my own potentially embarrassing experiences and private opinions helped to balance the power dynamic between participant and researcher. Another way to try to reduce the power imbalance was to have a phone call conversation with each participant prior to the interview. This facilitated the development of a rapport with the participants beyond written communication in the form of emails.

Feminist scholars promote non-hierarchical relationships between interviewer and interviewee (Oakley 1981), but it is important to acknowledge there can be challenges in this being achieved (Hammersley 1992). My participants often held higher status professions than I did, meaning there was potential for a different power imbalance during such interviews. One way of overcoming the potential difficulty this could bring was to reiterate the role of the interviewee as the 'expert' and the interviewer as the 'learner'. Identifying these positions within our relationship at the start and during the interview helped to encourage the

participant to take the lead in discussing their experiences and opinions of SRE. Similarly, during interviews where the power was skewed in my favour, positioning myself as 'learner' helped to reduce the power dynamic, therefore increasing the levels of reciprocity (Oakley 1981).

One of the participants was known to me prior to the start of the research. Another was a relation of a friend but I had never met the participant before. I was not acquainted with the remainder of the participants before the interviews took place. The participants who I had not met previously appeared open and candid in their disclosures. The researched and researcher's lack of prior relationship might have been a positive in this respect because the participants may have felt more 'free' to discuss their private experiences or opinions with me because they knew they would not see me again after taking part in the research. That said, the interview with the participant I already knew also created insightful and in-depth data.

It also transpired that being raised a Catholic was helpful with participants I had not met previously because it meant during the interviews I became an 'insider.' An example of this was when I used the word '*received*' (meaning to receive Holy Communion during mass) and a participant (Linda) highlighted our common understanding of the meaning of the phrase '*I don't receive when I go to mass.*' This helped to develop the rapport we had already established since the start of the interview. Furthermore, other participants referred to the label of '*being Catholic*' as automatically offering a sense of commonality and an

immediate connection based on our understanding and similar experiences of our education, upbringing and participation in certain Catholic practices.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was awarded for this PhD research by the Sheffield Hallam University Research Degree Sub Committee. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p16) state 'ethical issues permeate interview research', therefore, ethical considerations were deliberated throughout the research process. Knowledge produced via the methods conducted (and approach used) depends on the relationships between interviewer and interviewee (Bryman 2008). A key issue here rested on a guaranteed safe environment for sensitive subjects to be discussed and recorded in private, without judgement or harm and ensuring the interviewee does not feel like 'an insect under a microscope' (Sennett 2004, p38).

Religion, sex and sexuality might be thought of as possibly sensitive and potentially embarrassing topics (Renzetti and Lee 1993). When discussed collectively they may form a potentially contentious subject matter. As Seale (2005, p119) contends, '*ethical practice depends upon the integrity of the researcher.*' Therefore, to ensure the wellbeing of the participants it was essential that they were fully briefed and were as informed as possible about the research before each interview commenced and during all parts of the interviewing process.

As mentioned above, some of the topics covered during the interviews were potentially sensitive and embarrassing, particularly when discussing their own experience of sexualities and relationships in relation to their religious identity. This led to some participants discussing personal and difficult challenges they had experienced, for example, abortion and divorce. This may have increased the risk of possible emotional harm/risk of upset for some of the participants. To try and limit this, when inviting people to take part I was explicit about the research aims, the broad topics proposed for interview and I answered any questions. Participants were given an information sheet (see Appendix E) prior to interview, which tried to ensure they had a full understanding of how their data would be stored and used (Seale 2005). Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed through pseudonyms being used throughout the research process for participants and any other person mentioned during the interview (i.e. children's names). Any recognisable institutions were anonymised or referred to in a vague manner, for example, 'the school' or 'the Church', throughout the research process and any other information which could make the participant identifiable has also been anonymised (Robson 2002). The raw data has been kept on my personal computer and could only be accessed with a password known only to me.

It was possible that discussing this subject may have resulted in the participants generating questions about SRE or they might have wanted some extra support on related issues. The participant information sheet listed two websites that

offer support and/or information for parents/carers, therefore, the participants could refer to these if they had any uncertainties after the interview. Also, the contact details of the founder of 'Parent to Parent' (a Sheffield based charity which works with parents/carers to offer guidance and information about talking to their children about sex and relationships), who was involved in the participants recruitment strategy for the study, were also provided (see Appendices E and F). I also offered my e-mail address and contact number to participants to use to ask me any further questions which may have developed after the interview.

I endeavoured to build rapport with the participants to help them feel at ease prior to and during the interview and assumed a supportive role throughout the research to limit potentially negative consequences. However, due to the possible sensitivity of the research subject(s) and the reflexive nature of the topic (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009), it was important to try and not assume the role of '*counsellor*' (Kvale 2008). The boundaries of the contract between the researcher and participant were acknowledged during the interview and, as mentioned above, relevant information about support services was signposted on the consent and information sheet (see Appendices E and F).

It was also my responsibility to be sensitive to the participants' emotional well-being throughout the process. For example, during my interview with a participant named Charlotte, she got upset and started crying when talking about difficulties she had experienced due to ill-health. I was deeply involved in her narration of her experience and I got upset too. I realised that this was a potentially harmful time for Charlotte and suggested we changed the subject;

this helped to lift the mood and to redirect the interview to a less emotive subject.

The participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary; therefore, they had the right to refuse to talk about anything they felt uncomfortable/embarrassed about and/or to withdraw themselves from the research up to and during the interview. Participants were reminded that the audio recording could be turned off at any time and that they could withdraw any data they had submitted to the research project until August 2013 (end of data collection stage) without giving any reason. This was clearly stated on the consent form which the participant was required to sign before the interview (See Appendices E and F) and I specified this verbally at the start of each interview.

One participant chose to withdraw part of their interview, requesting at the end of the interview that one part was not included in the thesis as she felt she had disclosed 'too much' about her personal circumstances. This evidenced that the participants were fully briefed on their rights as participants in this research project and also confirmed their participation as voluntary.

The parents who participated in this research may have positively benefitted from taking part and may have encouraged an interest in the topic. It offered Catholic parents and/or carers the opportunity to state their views about this topic. Another outcome may be that participation led to (further) discussions

with their children about sexualities and relationships. Also, it may have encouraged the parents to have more interest in SRE and actively contribute to SRE policy development in their child's school.

Methods

Pilot Study

This section now turns to the description and evaluation of the pilot study. Two pilot interviews were conducted in order to try to minimise or attend to any inadequacies in the interview guide (Bryman 2008). Catholic parents were recruited for the pilot study through my personal contacts so that I did not use up any of the potential research sample.

The first pilot interview was with a participant named Carol (pseudonym) who was a Catholic mother of a 15-year-old male (Lewis) who does not attend a Catholic school. The second was with an Irish Catholic father (Peter) of two females, aged fourteen and twenty-one, who both attended Catholic primary and secondary schools. Both participants identified as currently being 'Catholic' but neither attends mass. Carol had liberal views on sexualities and relationships, (this may be because she was a single mother when Lewis was born), whereas Peter's were more in line with the Catholic ethos.

(Refining) the Interview Guide and (Practicing the) Interview Method

This study was exploratory and interpretative in nature and the semi-structured interviews allowed me to conduct ongoing interpretation and modification of the interview guide (Bogdan & Biklen 2003). The pilot study was useful in determining what refinements needed to be made to the interview guide. Using the four main topics helped to refocus when the interview topics were side-tracked (You and Religion, Child(ren) and School(s), SRE in school, SRE out of school/home) but the (sub)questions within the topics felt quite restrictive. This led to the decision being made that in the data collection interviews I would break down the interview guide, keeping the four main themes with only minimal key questions/words to use as a prompt. This offered participants more flexibility and latitude of response during the interviews.

During both interviews, interruptions were experienced which disrupted the flow of the discussions. This acted as a reminder for the need to be explicit about the need for a quiet space when arranging interviews, but also helped to develop an understanding that interruptions were likely when interviewing busy parents, especially when their children were within the interview location. Therefore, it was important to take notes when the interviews were happening, these could then could be used as a prompt to resume the discussion.

It was noticeable from Peter's change of body language and lowering of the tone of his voice, that he was uncomfortable when discussing abortion. As a result, I used my judgement and did not pursue questioning on this subject. At

the beginning of the interviews, I explained the holistic definition of SRE without using jargon. This links back to reflexivity and my relationship with participants. Throughout the interviews I noted to keep using the term '*sex and relationships*' not '*sexualities*' during the interviews because that is in line with what the subject is called at school. Another reason is the term 'sexuality' is commonly used simultaneously with the meaning of '*sexual orientation*'. Though when using the word 'sex' on the interview guide, this refers to the more holistic definition/meaning of the word '*sexuality/sexualities*'.

The pilot interviews did not last as long as those in the data collection stage of this research. This may have been because I was aware that there was 'taken for granted' knowledge between myself and the interviewees because they were known to me prior to the interview. This led me to try to prompt the pilot participants to be more explicit resulting in the prompts for each topic being refined.

Even though a key tenet of the method used was to give the interviewee the opportunity to lead the interview, it was still necessary to have an interview guide. This was to help make sure all interviews had 'aims' and because some parents felt they would not have anything to say about SRE as they did not know (much) about it.

The interview guide (see Appendix G) was originally developed through the influence of existing literature in the field of sexualities and relationships

education research and with the research questions in mind (see above). The pilot interviews evidenced the need for the interview guide to be used as a functional and flexible guide/prompt during the interview(s). Thus, giving each participant control over the sub themes discussed and the order in which these were approached. The semi-structured interview guide also allowed for further questions to be asked which may have been triggered by responses from the interviewee (Bryman 2008).

Once the pilot study had been conducted it was confirmed the main themes to be covered during the data collection interviews were: You and Religion; Child(ren) and School(s); SRE in school; and SRE out of school/home. These themes were used as a guide and the semi-structured in-depth interviews were viewed also as a desirable opportunity to open up new areas of enquiry (Britten 1995).

Before both the pilot interviews and once the interview guide had been refined after the pilot study, I rehearsed the interview guide questions and prompts which made me familiar with them. This allowed me to behave in a more natural manner during the interview and to only use the interview guide as the prompt it was intended to be.

Data Collection: Recruitment Procedure, Selection and Access to Participants

This section outlines the criteria for the selection of potential participants and the recruitment strategy used to access them.

To fit the selection criteria, parents/carers needed to identify as (once being) a Catholic, though they did not need to identify as a 'practicing'¹³ Catholic at time of participation (i.e. they may have been raised Catholic but now identify as a 'lapsed' Catholic). This broad category of identifying as a 'Catholic parent' achieved participation by parents with varying levels of Catholic affiliation and religious practice. The criteria for recruitment included both Catholic parents and Catholic carers but all participants ended up being Catholic parents. Participants were recruited from South Yorkshire and the West Midlands. These locations were selected as they were familiar to the researcher and therefore facilitated access to potential research participants.

Another condition for participation was that the parent had children aged between 11 and 24 years, at the time of their involvement with the study. This ensured that their children had been through education during the most recent government SRE guidance (DfEE 2000) at the time of data collection.

¹³ There are limitations to 'measuring' the concept of what constitutes a 'practicing' Catholic but this was not relevant to my recruitment strategy as any parent who had once identified as a Catholic could participate.

A number of recruitment practices were used to try to access potential participants. Below is a chronological flow chart of the different stages of the recruitment process.

Flowchart Showing the Stages of Recruitment

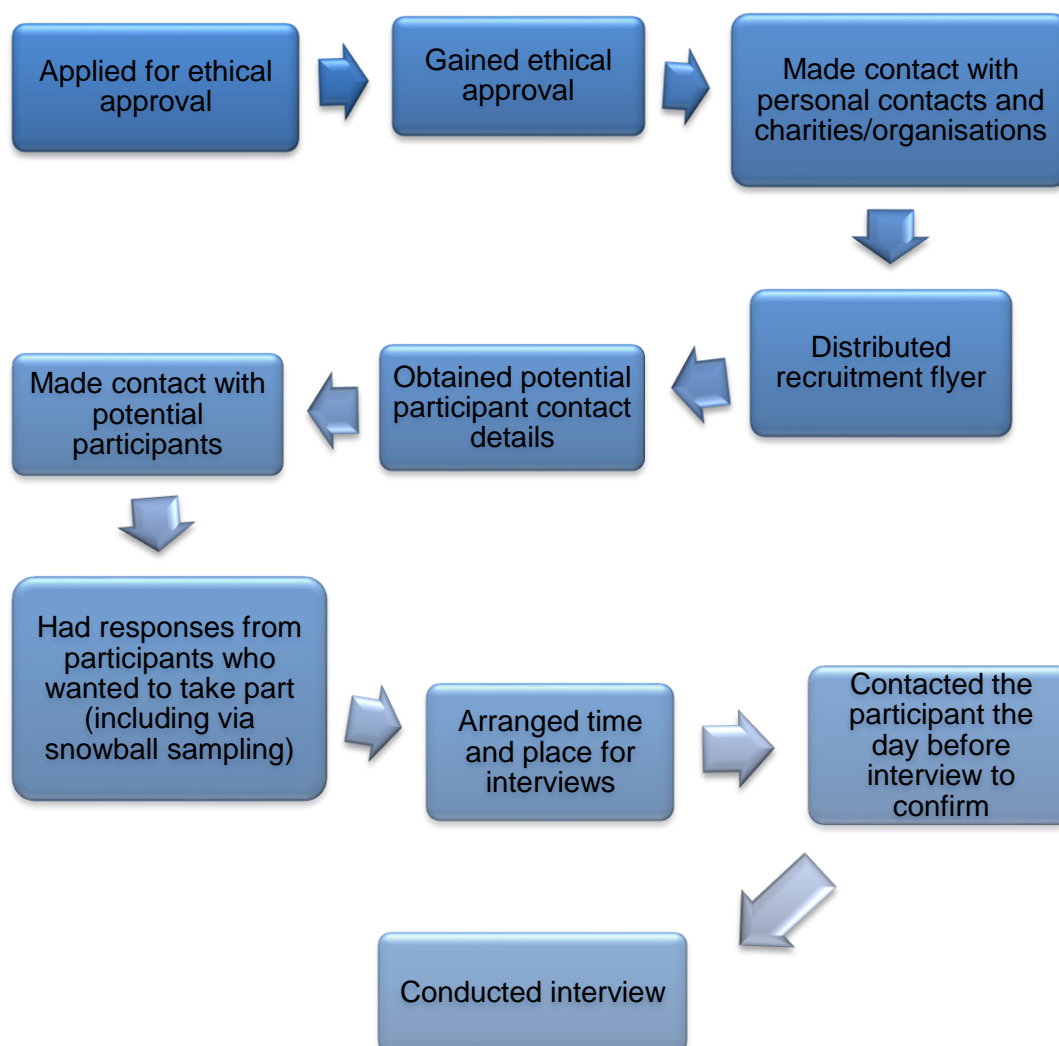


Figure 2: Flowchart Showing Step-By-Step Participant Recruitment Process.

As shown above, once ethical approval had been granted, purposive sampling (Bryman 2008, Sarantakos 1998) was used to identify participants who were

relevant to the research problem (i.e. a Catholic parent or carer) to be interviewed.

'Parent to Parent'¹⁴ and other existing networks were used to access participants. This method of recruitment was used because a level of 'trust' needed to be in place for the participants to enable their decision to participate. Snowball sampling was next used to gain further participants (Bryman 2008). Contingency plans to gain access to Catholic parents and carers included contact via the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University chaplaincy services, and the Catholic Diocese of Hallam pastoral care centre and website. These were contacted twice though this was met with no response. Additionally, advertisement flyers (See Appendix C) were disseminated to make contact with potential and eligible participants. These were distributed in a number of locations, for example, educational institutions, parenting groups (e.g. Parent to Parent) and via ad hoc conversations in public spaces (e.g. at a bus stop).

Once positive recruitments were made additional recruitment was made by snowball sampling through the participants own networks. Snowball sampling also meant that some participants were familiar with each other and were able to put each other at ease regarding the interview due to its potentially sensitive

¹⁴ Parent to Parent was a charity based at the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health in Sheffield. Parent to Parent offered parents/carers support, guidance, information and help to increase parents' confidence in talking to their children about sex and relationships.

nature (Stone, Ingham and Gibbins 2013). For example, a participant named Isobella made a comment about how she was acquainted with another participant, Linda, and they had an opportunity to discuss the interview informally, before I met with and interviewed Isobella.

Other participants who were accessed through snowball sampling (Bryman 2008) and purposive sampling (Sarantakos 1998) refused to participate. One reason given was because they could not remember and/or felt they had nothing to say on the subject of their children's learning about sex and relationships. One potential participant did not want to take part because they now identified their religion as 'Jedi' and even though I had been clear that the criteria was that they had identified as being Catholic at any point in their life, they felt they had nothing to add to the research. At times, I was in danger of having a selection of only participants who were knowledgeable about their children's learning about sexualities and relationships and who were willing to talk about this subject. However, some of the participants declared during the interview they were originally not going to participate because they felt that they had nothing to say regarding the research topic. At the end of the interview, though, some of the parents said it had been interesting and they had more to say than they realised. This represented participation by a mixture of parents with varying levels of knowledge and interest.

It could be argued that the sample size should be extended until saturation is achieved, however, 16 interviews with 11 parents yielded ample evidence,

particularly because five participants agreed to a second interview. Given the nature of the topic and the potential for huge variability among the participants' views and experiences, it was predicted that saturation was unlikely to be achieved because of the diversity of the research topic (Bryman 2008).

Demographic Information Sheet

A demographic information sheet (see Appendix D) was formulated for each participant to complete at the start of their first interview. This was requested not to quantify participants' identities but for the purpose of identifying some background information about each participant during the analysis and writing-up stage of this thesis. This task also saved time during the interviews because I did not have to ask about each participant's social characteristics.

It allowed for the participants to self-identify their characteristics by answering open ended questions rather than being asked (which may have seemed too intrusive) and prevented me from trying to guess or making assumptions. The questions on this form were kept to a minimum to make it less onerous for the participants whilst providing me with only the essential information needed (Morse 2008).

The open questions fazed some of the participants and some were unsure how to identify their social characteristics without preselected answer options (for example, gender, social class etc.). Whilst pointing at the social class question on the demographic information sheet, one participant named Cara asked '*what should I put here? I'd say I'm the lesser class because I'm not working.*' I

advised she could put down whatever she felt was appropriate and that represented her social class identity. She then continued to write down *'working-class.'*

The 11 participants who participated in this study were Catholic parents of young people aged 11 to 24-years-old, who have attended or are attending school in England. The participants mostly self-identified as females, apart from two who identified as male. Most of the participants had dual identities or identified with a combination of cultures. The eldest parent was 61-years-old and the youngest was 38-years-old. See Appendix K for a table that displays each of the participant's demographic information.

Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews

Initially, each participant was advised the interview would last for approximately one hour but that it would be led by them, which resulted in the time of each interview varying. The participant's level of comfort and availability determined if they desired to extend or reduce the length of the interview and I was led by their decision. The flexibility and control offered to the participant during the interview was an important element of this study's approach which helped in aiding to see their experiences and opinions from their perspective. This unobtrusive interviewing style was intentionally used as a measure to try and prevent the researcher's influence imposing on the participant's narrative. The

shortest interview was thirty-eight minutes (Cara) and the longest lasted three hours and twelve minutes in total across three sessions (Mateo).

Where two parents were present within the family unit, both were given the option to be interviewed and they could do this either as a couple or separately. In circumstances where this was appropriate and offered, the opportunity was declined with reasons for rejection being offered such as, one parent being more talkative than the other implying they would dominate the discussion.

On a number of occasions, the interviews were interrupted due to the participants receiving phone calls, family members interrupting, or by someone working in the café asking us if we wanted another drink, for example. This was detrimental as at times it interrupted the flow of thought and conversation but this is hard to overcome because each interview had been arranged in the most convenient and quiet location possible. This is also in part due to the nature of the semi-structured interview method (Bryman 2008).

At the end of each interview before turning off the Dictaphone, I asked the participants if they had anything they wanted to add or summarise or reiterate. I also requested that the participant contacted me if they had any further memories, experiences or thoughts they wanted to add to their narrative, however, no participants contacted me in this capacity after the interview.

Second Interview

All participants were invited to participate in a second interview; five participants accepted (making a total of 16 interviews). I did not ask the participants for reasons why they did not want to participate in a second interview, however attrition is a well-recognised problem in studies which include more than one point of data collection (Menard 2002). Reasons for this might include lack of time or participants believing they had nothing further to add (Thomson & Holland 2003), however the potentially sensitive and personal subject matter of this study might also have led to them seeking distance from the research/researcher.

For those who participated, a second interview enabled the development of rapport between me and the participant and it created opportunities for reflection on the first interview, including any follow up questions/issues raised in the first interview. A period of time between the first and second interview permitted researcher reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and time for the participant to reflect on their answers, opinions and experiences. Each participant was asked if they would like to participate in a second interview at the end of their first interview. If they had agreed, I organised a follow-up interview with them a few months later to allow for reflection and contemplation about the topics covered in the first interview.

Before conducting second interviews I familiarised myself with the first interview transcript. This allowed for familiarisation with the participant prior to the further interview. It also allowed the analysis of the research to start (or continue)

during the interviews as I was then aware of any tensions which had arisen in their previous interview.

Anne agreed to a second interview but the option of a second face-to-face interview was not possible due to her busy schedule, therefore, a telephone interview was conducted as an alternative. It has been reported that telephone interviews can have advantages when discussing sensitive subjects in comparison to face-to-face interviews (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004). One of the suggested advantages included the potential for a larger pool of participants because of the increased availability of potential participants (Holt 2010). This may be because participants could opt for telephone interviews if they did not have time to participate in a face-to-face interview (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Although the phone interview took less time (no travelling to and from destination) and did offer insights into the participants' views, I found the narratives to feel a little stunted or more abrupt than the previous face-to-face interview we had participated in. This resulted in me finding face-to-face interviews to be more fluent, natural and detailed, in this case.

Analysis

The data produced during these interviews was analysed using thematic analysis (Seale 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as '*a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*' (2006, p79). This type of analysis is epitomised by the 'layered reading of

interview narratives and their organisation' into themes and sub-themes (Allen 2009, p447).

The thematic analysis of the interview data constructed in this research was conducted according to the strategy developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The diagram below helps to illustrate the 'cyclical process' of qualitative data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994, p12).

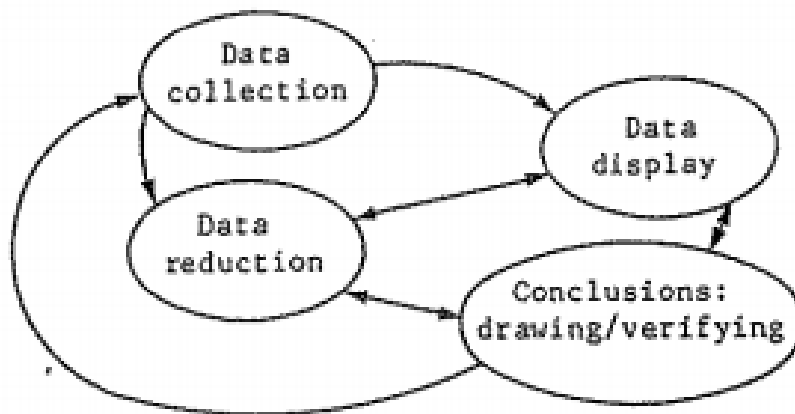


Figure 3: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model.

I will now discuss the (above) data analysis strategy in relation to my own project.

Data reduction was an ongoing process throughout the study (Miles and Huberman 1994). As the above diagram shows, each stage of analysis is connected and there can be repetitive movement backwards and forwards between each stage. During the data collection stage, data reduction was

achieved in the form of taking notes, writing summaries and acknowledging potential themes immediately upon completion of each interview. I also took note of any strong reactions that the participant had displayed and noted my own reactions to any disclosures (Miles and Huberman 1994). Data reduction helped to organise the data and helped to identify any preliminary findings that could be developed. All interviews were recorded using a voice recorder with the permission of each participant. Each interview recording was then transcribed verbatim by me at the earliest time on completion of each interview. This ensured all pauses and hesitations or strong emotional reactions were noted in the transcriptions, in their context. This meant the 'register of meaning which we hear in speaking, but which disappears in writing' (Laurier 1999, p37) could be acknowledged. The transcripts were also repeatedly reviewed and the recordings were listened to, ensuring any pauses or change in the tone of the participants voice were acknowledged.

Reviewing the preliminary notes taken during and after interviews helped to inform the refinement of the interview guide which was flexible throughout the data collection because of the inductive nature of this approach; it allowed emergent themes to be discussed further during following interviews, if the participant wished.

A Data display was defined as 'an organised, compressed assembly of information' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p11). For this project, spider diagrams were used as a device to form data displays. One was completed for each

interview transcript and included information from the data reduction stage (see Appendix I for an example). This process was repeated to help uncover key and/or sub themes for each individual interview transcription, thus helping to recognise and draw upon commonalities and differences between the participants' narratives.

The data displays (in the form of spider diagrams) were repeatedly refined to identify and illustrate the key themes (see Appendix H for diagram of overall/common themes). The use of data displays made information about the data 'immediately accessible' and in a 'compact form' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p11). Lists of themes from each spider diagram were formulated and verbatim quotes were selected to illustrate and support each theme. A data display that illustrated 'overall' key themes that had emerged from the data was developed and revised frequently throughout the analysis process.

From the start of data collection, I was attempting to draw conclusions by questioning what the content meant to the participants and trying to acknowledge any patterns that formed within the data. This is referred to as the 'conclusions: drawing/verifying process'. During the analysis stage and when coding the transcripts, questions which were developed by Santoro (2014, p130) were asked: *'What is the dominant story being told? What are the recurring themes? Where is the repetition? Where are the silences, pauses, hesitations?'*, with the additional question: *What is not being said?* For example, were there certain prevalent topics missing from the data? If so, why? This

raised questions around whether these issues were hurried or rushed within the interview and it had the potential to highlight any issues around parental embarrassment or lack of awareness. Such issues are discussed further within the following analysis chapters.

Gayle Rubin's (1984) theoretical framework of 'The sex hierarchy: the charmed circle and the outer limits' and Lees' (1993, p216-218) work, which identified three ideological approaches: conservative, liberal and feminist (see Chapter Three), were both drawn upon as analytic devices to unpick some of the experiences and opinions the parents asserted. These analytical frameworks also helped to inform some themes that were developed and which are discussed further in Chapter Eight.

For this project, conclusions were negotiated using a combination of information from each interview transcript and any accompanying preliminary notes. These conclusions were held 'lightly, maintaining openness and scepticism' and then verified in relation to the existing literature and theory (Miles and Huberman 1994, p11).

The validity of the findings and conclusions were considered by my research supervisors to ensure my position in the data collection and production process was reviewed. This process helped to explore the participants' perspectives of their realities. In providing the opportunity for my interpretations to be explored but primarily to substantiate the research findings, quotes from the verbatim

transcripts are applied in the following analysis chapters (Five, Six, Seven and Eight).

Introducing the Participants

Once I had completed each interview, I did a diagram of each participant which included any key information about their character, religion or life. I did this to maintain the element of their personalities that came across in the interviews, during the analysis of the data (see appendix one).

Here a description of each participant is provided as an overview of their character, demographic information and relationship with Catholicism. The intention is for these introductions to be used as a reminder of the person's broader context when reading their quotes within the following analysis chapters, therefore offering potential to provide a more intersectional view of the participant's experiences and opinions.

Adriana

Adriana was the eldest mother of young children when compared with the other participants. Aged 47 or 48 (she wrote her age as '*born in 1967*'), she had two sons aged ten and 14. She was middle-class and had just completed post-

graduate education.

Adriana was raised in a Catholic country in Western Europe by her parents. They were staunch Catholics and who abided by the practices and regulations of the Catholic Church in their small village and they also expected this of their children.

Adriana was a divorced-single-parent who was previously married to her sons' father, who was not a Catholic. She chose not to send her sons to Catholic schools and, similarly to Anne, she did not associate with Catholicism, unless it was to attend mass when invited by her parents, though she did say there is 'something nice' about attending mass.

Anne

Anne, at 50 years of age, identified as white (noting her Irish heritage during her interview) and middle-class. Anne was raised in a strict Catholic family and was encouraged to marry her first partner at a young age according to Catholic teachings, for example, before they cohabitated. Together with her husband she had two sons, aged 27 and 18, and a daughter aged 16.

Anne's marriage ended in divorce and she made it clear that she blamed Catholic practices for the breakdown of her marriage. As a result, she said she would be conscious not to put the same pressure on to her children.

Consequently, she defined herself as a lapsed Catholic or a 'non-believer'. She was in a relationship with a new partner who she did not refer to much in the interview.

Anne was the least affiliated with religion out of the participants and she spoke openly of her regret at belonging to the Catholic Church. She had her eldest son baptised and sent him to Catholic primary school but since opted not to raise her children as Catholics and sent them to non-denominational schools for the rest of their education.

Anne spoke with a gentle tone and effused a caring and considerate nature which seemed appropriate given her role working as a nurse at a special school.

Cara

Aged 44, Cara defined herself as '*mixed race, black/white Caribbean*' and her relationship status as '*single*'. Cara was unemployed but not through choice; she had been doing voluntary work with youth groups to try and gain experience for a future career working with young people. When filling out the socio-economic status she said '*well, I suppose I'm the lesser class*', referring to her status of unemployment.

Unlike the other participants, Cara has never been baptised but rather identified herself as Catholic because she was raised as a Catholic in a care home that was managed by nuns from the age of 10. Cara identified strongly as being religious and was the only participant to explicitly say she believes in, and sometimes talks to, God. Cara has overcome many issues relating to sex and

relationships that could be challenging because they contradict her Catholic faith: she was raised in a convent by nuns who supported her through an abortion, she is a single parent, and her mother is gay. Cara felt that people do not need to attend mass to be considered as religious, saying: '*I believe God's in your heart more than what you do on a Sunday at church.*'

Cara had always been a single parent and chose to send her daughter and son (aged 13 and 24) to Catholic schools.

Charlotte

Charlotte, a white middle-class female, aged 53, was the only participant to define her identity as '*Welsh! (British)*' and she was proud to declare this at the start of her interview. Charlotte projected a sociable yet professional personality, however, when she spoke of her previous experience of ill-health and trauma she also showed a vulnerable side to her character.

Charlotte and her husband were both Catholic, they had three children (twin sons aged 23 and a daughter aged 24) who were baptised and sent to Catholic schools. Their children went to both Catholic primary and secondary schools because of the schools' ethos. Charlotte spoke of how she was fond of the sense of community attached to being Catholic but explained that Catholicism was probably more a part of their everyday lives when their children were attending school.

Claire

Claire, a white female aged 38, was welcoming when inviting me into her home which was her chosen location for our interview. Being born into a large Catholic family in a 'very Catholic area' by 'very staunch' parents, after having some breaks in practicing her religion, Claire identified as being 'still Catholic'. Being Catholic was implicit in Claire's life. She said:

'I suppose really it [Catholicism] does play a part [in my life] but in ways that I don't really kind of appreciate until I stop and think about it.'

Claire and her non-religious husband raised their children as Catholic and they regularly attended church. Claire spoke fondly of her Catholic identity and the sense of community that came with that. She also spoke of her modern, broad-minded views in a diplomatic way and explained that she felt the Church's views no longer resembles its congregation.

Isobella

Isobella, who was aged 52, described herself as a white, middle-class woman. Isobella was married to her husband, who was a lapsed Catholic, and they have two sons aged 23 and 25.

Of the participants, Isobella had the most turbulent relationship with Catholicism throughout her life. Her mother divorced her abusive father and consequently

her family were disowned by the Church. Her affiliation to Catholicism was re-established when her sons were born because she wanted to raise them as Catholics. She spoke of going '*right back to her early years*' (the Catholic part of Isobella's childhood) because she associated those years with structure and safety and she wanted the same for her sons. Since her sons have grown older, she described herself as being '*vaguely aligned with being Catholic*' and described her history of religious affiliation as a '*mixed pattern*.'

Isobella's idea of sex and relationships as private was displayed in practice because at times I sensed she was reluctant to talk openly. Isobella came across as a professional and driven person who was also private and quite reserved at times.

Linda

At 61 years of age, Linda was the eldest participant. She identified herself as '*middle-class/ex-working class*', white and Scottish. Linda spoke passionately about her career as an English teacher at a non-faith Secondary school, highlighting that she previously had teaching responsibilities for PSHE (including SRE).

She was raised as a Catholic by her devout Catholic parents in Scotland. Her husband is also Scottish and Catholic but Linda revealed he '*practiced*' more than she did. They have lived in South Yorkshire for over seventeen years and they have two sons who were both in their twenties (22 and 26) and who

attended Catholic primary and secondary schools. Despite seeing herself as '*quite lapsed*', Linda said she still identified with other Catholics because of their shared education and upbringing.

Louise

Louise, a 53-year-old female, defined herself as a white British, middle-class female who practised Catholicism, though she said this was more for her elderly Catholic mother's benefit. Louise came across as a caring and '*dutiful daughter*'.

Louise's husband was christened as a Catholic but no longer practiced or believed in the religion. They have three children together: two sons, aged 21 and 27, and a daughter aged 25. They raised their children as Catholic and sent them to Catholic primary and secondary schools.

Weeks after the interview she remained in contact to let me know that her daughter had become engaged, which she had excitedly discussed when we first met.

Mateo

Mateo was a Latin American 44-year-old male. Mateo was '*brought up as a Catholic*' and attended Catholic schools. During the interview he described himself as a '*non-practitioner*' or '*maybe a lapsed Catholic*'. For Mateo, religion was viewed as a '*personal thing*' and he said he saw himself '*as a Catholic*'

sometimes... just because it's something familiar.' He has six siblings and his parents were Catholic but whilst his mother was practicing his father was *'probably closer to nature than... to God.'*

His wife is also a Catholic and he identified as middle-class; both Mateo and his wife are academics and educators. They have two children, but this research primarily focussed on his opinions of his twelve-year-old daughter's learning about sexualities and relationships because his son was still an infant (three and a half years old). Mateo and his wife chose to send their daughter to primary Catholic school but changed this to a non-denominational secondary school.

Mateo placed importance on educating his children about ethics and having a set of values, rather than learning about a specific religion, because he wanted them to have access to a plurality of views.

Monica

Monica was a 46-year-old American female who described herself as a spiritual and practicing Catholic who enjoyed taking an active role in the parish community. As a Lay Minister at her parish, Monica was the participant who was most involved with her parish outside of a school community.

Monica was raised Catholic, along with her sisters, by her Catholic parents of Irish (mother) and Sicilian (father) heritage in a small community in America.

Her father was a funeral director, therefore, they had a lot of interaction with priests. She had two sisters, one of whom was gay.

Monica went to Catholic primary school but her sister persuaded her parents to send their other daughters to a secular Girls High School which opened Monica's eyes to a diverse culture that she had not experienced before. Monica was divorced from her Catholic ex-husband with whom she had two children. They decided to send their son and daughter, aged 22 and 16, through Catholic education. Monica remained friends with her ex-husband and her children maintained a close relationship with their dad.

Paul

Paul was aged 50, white British, and identified as working-class. He was proud to be of Irish heritage and was raised by his strict Catholic Irish parents. He left school at 16 to do a skilled job and when he married his Catholic wife he proudly became the financial provider creating a traditional (Catholic) family structure. They have three daughters aged 15, 23 and 24 and a son aged 18 who all attended Catholic schools.

He identified as a practicing Catholic and asserted traditional views associated with right-wing political thought and a conservative way of thinking about social issues. He was a serious man and acknowledged that his views were not shared by everyone; this was displayed by his slightly reserved nature during the interview at times due to his concern that I held opposing views.

Paul was the most open participant when talking about his relationship with religion, describing himself as a 'devout Catholic' and at other times questioning this by admitting he did not always follow the Catholic rules. Of the participants, Paul's views were the most aligned with traditional Catholic views on topics relating to sex and relationships.

Chapter 5. Influencing Factors on Learning about Sex and Relationships

Introduction

This chapter looks at the factors which the parents in this study perceived to be influential in their opinion-forming about how young people learn about sex and relationships.

The judgement about who should be young people's principle sex and relationships educator is charged with contradiction within the literature (Turnbull et al. 2008, Walker 2004). Amongst my participants, however, there was a common view that education about sex and relationships should be a joint task between schools and parents. Even though importance was placed on the provision of formal sex and relationships education (SRE) in schools, my participants felt parents should still play an important role in their children's learning about sex and relationships. This could be because parents might acknowledge the family as an important contributor in implementing (positive) health messages. As the literature review has highlighted, however, the family as a facility for health strategies has been relatively neglected (see Walker 2001).

As discussed in previous chapters, parent-child communication is recognised as one of the vital channels for learning about sex and relationships (Garcia and

Fields 2017), but most research has tended to focus on formal education at school rather than sex education within the family (Morawska et al. 2015). In line with other projects (Turnbull et al. 2008, Walker 2001), this project has found that most participants did educate their children about sex and relationships but more support needs to be given to them. Due to the lack of research exploring SRE provisions within the family, there is a knowledge gap in how SRE is provided by Catholic parents outside of school. Therefore, this chapter provides insight into the factors that influenced the ways Catholic parents considered the provision of SRE within the family. Information gained in this project is important for facilitation of effective Catholic parent-child communication and their education about sex and relationships.

This chapter will, therefore, dedicate attention to the participants' perceptions of their children's learning about relationships and sexualities within the family and outside of formal SRE at school. Whereas the next two chapters explore the participants' views on SRE at school and their practical approach and experience of providing SRE within the family, this chapter focusses on the factors which influenced their thinking about these issues. The first half of the chapter is focussed on discussing the wider contextual influences which may shape parental thinking about SRE at a societal level. Then, the individual factors and specific experiences which influenced the participant's way of thinking about education about sex and relationships are highlighted. Finally, as half of the participants had experience of working within sexual health and/or education (see appendix K), the influence that the participants' profession had

is discussed. Additionally, the amount of time the parents had available to provide SRE and how this intersected with their employment status is explored.

Contextual Factors Influencing How Parents Think about SRE

This section of this chapter will look at the broad factors which were identified by Catholic parents as influential in the way parents thought about the provision of SRE.

‘Childhood Innocence’ and ‘Sexualisation’: ‘You can’t protect them and put them in a bubble’

A commonly mentioned objection to sex education is based on the notion that it can take away the ‘innocence’ of children (Goldman 2008, Morawska et al. 2015), however, young people have stated that when it is provided it is often too late and with not enough information or detail (Blake 2008). There is evidence of parental objections to SRE (see Hirst and Ingham 2010) though the speculation that religious parents object to SRE is unsubstantiated academically. Furthermore, to my knowledge, there is nothing in the way of previous research that has been conducted to explore if specifically Catholic parents object to their children learning about sex and relationships.

The practicing Catholic participants in my research contradicted this common assumption that religious parents object to their children learning about sex and relationships and most even supported it being provided in an unbiased way. It is important to note here that most of the participants provided unbiased sex

education at home and how they did this is discussed in Chapter Seven. None of my participants, however, explicitly equated sex education, at school or home, with the loss of 'childhood innocence'. In fact, the participants, whose perspectives were mostly situated in a protectionist discourse, were often enthusiastic about providing young people with information to enable them to keep themselves safe (see also Kidger 2006, Lees 1993).

In contrast to the common adult-conceived notion of SRE 'sexualising' children (Allen 2005, Hirst 2004), young people have clearly stated the desire for SRE and their need for it to be more open (Schofield 1965, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, UK Youth Parliament 2008, Hirst 2004, OFSTED 2010). Correspondingly, my participants felt that reinforcing the notion of 'childhood innocence' as a way to protect young people from sex education was not in the best interests of young people (see also Goldman 2008). As Adriana asserted:

'...you can't protect them and put them in a bubble, so I prefer to give them as...much information as possible so they can fend by themselves because life out there is tough.' (Adriana)

This quote shows that Adriana perceived educating her children as a positive method to impart knowledge that could be used as a tool to navigate throughout their lived experiences of sex and relationships. She highlights that SRE in a holistic manner could be a benefit to her children's lives as it enables them to engage with their agency and gain independence.

In addition to Adriana's view that SRE helps to protect young people, Isobella spoke about the need to 'catch' all young people and provide them with information before they might need it. She also agreed with Adriana's statement that information was a tool to be used by the young people as a form of protection. When talking about what age is appropriate to start teaching young people about sex she said:

I think about 12, it's kind of when you're on the cusp really because for some kids I think that's too early, for some kids it's not... [I] don't believe it would put anybody in mind who hasn't got it in mind but I think it protects those who for whatever reason, are either more sexually developed or more emotionally vulnerable or whatever I think it would help protect them. (Isobella)

In contrast to previous research (Lenskyj 1990, Goldman 2008), Isobella questioned the notion of 'childhood innocence'. She recognised that young people could be sexually developed and suggested that even if they were educated before this point it would enable young people to have the knowledge to protect themselves. Both Isobella's and Adriana's outlook supports previous research which found that SRE increased the use of condoms and other forms of contraception, and postponed initiation of sexual intercourse amongst young people (see DfEE 2000, Wellings et al. 2006, Kirby 2002). My participants felt that young people who were provided with information were able to protect

themselves, thus supporting Goldman's (2008, p8) argument that not providing young people with information leaves them in a state of 'ignorance not innocence'.

Going further than simply seeing SRE as a way to protect people, Monica saw SRE as an opportunity to encourage young people to have positive expectations of sex:

'What if young people valued their sexual experience as much as they value things like their experience of mobile phones? So as opposed to kind of just everybody has to do it and people go out in alleys and do it and the whole daisy chain¹⁵ thing in the park which just makes my hair stand on end, what if people actually thought about it and thought, "No actually, if we have sex it's going to be good, it's going to be in a nice bed...It's going to be a warm place, there'll be flowers, he's going to come [orgasm] the next and he's [young people] going to rub my feet..." If they had some kind of positive expectations of it...So as opposed to all that [negative SRE] actually you know, "what would you like? What would your vision of it [sex] be?" I'd love to have that conversation with my daughter, maybe I will now.' (Monica)

¹⁵ Daisy chain is slang term used to describe sexual activity with a group of people where each individual is simultaneously both an active and passive partner to difference people. This forms a chain of sexual activity.

Monica's attention to her desire to provide SRE for her daughter and to encourage positive partnered sexual experiences contrasts with the objections to SRE on the grounds of sexualisation or encouraging sexual experimentation. Rather than perceiving young people as chaste and therefore 'innocent', Monica acknowledges young people as sexual beings. She advocates for young people to have positive expectations of their sexual experiences. Monica assumed that young people have sex whether or not they are taught about it by adults. She believes, therefore, that providing young people with the skills to think about what they would like their first sexual experience to be like will help them to value their sexual encounters. If young people, referring to girls in particular, have more positive expectations they could have more control over their experience rather than just hastily '*doing it because everyone else is*' (see also DfEE 2000, Wellings et al. 2006, Kirby 2002).

Unlike the much-criticised UK Home Office reports on 'sexualisation' (Papadopoulos 2010) but similarly to the research conducted by the Scottish Parliament (Buckingham, Willett, Bragg and Russell 2010), this research explored parental expectations of their children's learning about sex and relationships without acknowledging direct assumptions relating to the 'sexualisation' of children. In other words, I did not ask my participants direct questions about the concept, instead, I gave the participants space to consider and raise any issues they deemed relevant, be they positive or problematic. Monica recognised her daughter not only as a sexual being but she recognised the opportunity for her daughter to challenge Catholic and societal gendered notions of pleasurable sex. Such notions construct men as sexual pleasure

seekers and women as passive and available (Holland, Ramazonoglu, Sharpe and Thomson 1992). Though Monica's approach to sexuality education is more progressive than that which is often assumed of Catholic parents, there are still elements of restricting dominant 'vanilla' discourses (Rubin 1984). For example, the depiction offered by Monica above is constrained by romanticised heteronormative and gendered notions which overlook lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, and fail to consider solo sex.

In the previous quote above, Monica placed emphasis on female pleasure, describing a scenario where the male ejaculates after his female partner has orgasmed. In Monica's interpretation of a positive sexual experience, she goes further than proposing the 'pleasure imperative' (see Allen and Carmody 2012, Lamb 2013, Rasmussen 2014) in suggesting the notion of the 'orgasmic imperative' (Frith 2015). In this interpretation, the 'end goal' of sex is for all involved to achieve an orgasm. Monica placed importance on sexual pleasure, and to achieve this, on both partners achieving an orgasm. Later, Monica thought of questions she would like to ask her daughter to help her identify her individual desires for her first sexual encounter, the aim being that *'anything else that comes short'* of her daughter's vision of her ideal sexual experience *'is just not acceptable.'* The inclusion of pleasure in education was not disputed by Monica but it could be argued that, through encouraging young people to focus on their own desires for experiences of partnered sex, the importance of consent and negotiation could be overlooked. Many have argued that the 'pleasure imperative', which places significance on sexual pleasure during sexual experiences, could be of detriment in sexual education because it

overlooks the many reasons why people may or may not engage in sexual activities (Allen 2012, Allen and Carmody 2012). This discourse could also lead to greater disappointments for young people as not all sexual experiences are pleasurable. Whilst it could be argued Monica is aiming to pursue the 'pleasure imperative', it has been argued that the inclusion of pleasure within sex education offers sex educators and practitioners the context for critical discussion about sexual health and relationships (Wood et al. 2018). This could be viewed/demonstrated by the participants challenging the traditional Catholic notions of men as the only pleasure receivers and their broader definitions of pleasure that include wider practices such as 'feet rubbing'.

In contrast to the commonly advocated idea that 'children [are] being forced to grow up too quickly', the notion of 'sexualisation' had a minimal contribution to how my participants formed their opinion to support their children's learning about sex and relationships (see also Smith and Attwood 2011). There was a sense that the participants had, in most cases reluctantly, accepted that their children had the potential to be sexual and that education about sex and relationships would help them to protect themselves. This contradicts the common impression that sex education equates 'sexualisation', which is often endorsed by the media, politicians and religious groups (see Kirby 2017, Dorries 2011, The Christian Institute 2011).

The Influence of Pornography?

When the interviews were conducted for this research, it was at a time when the media had a heightened focus on the 'sexualisation' debate and there was a focus on concern regarding access and viewing of pornography. When discussing learning about sex and relationships, there was an assumption by the parents that young people viewed pornography:

'it would be totally unrealistic to say that my children, and probably my sons more than my daughter...wouldn't be interested in it [pornography].'

(Charlotte)

Whilst Charlotte made a gendered assumption that pornography had less appeal to her daughter than her sons, Monica talked of her concerns about pornography for young people today and said that she did not make assumptions about what her daughter has viewed:

'it's not about an anti porn perspective... I worry about the whole pornography thing and its impact on young men and women in their relationships, it's much more of a problem for my daughter, her age, that part of the generation. We haven't really had a conversation about porn yet, not much...I don't know if she's seen any porn. She may have with friends, again, I don't assume that I know everything she's seen.'

(Charlotte)

Both Charlotte and Monica identified their lack of knowledge about their

children's interaction with pornography. Each have both sons and daughters and both highlighted the pressures that young women, in particular, might experience because of porn.

The changing nature of pornography, the consumption of it and who views it were acknowledged by the parents. Overall, it was felt that providing young people with inclusive and holistic knowledge facilitates their development of critical skills which give them the ability to protect themselves. The progressively easier access to pornography online via smartphones increases the difficulties parents face in 'protecting' young people:

'they use the internet for everything and they're never really far from it and...there's not an awful lot you can do about your kid's smartphones is there, in terms of protecting them, so I think you have to make them aware of what's out there and help them make strong choices about what they're going to watch and how it's going to influence them.' (Monica)

Whilst Monica was in favour of supporting her children to make appropriate decisions, Mateo offered information about pornography to ensure that if his daughter did view pornography it would be in an analytical way, however, he predominantly encouraged her not to view it. The pornographic materials young people can access today were generally viewed as more problematic than those from the era when the participants were young:

'we've talked about pornography on the internet and how she [daughter]

and her friends should stay away from it and the problem of how it displays a distorted image of relationships and sexuality but it's accessible, it's there, in my days it used to be a boy who bought a magazine.' (Mateo)

As mentioned later in this chapter, some of the participants acknowledged that young women are absorbing the aesthetics of 'fantasy girls' which are normally associated with pornography. It has been argued that such artificial and often unobtainable images are increasingly appearing in mainstream popular culture which is referred to as 'pornification' (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007). Yet, this term is also critiqued by Attwood and Smith (2011b, p235) who suggested that there was no 'convincing evidence' of 'pornification' and suggested that the:

'shifting sexual cultures of young people [...] seemed to be underpinned by views of sex and culture as inherently dangerous and of young people as easily corruptible and harmed.' (Attwood and Smith (2011b, p235)

In support of the notion of 'pornification', Isobella discussed the pressures that young women might face relating to the normalisation of porn and the 'sexualisation' of girls, for example, to look or act in a certain way and the narratives and body images used in pornography:

'it's basically a lot of the ideals have come from...[the] pornification of mainstream fashion like breast implants first, like ridiculous amounts of

waxing ... A chap saying to me, he started going out with ... girls that are young, he said, "they've got no pubic hair- what happened?! It's kind of ran away again!" (laughter) and I think "well...if it's just fashion it's kind of fine but it's not, it comes straight from porn it's an adaptation, it's the normalisation.' (Isobella)

Some parents were influenced by the media's confusing message that porn was directly negatively impacting on young people, even though there are no 'plausible accounts' or convincing academic evidence to support this claim (Attwood and Smith 2011, p235). Likewise, other participants questioned whether there was any real threat from viewing porn or whether it is media sensationalism:

'when Ken and I were talking about what sex education they [her sons] needed it was around respect, boundaries- this is fantasy [porn], this is real...and both of them [sons]...have got very real girlfriends and very just normal girls kind of thing and there still is lots of normal girls and normal boys but, and I don't know whether it's just...a bit sensationalising and panicking...I keep reading about...how boys are now influenced by watching the hard core porn and girls are as well and I think "God, you poor little souls, poor little lambs."' (Isobella)

In contrast to the common held belief that parents (particularly Catholic ones) would object to young people viewing pornography, Charlotte said she felt her experience of having cancer (this is discussed later in this chapter) and the

affect the treatment had on her body influenced her to be more accepting of her sons viewing pornography:

'In terms of pornography I think I've had a different sense of that, because actually I've wanted the boys to be very open to - I know that...you can come in from all different angles... for me, this is the angle that I come in from. I know there are lots of other things attached to it but ... they don't worry me in the way that I'm not a staunch feminist...'

(Charlotte)

None of the parents knew for definite if their children had viewed pornography but most assumed their children had consumed it. In general, young people viewing pornography was not entirely opposed by the participants. There was a desire, though, to encourage young people to develop the critical skills to enable them to distinguish between pornography and 'real life', and in doing so to challenge the artificial construct of women and sexual behaviours from pornography that were deemed to be becoming normalised.

Gendered Roles and The Protection of Girls: *'I was hoping somebody was looking after the girl.'*

Whilst the biological sex of the parent and/or young person is discussed in Chapter Seven, here the influence of the construction of gender and how it influenced the participants' thoughts about learning about sex and relationships is explored.

As discussed further in the next chapter, the participants were mostly supportive of their children's education being unbiased and the majority felt young peoples' needs may differ based on gender. This difference in educational need was often attributed to the perceived targeted 'sexualisation' of young people, more specifically of girls:

'... [society's] become massively more sexualised and I'd be completely traumatised if I had daughters now and trying to protect them in this world ... really girls are a lot more vulnerable.' (Isobella)

When asked whether she thought SRE could help young women to think critically about sexuality and, as Isobella put it, '*what being a girl is*', she replied: '*I think it's a bigger issue than that but it would surely help*'.

In relation to the protection of girls, Isobella perceived the 'sexualisation' of young women as a broad problem in which SRE at school alone would not be able to eradicate because she believed it to be entrenched within broader society. As with many of the other participants in their role as parents, Isobella said '*I don't feel like I've got any influence on fixing it- I like things like Pink Stinks*¹⁶.' Here, Isobella is explaining she did not feel she had any control over the perceived 'sexualisation' of girls and so she turned to campaigns for education and support. Similarly to Abbott, Elis and Abbott (2016) who found teachers also perceived young women as vulnerable, some of my participants

¹⁶ PinkStinks is a campaign which aims to challenge traditional binary gender roles by promoting toys that are gender-neutral, for example, they look to eradicate the separated blue and pink isles in toy shops. The campaign challenges the idea that the construction and engineering-based toys which help to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills are amongst all the blue toys which are for boys to play with. The dolls and princess fancy dress costumes which promote caring for others and place importance on image are situated amongst the pink toys which are deemed only suitable for girls to play with.

also recognised the restrictive risk discourses and the demands placed on female sexuality that are conveyed to young women throughout society more widely.

Whilst SRE is not compulsory in schools, my participants had no choice but to scout for knowledge using other sources of information to educate themselves about issues relating to sexuality and gender. The participants not only acknowledged the differences placed on young people based on their gender identity when they were young, but also for girls as they grew older:

'it's just trying to articulate some opposition to everything being divided and those sort of awful things like... I'm thinking of T-shirts with the logos and things like that ...you know the ones that I mean and it's just...depressing and awful ... I think it's when fashion changed and I look at girls now and I think they look like almost like men in drag in terms of the amount of make-up that they're wearing, everything's artificial, it's artificial hair, artificial lashes, artificial breasts, artificial nails and I think you poor girls don't you think anything, you can't see people's skin...a lot of girls wear [a] mask... it's like almost foundation becomes so it's almost artificial skin, hair is so big it's almost not [real]...everything is artificial and fantasy, it's like fantasy girls, it's just awful.' (Isobella)

Here, Isobella acknowledged that through changing fashion trends and an increase in using technology, young people are encouraged to place importance on women's appearances but she suggests that the current trend is to look like a 'fantasy' version of a woman. Susan Bartky (1990) raised the issue

of the objectification of women and girls through beauty regimes nearly 30 years ago. Since this time, there is increasing popularity in the use of social media applications, such as Snapchat and Instagram, which could facilitate the importance placed on fashion and body image and young people (of all genders) are not immune to the constructions of the 'perfect person'.

The participants, however, felt there was a need to challenge their perceived 'sexualisation' of young women in particular. There was a sense of contradiction to what the participants felt towards society's gendered messages which they felt young people are susceptible to through popular discourses, culture and religion. They believed their children embodied Western society's version of sexual gender roles and as parents they made decisions to protect young people from the conduct associated with such behaviour. Some of the participants explained they held different moral standards for their daughters than their sons. They also believed their daughters needed protecting from young men:

'I think he [Charlotte's husband] would be more protective over Natalie, as a father would be over a daughter naturally...And yeah he would have hated to have seen her bring different boys home. I don't think that he would have allowed it...' (Charlotte)

The same expectations were not applied to Charlotte's twin sons. This highlights a common heteronormative and gendered assumption (see Holland et al. 1992 and 1996). In my research it was assumed that fathers would be more protective of their daughters and expect them to only be involved in

monogamous relationships, whilst there was a sense of greater acceptance of young men being involved in several relations with numerous young women.

The influence of how assumed gender roles influenced parental decisions and the messages about gender norms given to young people were both illustrated when discussing mixed gender sleepovers with some participants. When discussing when their sons had sleepovers with their girlfriends and friends who identify as female, Linda and Isobella highlighted their concern for the welfare of the young women. Their focus was to make sure that the girls were consenting and comfortable with all situations they were involved in and not being sexually coerced by their sons or their male friends. Isobella recalled tense situations in which her son wanted to have mixed-sex sleepovers with their friends:

‘... we had a few kind of dilemmas like at fifteen, sixteen there would be half a dozen of them ... girls and boys and they'd say, "oh we'll all sleep in our room" ... I said "you can't, I can't let four 16-year-old boys and two 16-year-old girls sleep in the same room. If I was the mum of one of those girls, it's not fair, it's not that I don't trust you but I can't."’ (Isobella)

In not allowing the mixed-gendered sleepover to happen because of her (heteronormative) expectations of her sons and their male friends, Charlotte hinted at the girls being unsafe because of the young boys but did not offer an articulate reason as to why the teenagers could not share a room to sleep in. Instead of segregating the friends based on their (presumed) gender and sexuality, it would have perhaps been more beneficial to the young people to

have an educational conversation about consent and critiquing gender roles.

The barriers which parents can often face when attempting to provide their children with effective SRE are discussed in the next chapter.

The above quote illustrates wider ideas relating to segregation based on gender. Isobella's behaviour in response to what she considered to be a problematic situation reinforced Holland et al.'s (1996, p239) claim that:

'Sexual reputations can regulate behaviour, knowledge and expectations, since they are constituted through very powerful normative conceptions of what it is to be masculine and feminine. In journeying into adult sexuality, young women appear under pressure to safeguard their reputations, young men under pressure to demonstrate theirs.'

In saying it was not safe for two young women (aged 16) to sleep in the same room as four boys (also aged 16), Isobella provides an example of the other participants' opinions. Both, Charlotte's husband and Isobella's actions, offer examples of regulating young women's sexual reputations by not allowing them to be in the presence of boys. Instead the act of segregation may serve to confirm unhelpful notions of gendered expectations that young men are intent on demonstrating their sexual reputation.

As evidenced above, the responsibility to safeguard young women's reputations was viewed as a parental obligation. The participants experienced this obligation towards safeguarding their own daughters, as well as their sons'

female friends, the young women their sons were dating, and young women in general. However, Isobella also mentioned that her sons needed protecting from their female friends who they wanted to have a sleepover with because they could potentially make accusations about her sons' sexual conduct:

"it's to protect you as well from being accused of anything" you know "it's just... it's safer for everybody".' (Isobella)

Due to her assumption that her sons and their friends lacked understanding about the concept of consent, Isobella did not feel it was safe for them to have sleepovers together. This was because of the risk of actual or fabricated and either consensual or non-consensual sexual encounters. In doing so, Isobella assumed that all of the young people were heterosexual and, therefore, would not engage in sexual activity with those who identify with the same gender or those who do not associate with either male or female gender identities.

Isobella's heteronormative and gender binary views reflect Catholic teachings which may have influenced the way she perceived how young people should be taught about sex and relationships. The missed opportunity to discuss consent in the context of mixed gender sleepovers relates to wider discussions about how consent is taught in SRE. There have been recent discussions about including consent and enthusiastic consent within SRE (see Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013, Coy 2016) and, furthermore, the government has stated that consent will be part of compulsory RSE when it is implemented in 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). However, with the heteronormative and binary gender roles that the Church teaches, Catholic parents may

experience difficulties including consent in their sex education at home, which is illustrated by the mixed gender sleepover example. The established beliefs of Catholicism could potentially leave young people uneducated about what consent is and what it means for LGBT people.

As well as gender, the age of the young people also determined the level of parental involvement in their children's relationships and how much protection young women were perceived to need. Linda spoke of when she was concerned for the girls her sons were in relationships with and how she wanted to protect them:

'If they had been younger [than 18], I would have said "Are you sure Rosie wants this because I don't want her to feel she has to just because we think that it's okay", you know, she has to really want that too...it's part of that protecting them until they're that wee bit older.' (Linda)

Later when asked if she allowed her sons to sleep over at their girlfriend's parents' house, Linda said:

'When the older one [son] was just ... over 16 ... he was going out with a girl ... and she lived away ... and her parents were very liberal... But I don't know if they were actually having sex, but they were maybe just sleeping together in the same bed. Maybe not actually being sexually active, or being sexually active but not actually having full sex and I do remember thinking "Hmm, I've got a bit of a problem with that, but then

it's her house and I presume her mother is okay with that", but again I was hoping that somebody was looking after the girl.' (Linda)

In viewing their sons' girlfriends or friends as vulnerable and in need of protecting from boys, the participants implied that men have sexual needs which cannot and will not be controlled, whereas 'female sexuality is reproduced as a passive hole to receive the penis' (Ringrose 2010, p54). Furthermore, in trying to protect young girls from being passive, it is possible that the myth that all young men and boys are a constant sexual threat is reinforced and this contradicts the popular idea of 'childhood innocence'. It sends a message to young men that in order to fulfil their gender role and Catholic duty they should always be wanting and/or practicing sexual intercourse (penetration of penis in vagina) with a young woman (whether the young woman is consenting or not). This view is heteronormative and conforms to binary gender roles which could send problematic messages to people who are not heterosexual or cisgender.

Individual Factors Influencing Perceptions of SRE

This section looks at some individual experiences that affected the way children's learning about relationships and sexualities was perceived and provided within the family. The requirement for parents to be fluid with their ideas and approach to young people learning about relationships and sexualities was highlighted by Charlotte, particularly because of potentially unexpected changing circumstances:

'When you've got children and they're growing, there are all sorts of different things that can interplay where...something happens and it's like "Oh, well I can't behave like that anymore" because it's not appropriate, or it doesn't work...' (Charlotte)

As well as the contextual factors which are discussed above, some participants were also influenced by individual circumstances that had an influence on the participants' perceptions and provision of SRE.

Illness

Charlotte described how the medical treatment and her experience of breast cancer influenced the way she thought about her children learning about sexualities and body image:

'I got breast cancer and I had a double mastectomy and even when the boys were between the age of 14 and 20 I went through several bouts of breast cancer ... I remember [it] being really tricky, because when I first had the first mastectomy they were about 14 and it was when they were just starting to put pictures of topless women up in the bedroom and I remember being absolutely horrified that I was having to tell them what operation I was having, because I felt traumatised - I felt ...my own experience and I felt very traumatised by what their vision in their heads I would look like. Because it's like they were looking at the body beautiful in a sexual way, and I was having my not-so-beautiful body completely

de-sexualised ...' (Charlotte)

This highlighted that there was a difference in Charlotte's perception of SRE based on the gender of her children and her gender in relation to them.

Charlotte said she had felt very worried for all of her children *'but more so for the boys about how they would view me'*. Her changed post-surgery body became a concern regarding its influence on how it might alter her twin sons' view of her and other women, but not so much about the impact it could have on her daughter.

Charlotte went on to discuss how she wanted her sons to display posters of topless women which contrasted with the common belief that fear surrounds the idea of young people engaging in sexual or pornographic imagery because it will result in them being 'sexualised' (see Papadopoulos 2010). However, Charlotte acknowledged she might have reacted differently to her sons putting up posters of topless women on their bedroom walls, if she had not had cancer:

'Maybe if I hadn't [had breast cancer] I would have said something:

"Look, I don't think it's appropriate for you to have those pictures on your walls" but I just thought actually I want them to have those pictures up on the wall because I want them to continue feeling open. If I say to you "... you can't put those pictures up on the wall", what message would that have given them?' (Charlotte)

Charlotte discussed her sons' consumption of sexually explicit images, or as

she put it, *'the body beautiful'* and omitted her daughter from this discussion, whereas Isobella critiqued the impact this 'pornification' of culture could have on young girls. Charlotte's permission for her sons to display posters of topless women in their bedrooms differs from Isobella's criticism of 'fantasy girls' in the section above titled 'The Influence of Pornography?'. Isobella disapproved of women being portrayed in an artificially sexual way and Charlotte acknowledged she may have too if she had not had breast cancer.

In support of Attwood and Smith (2011), who argued there is no evidence to suggest young people are 'sexualised', Charlotte considered her sons viewing images of topless models to be a positive addition to developing their view of women and of sex and relationships. It could be argued, however, that Charlotte's views on this topic also support the Catholic view of gender and sexuality in that they encouraged her sons to engage with their sexual self by viewing women as sexual objects. Furthermore, her daughter's potential sexual agency is absent from the discussion which supports the (Catholic) view of women as non-sexual or sexually passive.

The impact of Charlotte's individual experience of breast cancer and surgery evidenced the influence subjective experiences can have on parental perceptions and provision of education about sex and relationships. In a similar vein, Isobella's personal biography affected her view, as described in the next section.

Divorce: 'You're just pulled off the face of the world, it's just like you've done something so terrible'

When Isobella's mother got divorced, her family were ostracised by the Catholic Church and they refused to baptise Isobella's younger sister, consequently leaving her family feeling shunned by the Church. Even though this was many decades ago, Isobella still displayed strong emotions and used strong language when talking about this. It was the only time that she swore during our meeting:

'I don't agree with the rules and the judgements [of the Catholic Church] my Mum got divorced so she had a lot of judgement from the Catholic Church, because even though she'd got an abusive husband, her being the one that wanted a divorce made her feel ashamed so she was very anti Catholic so we grew up very strong Catholic and then very anti Catholic.' (Isobella)

Parental experience of going against religious teachings could influence the way they view SRE. It is clear that the abusive relationship with Isobella's father, and the Catholic Church's response to it, influenced the way her mother viewed sex and relationships. Isobella continued:

'[when] Mum got divorced and then all of the sudden you're the only family in a Catholic school with a divorced parent and ... Mum remarried shortly before my dad died, when I was ten she remarried and she had my little sister and she wanted to get her baptised and the Church said no and Mum just said you know "they can fuck off basically"...But it left

us with having what you'd been brought up with and was true - we used to go to church on Sundays and it was all a big part of life - and then all of the sudden it was like "oh, I can fuck off then?!" Which I can understand and I think my mum was quite right, you know how dare these middle-aged men judge somebody and say, "your child isn't good enough to be baptised in my church." ...you're just pulled off the face of the world it's just like you've done something so terrible.' (Isobella)

The Catholic teaching which informed Isobella's childhood changed once the Church shunned her (divorced) mother. Their family no longer 'fitted' with the image that the Catholic church condones and that left Isobella feeling stranded and confused about the teachings that had informed her practices and views about sex and relationships prior to that point in her life. The Church doesn't agree with divorce under any circumstance, therefore, to put it in simple terms, the Church believed her mother should have stayed married to her abusive father. Her new family life made Isobella feel like she had done something wrong because it was different to what the Church condones. The Church's reaction to her mother led Isobella to sever her attachment to the Church's doctrine at a young age and this influenced her views on SRE. There was a sense that, even though her father was the abusive person in the family, the Church placing the onus on her mother caused conflict for Isobella regarding her understanding of relationships.

Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (Confession)

Mateo spoke about how he had been asked an inappropriate question by the priest in his first Confession. This led to his continued withdrawal of an integral part of mass: receiving the Eucharist (also referred to as Holy Communion). To receive Holy Communion, practicing Catholics are expected to repent their sins by receiving the Sacrament of Penance, which is commonly known as Confession. Mateo explained:

'even when we used to go to Confession it [sex and relationships] is presented like things you know as not a good thing and you have the priest saying, "what about your sins?" and different lists and then they list things like masturbation and you know it's like "ugh!! (Gasps) definitely not "and then you go like "I don't even know what it is! Why are you asking me?!" (Laughs) and then "have you had inappropriate thoughts?" and it's like "well I don't know what is inappropriate.'" (Mateo)

When recalling his experience, Mateo highlighted that topics relating to sex and relationships were often included as behaviours that needed to be asked for forgiveness for because they were considered to be sinful, which particularly applied to masturbation. When asked if it was the priest who had asked Mateo this he replied by saying:

'yeah ... I just did my first communion and I had to do Confession for my first communion and never again in my life ... even though I went to church and things like that I didn't participate in communion. So I thought,

"no I won't participate in the communion but I'll still go to church and things" ... you know, now looking with hindsight, I think, "is that the priest really doing his job? Or is that a dirty mind trying to find out what the kid is up to?" ...I think it's part of the mistrust that you know I developed because of the cases that came to light...(sigh).' (Mateo)

Mateo's uncertainty about the priest's intentions influenced how he participated in Catholicism and it was implied that the effects of this encounter shaped Mateo's sexual behaviour and practices. He later spoke about how he stopped practicing Catholicism and participated in casual sexual relationships prior to getting married. The mistrust which developed as a result of his experience during Confession influenced the way he perceived how his children should be taught about sexualities and relationships. Mateo, like many of the participants, viewed SRE from a protectionist perspective (see Kidger 2006). Therefore, because of what seemed like difficulty in trusting priests' intentions with his own children, he decided to teach his children in an unbiased way, allowing them to use SRE as a tool for protection (this is discussed further in Chapter Six).

Parent's Profession

This section looks at the participants' profession and any potential influence this had on their view of SRE and experience of providing education within the family. Leading on from this, the time with their children available to the parents and the potential impact this had on their experience is considered.

For the participants whose profession was in, or relating to, sexual health and education, it is likely that it had an influence on how they provided SRE within the family. Of my 11 participants, four had experience in working in sex education and sexual health. This could be seen as a limitation of my study because it could point to a tendency that parents who feel more confident about their knowledge and provision of SRE may be more likely to opt to participate in a project researching parent's views. Many of those who do not work within sexual health indicated they did not feel they had much to say about the topic and that they had originally felt unsure about participating in this research because of their lack of knowledge and experience. However, once they were informed that the research would explore both SRE in school and within the family, there was a sense that they felt that they would have more to contribute to the interview. Parental knowledge (or lack of) regarding SRE at school is discussed further in Chapter Six.

For the participants who worked within sexual health or educational settings, it seemed they were more willing to discuss SRE, with one reason being that they felt more equipped to provide SRE for their own children. For instance, for some, their teaching and youth worker roles had given them more confidence and encouraged them to talk to their own children about sex and relationships. Anne was the manager of a special school nursing team and when asked if she thought her job had made her more conscious of teaching her own children about sex and relationships she replied:

'Oh definitely, yes, because...I realised actually how little they actually do

and that you need to beef it up around the edges, work with what they're doing but make sure it's...the same sort of thing, you're drip feeding it, you're not only doing it for three weeks per year, it's in every conversation and if they ask you something that you don't shut down and just answer that, you can explain lots of other things...' (Anne)

Anne identified three potential outcomes of her professional experience as to why she was more willing to provide SRE within the family. They were her knowledge of school SRE provision, her eagerness to collaborate and 'work with' the sex education the school was delivering when providing it within the family, and finally her understanding of a suitable approach to providing education within the family (for example, on an ongoing basis). These reasons are important to highlight here as Anne directly linked them to her professional experience. They are discussed further in Chapter Seven in the context of how the participants provided education about sex and relationships within the family.

The participants who had experience of teaching other young people about sex and relationships also reported having more access to resources to use when talking to their own children, when compared to the parents whose profession was unrelated. Anne spoke about some of the resources she had access to because of her job role:

'... these cloth dolls that are anatomically correct and obviously they're around the house, I've got a contraceptive pack in that cupboard, I've

obviously got all these resources. So often they're all left around so often they'll ask about them ... obviously I've got lots of prompts and things that I could use as well to explain things really which has been quite good.'

Anne was clear that because she had more access to resources that she was confident that she could facilitate or prompt discussions with her children. This seemed even more useful to Anne because one of her children was on the autism spectrum. The resources, therefore, gave her comfort and reassurance in educating her children according to their individual needs. This highlights the potential challenges other parents may experience who lack access to resources and whose children might have additional needs. Since these interviews, the government's austerity agenda has increasingly targeted sexual health budgets (Campbell 2017, Forster 2017, Wood et al. 2018) meaning there are fewer resources available to sexual health educators, teachers, young people and parents.

For some participants, the confidence their experience gave them when talking to their own children about sex and relationships, however, meant that they were concerned they might talk about the topic too much with their children. Additionally, for some of the participants, professional involvement in SRE had a positive influence on their children's educational and professional development. During Anne's second interview she informed me that her daughter had completed training and was now a peer mentor for the sexual health services in her city. This role involved Anne's daughter going into schools and providing SRE to young people. When speaking with Anne, she was proud

that her daughter had opted to be a peer mentor. She viewed this as an advantage for her daughter's own personal development as well as in terms of benefits for the young people participating in the programme.

The participants who discussed certain difficult, personal situations (discussed later in this chapter) tended not to be the participants who worked within education or sexual health. One reason for this might be that such participants were unable to draw on professional experiences of providing SRE to create distance when reflecting on the sex education they provided for their own children, which in turn revealed more specific and personal influences. For example, Linda was an English teacher who had taught SRE as part of PSHE at the secondary school she worked at. During her interview, when asked her about her experiences of SRE relating to her sons, she would often answer with experiences from her role as PSHE teacher. Another reason could be that the participants who had sexual health and educational experience seemed less thoughtful because they often dealt with SRE as part of their work. This meant, maybe because they often had conversations regarding this issue on a professional level, that their interactions with me felt more distanced from their personal experience. For many of the participants, however, it was their first time talking about SRE in this capacity and it seemed as though their interactions with the topics at hand had more depth and thought, often delving into their own lives and their experiences. The other participants regularly talk about SRE in a similar capacity as the interview and maybe as a result they now seem more removed from their feelings about it and experiences as a parent.

Time for Participants to Provide Education about Sex and Relationships

The amount of time participants spent with their children influenced the family-based education about relationships and sexualities that was provided. It was presumed that the parent who spent the most time with their children would be responsible for talking to them about sex and relationships. Therefore, where applicable, the parent who did not work (or worked for the least number of hours) was the assumed sex educator. Just prior to Paul saying he was *'happy to avoid'* educating his children about sex and relationships, he explained how his absence from home because of work meant he presumed his wife was best placed to be their sex educator:

'... basically, she was a full-time mother to them all...reared them all, took them to school on their first day, picked them up every evening and I would come in, in the evenings [after work] and be tired and grumpy (Laughter).' (Paul)

Paul's views on gender roles were fitting with his religious affiliation. He viewed the 'ideal' family unit as consisting of a mother and father who were married with children (he had four) and he did not consider any other formation to be suitable. The father was viewed as the provider of the family and the wife as the *'full-time'* parent who *'reared'* their offspring. These roles were provided as a reason for why he had not provided his children with sex education. Paul's binary view of gender, which was likely to have been shaped by his faith, influenced the parenting roles he considered to be appropriate. This, in turn, determined who the main earner was and therefore who would spend the most

amount of time with their children. This meant that within families, mothers were the main sex educators by default due to the amount of time they spent with their children in their '*full-time*' parenting responsibility. This traditional (Catholic) view of the parenting roles could be viewed as problematic because of the increasingly changing nature of family structures which often do not adhere to the imposed Catholic doctrine. For example, lone parent families, where the parent (which is more commonly the mother) has to take on both roles of 'main earner' and 'full-time parent' and other examples, including same-sex and divorced parents, are increasingly raising children (see Office for National Statistics 2015, Sandfield 2006, Smith 1997).

Although he had previously explained the small amount of time he spent with his children was not conducive to discussions about sex and relationships, Paul assumed none of his children were in long-term relationships which is another reason why he had not provided his children with education. He believed they should not receive this education until they were in established (assumed heterosexual) relationships. This assumption, that his children were not sexually active, implied that Paul thought partnered or solo sexual activity did not happen outside of established relationships. This view was fitting with the Catholic doctrine which judges both acts as sins. It could be argued, however, that because of the lack of time Paul spent with his children and his 'grumpy' mood when he returned from work that they might feel unable to inform him if they had established (sexual) relationships. This would support Ogle et al.'s (2008) findings that young people were reluctant to communicate about sexual health matters with their parents. This could be seen as detrimental to young people

as they have stated the importance of access to learning from their parents (SEF 2006, 2001). A 'proactive' parental approach to education about sex and relationships could be beneficial for young people (Stone et al. 2017) when parents can find the time around their work commitments. This could also benefit wider society because involving parents in talking about sexual health matters with their children could influence the health of future generations (see also Walker 2004).

Other parents identified their social time with their children as an opportunity to provide SRE. This was seen to facilitate a more relaxed environment to be able to talk about topics relating to sex and relationships. The parent who spent the most leisure time with their children, for instance through a shared interest, was assumed to be the primary educator within the family. Isobella spoke of how her husband spent more recreational time with their sons which provided him with the appropriate environment and opportunity to provide them with education about sex and relationships:

'They were going for a bike ride with their dad, they were doing stuff with their dad in a way that was quite natural whereas if I said do you want to come for a walk or do you want to have a chat? It would feel quite unnatural whereas he was in the position much more, they'd go for two or three days, say, youth hostelling or cycling. So it was just they had the relationship...' (Isobella)

It was important to the participants for the education they provided to feel as though it developed in an informal and 'natural' way. The approaches parents

used to provide SRE within the family are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

The amount of time the parents spent with their children and the way in which that time was spent influenced the type of relationships they had with their children which relates to the parent's/parents' profession. In line with previous research (Turnbull et al. 2010), the participants confirmed that the conversation(s) between parent and child about sex and relationships increased when they had more time, recreational or not, available to spend with their children. It was understood that if the parent had spent more time with the children, they would also have developed a more suitable relationship to accommodate a discussion about sex and relationships that felt comfortable for all involved.

Conclusion

There were many factors which influenced the way the Catholic parents in my study thought about SRE. These influences could be categorised into two groups: broad contextual factors and specific individual experiences.

The combinations and variety of these influences for each participant formed a complex picture of the many factors which may intersect to develop Catholic parents' opinions of young people's learning about sex and relationships.

Chapter 6. Catholic Parents' Perspectives on Young People's Formal Learning About Sex and Relationships Taught Within Schools

Introduction

As noted above, parents have the right to withdraw their child from formal SRE provision under the SRE statutory guidance (DfEE 2000) and will continue to do so when compulsory relationship and sex education (RSE) is introduced in schools in September 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). The participants were aware of this option yet none of them acted on their right to withdraw their child from SRE. This chapter explores the participants' views on young people's formal education about sex and relationships which they receive in school. It emerged that participants' views were closely tied to their own experiences of sex education at school, hence this forms the first part of this discussion. This is followed by views on what the participants think SRE provision should look like, who should teach SRE, and whether this should be approached as a joint task between parents and schools, as is often recommended. The preferred options for the content of SRE curricula is then explored followed by a discussion of how much the parents know about the formal SRE their children received in school.

Participants' Own Experiences of Formal Sex Education

In seeking to understand Catholic parents' opinions on the formal SRE young people receive in school, it is useful to consider the participant's own experiences of formal sex education since this is likely to inform their thinking. In Chapter Seven there is also a discussion about the parents' own experiences of sex education, but this is within the context of the family and focusses on how this can act as a barrier to providing education for their own children. In the following section, however, I will look at the amount of sex education the participants received (if any), the content of the curricula, the approach used for its delivery, and its potential influence on parental opinions of formal SRE in schools.

Unsurprisingly, none of the participants recalled receiving any sex education in primary school and either little or none during their secondary education. The non-statutory status of sex education in the curriculum, together with having attended Catholic schools meant their sex education was, at best, inadequate or partial through adherence to the doctrines of the Catholic Church, and at worst non-existent. For example, Paul spoke of how the Catholic school he attended as a young person offered minimal input on sex education:

'I think they did what they had to do to comply with what the government laid down at the time for sex education...I think it might have been one or two lessons, that was it.' (Paul)

There was an implication that Paul felt his own sex education at school could have been improved by possibly having more lessons which included additional information than the minimum required by the government.

Of the participants who did receive sex education in school, there were complaints that it was too biological and that it did not provide them with the information they desired. Where sex education was taught in secondary school it adopted a scientific focus:

'I don't remember anything at [primary school], I think at [secondary school] we had the anatomy and physiology and sex education but none of the other bits that went with it...' (Anne)

The nature and importance of the *'other bits'*, such as, emotions in sex education, are discussed later in this chapter in 'Parental Preferences for SRE Provision'. Similarly, Paul highlighted the scientific approach which schools used to provide sex education:

'... it was taught on a science basis, it was more the, you know, how fertilization takes place ... the emotion of it was never mentioned.' (Paul)

In a similar vein to Paul, Isobella recalled the importance placed on the biological elements of her sex education at school. She explained that her sex education was in a lesson called Human Biology and she described it as:

'like biology... it was anatomical- nothing else at all -and it was probably like one lesson within a whole year's teaching would be Human Reproduction and it was very much, you know I can picture the text book now, it was like those almost unrecognisable drawings... [Human Biology] was useful at a level but I think we should have had more sex education, I think sex education would have been good.' (Isobella)

The consensus among these participants that their own sex education in school had been too biological and too scientific reflects parents' experiences in other studies (Sanjakdar 2014, Walker 2001) and young people's criticisms of SRE (Rolston, Schubotz and Simpson 2005, Blake 2008).

Their own poor experience of formal sex education left the participants feeling that perhaps it did not equip them with appropriate knowledge, confidence or skills to broach the subject with their own children. Similarly to previous research, the participant's own experience of sex education influenced the education they provided within their family unit (Walker 2001, SEF 2011b, Berne et al. 2000, Kirkman et al. 2005). As a result of their poor sex education, the participants were mostly left lacking the vital skills required by sex educators including confidence and knowledge about sex and relationships (see also SEF

2011b, Walker 2001, O'Higgins and Gabhainn 2010, Sanjakdar 2014). Blakey and Frankland (1996) and Morawska et al. (2015) have stated parents' lack of skills could be because of having received inadequate or no sex education. The detrimental influence of parent's poor experiences on their opinions and practice of SRE within the family is discussed in Chapter Seven.

One suggestion to remedy the lack of parental knowledge and/or confidence is to provide formal SRE for parents. Jerves et al. (2014, p24) recommend formal 'learning spaces for parents' or parent-specific training programmes where they can develop skills to enable them to provide SRE. Amongst my participants, however, there was a sense that there were more pressing matters and that sex education was not a priority in my participants' everyday lives. This could be taken as an indication that it was unlikely for my participants to want to attend such training courses. Instead, there was a sense that my participants hoped their children were receiving better sex education at school than they had experienced and that this could lead to young people feeling better equipped in the future.

Parental Preferences for SRE Provision: How Catholic Parents Think SRE Should Be Taught

This section will discuss the preferred notions of status and approach which parents desire schools to take when teaching young people about sex and relationships formally.

As discussed above, the participant's own poor experiences of SRE can influence their preference for improved education for their children.

Like previous research (Berne et al. 2000, Farrington et al. 2014), the participants thought SRE should be taught at school, that it should be compulsory, and delivered via a comprehensive model of education in contrast to their own experiences of sex education. In general, the participants wanted sex education at school to be unbiased, that is, they wanted schools to offer a curriculum that is not influenced by religious beliefs. They considered an inclusive approach to SRE within schools to be a positive model of education (see also Walker 2001, Berne et al. 2000, Dent and Maloney 2017). Though there seemed to be an implicit desire for Catholicism to be detached from the subject of sex, education about relationships and values informed by a framework of Catholicism appealed to the participants. This is discussed further in the analysis Chapter Eight.

Parents have a main role to play in educating their children about sexual matters and in decisions about whether their children can participate in SRE (Turnbull et al. 2010). Previous research has found that in general, most parents are supportive of SRE but when a minority of parents (or an interest group) object to SRE (or part of a programme) there can be implications for the provision of SRE in schools (Jerves 2014). As mentioned previously, Ingham and Hirst (2010) described an incident where objections were made by two parents in a school about a popular video being used in SRE. This resulted in

the video not being shown even though the majority of parents had not objected. One of the reasons for this could have been the fear of further negative reactions from parents (see Blake 2008). Teachers, like other people, are not immune to the power of the media to inflame their fears about potential objections regarding SRE.

All my participants were in favour of SRE with some unequivocally supporting the rights of all children to receive sex education, irrespective of faith. For instance, Linda suggested that there should be a nationwide curriculum for SRE which all schools should be required to implement and thus ensure all young people had access to SRE:

'Personally I think then there should just be a national programme that's quite detailed and that every school... if they get government funding, is obliged to deliver that programme and the faith schools technically shouldn't have the ability to cop out of that...really, every student should have the same access to that education so that then you can put your hand on your heart and say every [young person] in this country has been taught what sex is, you know, the pleasures, the pains, the problems, you know, whatever. I think it should be taught in its entirety.'
(Linda)

All the participants were keen for schools to provide SRE. This desire for education and collaboration contrasts with the view that some schools may keep parents at a distance regarding sex education as a measure to avoid

incensing them (see Walker 2004, Jerves 2014, Ingham and Hirst 2010). Some schools have previously kept parents at a distance to prevent a small proportion of parents (or faith groups) from being offended by SRE content or delivery (see Walker 2004).

As well as stating the need for access to a programme of SRE for all young people, Linda's above quote recommends that this is provided via a holistic approach. It recommends a comprehensive curriculum which encompasses all topics relating to sex and relationships. Another reason why the argument for all young people to have access to SRE has been raised (again) is perhaps because of the recent change in school management systems. As a result, there has been an increase in free schools and academies which do not have to follow the national curriculum (DfE 2010). Similarly to my participants, parents have consistently stated over recent decades that they desire statutory SRE because they felt that it was the right of young people (see Sherbert Research 2009, Berne et al. 2000), which echoes the recommendations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Act (Unicef 1989).

When discussing young people's right to comprehensive SRE, I asked the participants whether they thought SRE should be taught within the Catholic ethos in Catholic schools. When considering this, some parents identified a possible tension which Catholic schools could experience when teaching SRE in a holistic way. Paul spoke about the difficulty in which the Catholic Church

might have in educating people and encouraging them to live according to Catholic rules:

'Yes, I think the Catholic Church has a strict rule on no sex outside of marriage so they should try and teach why that is... Whether you get everybody to agree to that or to abide by it is another thing, so it's not easy is it? (laughter).' (Paul)

Paul gave the impression that he was doubtful of young people adhering to such teachings even though he wanted the Church to have a role in young people's learning about sex and relationships. In contrast, some participants seemed nonchalant about the Church's input in SRE provision in schools, whereas other participants were clear that they wanted the SRE their child received to be unbiased and, therefore, secular. However, it became clear that for the majority of participants there were certain topics which they preferred to be taught in a secular way. For example, as discussed above, when reflecting on being shown a pro-life abortion video at school aged 13 or 14, and recalling the dissonance and fear it made her feel, Cara said:

'To me they just shouldn't shove things, their beliefs, down [young] people's throat[s]- I think they're [Catholic Church] a bit strict on their beliefs.' (Cara)

As mentioned, other participants did not want their children to be taught about sex within the Catholic ethos because they had become estranged from Catholic beliefs and felt they were no longer relevant to society or its views on sex. It was insinuated that the participants could try to counteract any views taught through a Catholic lens (which they deemed as negative) through the education provided at home. When asked if she thought SRE should be taught in an unbiased way or within the remit of Catholic beliefs Claire said:

'Erm, oh gosh that's really difficult... I suppose they should be unbiased really, so that you've got the whole information and they [young people] can make their own decisions then, but certainly as long as they've got somebody there that they can ask the questions of, or come home and ask the questions so you can discuss it properly...' (Claire)

Young people's right to access comprehensive information relating to sex and relationships was viewed as important by my participants but the possibility of unbiased SRE and information, without limitations, seemed unlikely within Catholic teaching. One reason to support young people having access to unbiased information, as Claire described, was to encourage young people's agency in engaging with the information and forming their own convictions (see also Hirst 2013). For other participants, this support for the separation of Catholic beliefs from sex education was the result of very specific individual experiences.

Given that the purpose of SRE was not to communicate the Catholic Church's beliefs regarding sex and relationships for most of my participants, there were other incentives for supporting education provided in school. SRE was also viewed as a form of protection for young people. This was discussed further in the context of 'childhood innocence' in Chapter Five.

Given the initiatives over the last two decades to reduce the teenage pregnancy rates in the UK and the aim to increase the involvement of parents in SRE (Social Exclusion Unit 1999, Walker 2004), it could have been assumed that this topic of SRE would be a focal point for the participants. However, when deciding what young people should be taught about in SRE, the participants seemed uncertain but overall there tended to be an implicit focus on protecting young people. The stereotype of religious parents being overly protective of their children relating to sexual topics, especially in relation to pregnancy because of the importance Catholicism places on it, did not appear to be demonstrated by my participants.

In a similar vein and against the perceived assumption about Catholic parents' views on SRE, my participants did not view it as a vehicle for encouraging sexual experimentation:

'Just because you talk about sexuality and it's taught at school it doesn't mean that schools are encouraging children to be sexually active.'

(Mateo)

Linda also dismissed the notion that SRE encourages young people to have sex:

"You will only encourage them to do it if you tell them about it", which I just think is nonsense... It's totally daft.' (Linda)

Both Mateo's and Linda's explanations above contrast with the common negative objection (and misconception) that is often reported among parents, that SRE could encourage sexual exploration and experimentation (Goldman 2008, Lenskyj 1990). Comparatively, it could be argued that my participants' support for comprehensive provision, despite their religious upbringings, suggests they have a progressive view of sex education.

Another parental attitude which displayed my participant's support for SRE was when I asked the participants if they would/did withdraw their children from SRE. They said they would not. Prior to the interview the participants seemed aware of their right to withdraw and, even though they did not act on this entitlement, they felt that this parental right should remain part of SRE policy. Instead of withdrawing their children, if necessary, they said that they would rectify any unsatisfactory SRE at home after the lesson. This applied to

circumstances where their children may have been taught about topics (e.g. abortion or LGBT issues) from a contrasting perspective to their family's values. Low interest in parents opting their children out of SRE is representative of other research findings. For example, OFSTED (2002) reported less than one percent of parents choose to withdraw their children. My participants' opinions contrast with the misconception that if parents object to SRE they will withdraw their children from it.

Along with discrediting the misconception of SRE promoting sexual exploration, the decision not to use the option of withdrawing their child from SRE could also be interpreted as a sign of support for it by my participants. Mateo described his support for SRE which consisted of both progressive and protective opinions regarding sexuality:

'at the end of the day I want my daughter to, ideally, I know it's too much to ask but I would like my daughter to enjoy her sexuality in a safe way and guided by some principles just not randomly, I wouldn't like her to see it as just pure self-indulgence, err because it doesn't work I've (laughter) been there! (Prolonged laughter) you would expect them to experiment and all that but at the end of the day you want something to guide them.' (Mateo)

The above quote illustrates the empowering discourse (Kidger 2006) which recognised young people's rights to sexual agency and competency and to enjoy their sexualities (Hirst 2013, 2008) were underpinned by the protectionist

approach to SRE (Jackson 1982). It could be argued that the notion of protection may be founded in the parent's own negative experiences of sex and relationships, as Mateo admitted '*I've been there.*'

My participants demonstrated both a support for formal sex education and the dismissal of the misconception that SRE encourages sexual experimentation, which upholds similar perceptions found in earlier research which was undertaken in a number of different countries (Wellings et al. 2006, Kirby 2002).

Who Should Teach SRE? 'Parents...but...you absolutely can't rely on parents, I think it should be schools'

Whilst the above section laid out the participants' preferences on how SRE should be taught, this section will explore their views on who should teach it and what subjects the curriculum should include.

A significant factor regarding participants' disclosures on what might constitute sound education for their children was where and by whom it was provided. It has been suggested that the primary sex educators for children could be parents (Goldman and Bradley 2001, Krafchick and Biringe 2002). However, there was a sense of confusion around who the participants thought was best placed to provide their children with SRE which echoes the contradictory nature of the findings of research in this area (Dyson and Smith 2010, Berne et al. 2000, Jerves et al. 2014, Dent and Maloney 2017, Morawska 2015). Many participants said they had not given this subject much thought prior to their interview for this project but there seemed to be a presumption among the participants that schools provided SRE. For further discussion about what the

participants knew about SRE in practice, see the section titled 'Parental Knowledge Concerning Formal Learning About Sex and Relationships Taught Within Schools'.

Arguably, it is important that parents are included in the sex education their children receive (Walker 2001, Berne et al. 2000), though this throws up questions about parent's reported lack of knowledge, confidence and skills in providing SRE (see Walker 2001, Stone et al. 2017). Walker (2004) explains that involving parents in talking about sexual health with their children is important and it influences the sexual health of future generations. Therefore, it seems important that young people today are provided with better sex education than their parents so that they can have the confidence and skills to potentially provide the next generation with adequate sex education. Parent-child communication is one of the most recognised situations for sex education to be implemented outside of school (Garcia and Fields 2017) and where family members can support young people to become healthy sexual adults (Miller et al. 1998). Though rather than parental experiences and opinions about their children's SRE, the literature tends to focus on the communication between parents and children about the SRE received in school (Wills et al. 2003).

Unlike previous research (Turnbull et al. 2010), most of the participants in my study offered their children guidance on sexual relationships, though this was not seen as a substitute for sex education at school. The findings suggest that the participants assumed schools would provide sufficient sex education for their children. However, parents' faith in schools to provide adequate sex education may be over optimistic because, according to the PSHE Association

(2008), a quarter of teachers felt that they were unable to provide the SRE young people needed.

Passive Partners

Previous research suggests there are several barriers to parents discussing sex and relationship matters with their children (Rosenthal and Feldman 1999, Morawska 2015, Ogle, Glasier and Riley 2008, Walker 2001) but such findings could undermine the important role that parents can play (Burgess, Dziegielewska and Green 2005). This is recognised by the UK government's recommendation that parents and schools should work in collaboration (DfEE 2000) and form 'partnerships' (DfES 2001) to encourage input from both 'partners'. This means parents should be encouraged to be actively involved in SRE and in the development of SRE school policies. However, there was a sense from the participants that they would rather be passive partners in which they maintained a casual relationship with the schools.

Whilst government initiatives recommend that schools provide SRE in collaboration with parent's providing education at home, little is known about how these initiatives or partnerships have materialised. It is notable that these 'partnerships' were borne out of the strategy to tackle teenage pregnancy (Social Exclusion Unit 1999, Walker 2004) and the emphasis on highlighting and reducing negative outcomes of sex in efforts to prevent further teenage pregnancies. As noted above, Turnbull et al. (2010) identify these relationships as an under-researched and poorly understood area, especially in relation to how families discuss sex and relationships. How parents provide SRE within the family is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, whilst this chapter focusses on formal SRE at school.

Though the role of parents in sex education is viewed as extremely important (Morawska et al. 2015), my participants viewed SRE as a joint task shared between school and parents to provide a holistic model of education for young people. This view is supported by earlier research which shows young people have made clear their desires for compulsory SRE (UK Youth Parliament 2010), for parental input into their sexual education (SEF 2011a), and for opportunities to talk to their parents (DfES 2001). The participants in my study largely viewed the (varying) input from schools and parents as equally important to the education a young person receives, unlike previous research which found parents felt school teachers were most appropriate to teach SRE (see O'Higgins and Gabhainn 2010, Sanjakdar 2011). This also differs from the SRE legislation, which Walker (2004) speaks of, in which teachers take on an assistive and supportive role and parents are promoted to be the prime educators. However, government SRE guidance (DfEE 2000) calls for collaboration and consultation with the community, including young people, parents and governors, when developing their SRE framework.

Though responsibility for SRE seemed to be casually relegated to schools, the participants held strong views on the specific designation of those doing the teaching. The participants believed celibate Catholic priests or other religious figures could not offer unbiased SRE:

'The fact that you know the sexuality of Catholic priests is limited to the extent that it is... it's not a very good example [of healthy sex and relationships].' (Mateo)

Even though religious figures are recognised as contributors to school sex education policies (Sanjakdar 2014), the participants did not value their sanctioned input. It could be argued, in rejecting priests as potential sex educators because of their restricted sexuality, the participants felt that teachers from more diverse backgrounds and who display different sexualities could be best placed to provide sex education.

Another reason why priests may not have been viewed as suitable sex educators could be because they were linked with notions of abuse and inappropriate behaviour. Monica offered an example which illustrates this:

'I remember my sister going to confession with this priest and everybody knew he was a bastard and he tore her apart. He said things to her like 'So aren't you having sex with boys?' and my sister was horrified, my sister had never even kissed a boy and she was just traumatised.'

(Monica)

There were also other comments about the Catholic abuse scandal and priests asking inappropriate sexual questions during Confession (this is discussed further in Chapter Five). It is reasonable to assume that such experiences and associations may have resulted in depleted confidence in priests which may have added to the reluctance for these once trusted members of society to be involved in SRE. These findings contrast with previous research by Farrington et al. (2014) which suggested that clergymen should be involved in developing sex education programmes. As a result, religious leaders such as priests could contribute to offering parents advice on how to mediate providing their children with factual and religiously sensitive SRE.

The lack of awareness about who taught SRE was viewed as a cause for concern and this was interpreted by some participants as a representation of the lack of status given to PSHE provision. Mateo displayed concern as he explained he knew all of his daughter's subject teachers apart from the one that taught PSHE:

'I know the name of the head tutor, I know the name of the science teacher and the maths teacher but I have no idea who the P-SHE tutor is so, obviously I think it is the subject itself and probably the people who teach it are probably marginalised and as long as that happens that stage of moving towards cross-curricular classes... it's not going to happen.' (Mateo)

The above quote illustrates the notion that priority was given to subjects traditionally viewed as academic, for example maths and English, over PSHE, which includes SRE. This also shows why the desired comprehensive approach to SRE is to incorporate sex education across the school's curriculum, which was mentioned by some participants. This model would mean that all teachers would be expected to teach part of the SRE curriculum.

The participants wanted their children to be taught by 'experts' or well-trained educators in the hope this would lead to better sex education for young people than they had experienced at school (see also Dyson and Smith 2012, Martinez and Emmerson 2008, Fisher and McTaggart 2008, Hirst 2004, Formby 2011b, Abbott, Ellis and Abbott 2016). For example:

'I think I would have liked to know more from people who really knew stuff because what ends up happening is, your mates start filling in the gaps and sometimes they are wrong (laughs).' (Mateo)

Mateo would have preferred SRE to be taught by educators or health practitioners who were well informed about sexuality, relationships and sexual health. In-line with Kidger's (2006) 'harm-reductionist' approach to sex education, Mateo's preference was for SRE to be taught from the perspective of information founded on science rather than religious belief and misinformation passed on by peers.

Whilst this chapter focusses on formal education, it is important to note that young people's school friends were presumed to be key educators by the participants. This assumption seemed based on the parents' own experiences of school where many said they learnt from their friends and their siblings. It is important to acknowledge that whilst this section is focussing on whether parents or teachers are best placed to provide SRE, for many young people the internet, TV and their peers may be their main sources of information when learning about sex and relationships.

The participants in my study agreed that schools and teachers were appropriate sex educators:

'It's something I was happy to leave the school to, it's something I was happy to leave the Church to. I think I put a lot of faith in the Catholic Church to run the school and to make sure the school runs sex education to the best of its ability within the confines of the Catholic religion.' (Paul)

Above, Paul displayed a sense of confidence that his children's school's ethos would reflect his family's values and he, therefore, held an assumption that schools provided appropriate SRE. These findings were consistent with other studies (Sherbert Research 2009, SEF 2011a, Dent and Maloney 2017). In contrast to Bijelic's (2008) suggestion, the participants did not appear concerned that teaching their children through the same value system in school and home would lead to discriminatory teaching. However, some participants felt that for some topics in SRE the school did not reflect their own values. For such topics, the participants suggested they could attempt to rectify any inconsistent teaching with the SRE they provide at home. This concurs with the literature that states parents should be the 'primary sexual educators' of their children (Turnbull et al. 2008) because they could maintain family or ethnic cultural morals, values and faith (SEF 2011b).

Despite misgivings about sex education informed by the Catholic faith and inconsistencies between Catholic teachings and their personal beliefs, participants' reticence to withdraw their children from SRE could partly be explained by their sense of lacking sufficient confidence and competence to offer this input themselves, hence leaving the responsibility to schools. As Mateo states:

'Off the top of my head I'd say parents [should teach SRE]. But, as soon as I hear myself I think that's rubbish. You can't rely on parents; you absolutely can't rely on parents, I think it should be schools.' (Mateo)

Goldman (2008) affirms this view in arguing that despite their best intentions, most parents offer inadequate and infrequent SRE at home. The main reason

proffered by my participants, and those in other studies, for this is the inadequacies of their own sex education that had not provided the skills or knowledge to take the lead role in providing education and support within the family.

What Content Catholic Parents Think Should be Covered in Formal Learning About Sex and Relationships

As discussed above, there is a desire for education about sexuality and relationships in schools to complement the SRE offered to young people at home and by health practitioners (see Fisher and McTaggart 2008). However, my participants acknowledged there were certain topics they were uncomfortable covering with their children at home and consequently said they would prefer a comprehensive model of SRE to be provided in schools, which supports Morawska et al.'s (2015) findings. Comprehensive SRE was defined as covering all aspects of biological and relationship topics (see also SEF 2011a, WHO 2011). Examples of 'biological' aspects included: how to avoid getting pregnant, how to protect yourself from getting an STI, 'what STIs look like', understanding your genitalia etc. Relationships and the 'emotional side of sex and relationships' were viewed as an equally important and beneficial addition to SRE at school. In general, the participants, like Linda, felt that SRE *'should be taught in its entirety.'*

Isobella highlighted the importance of the availability of an educator to communicate with about other subjects relating to sex and relationships, not just the biological:

'When I think of sex education I don't know what is delivered because I don't know about the boys and I don't know about mine but somebody to talk about valuing people, relationships, safety, all of those sort of things I think...would have been really good and valued.' (Isobella)

Like Berne et al. (2000) found, perhaps because of their own deficient experiences, both Isobella and Linda placed importance on teaching about relationships, the safety of the young person, and their partner and mutual respect:

'One of the things that I think still isn't done enough, even with the present thing [guidance], is just the idea of relationships being important and respect and valuing people and that kind of stuff. I do think if you're in a rush to deliver a programme you're not going to necessarily do all that and that's [education about relationships] not going to be as detailed.' (Linda)

Mateo spoke about approaching SRE in a way that included education about ethical decisions and he also recognised the difficulties schools may face in deciding what to teach in SRE. He described his idea of comprehensive SRE as encouraging young people to think critically about ethical life decisions and suggested including numerous perspectives on these issues within the curriculum:

'I think it would be a very, very fine line and it's not a decision I would like to be making in terms of what to include or not, I do believe in terms of

you know probably presenting case studies especially if they are real case studies that involve difficult decisions, ethical decisions, different points of view, inviting them to argue that sort of thing would be very, very, very important in terms of things like abortion and you know contraception and things like that ... it would have to do with the discourse that is presented to her [daughter] whether it is generally making her aware of different points of view or presenting one point of view which I think would be as equally damaging as just having a Catholic point of view exclusively...' (Mateo)

Mateo raises the desire to have an inclusive curriculum that encompasses many viewpoints, not just those of secular or Catholic persuasion, specifically about topics that may be viewed as controversial within Catholic families (for example, contraception use).

The topics which Isobella, Linda and Mateo highlighted above, for example, valuing people or ethical decision making relating to sex and relationships could also be considered as relevant to the moral education which the participants placed importance on. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

Emotions Education

Similarly to placing importance on education about relationships, alongside acknowledging the requirement for scientific information about sex to be taught to young people, Charlotte highlighted the need for other aspects of sex and relationships, specifically emotions, to be covered:

'[SRE] should definitely be taught in the biology side of things for people to understand how your body works. And probably there isn't enough talked about the emotional part of a relationship.' (Charlotte)

Paul's reference to emotional and physical aspects was framed in relation to love:

'I mean sex as a physical act it can last for two minutes and that's it but it can emotionally scar you though. So I think, yes, they should teach the emotion, teach that it's [sex] far better when it goes along with proper [emphasis added] love.' (Paul)

Paul offered an interesting example which compared the focus given to what the participants potentially viewed as the key elements of SRE, which were biology and emotion. He concluded that the focus of school education tended to be biological and physical even though the emotional results of sex can also be long-term.

The notion of 'proper love' is referred to. There was the implication that sex is viewed as being better if it is part of a long-term relationship, as instructed by Catholic teachings in which sex is permitted within marriage for procreation. The distinction that Paul makes regarding the 'better' types of sex and love fit in Rubin's (1984) 'Charmed Circle' of 'blessed sexuality'.

Adriana also said the emotional impact of relationships and sex should be addressed in SRE and that young people should be encouraged to discuss this in formal classroom settings:

'I think it's...how to cope with those changes... they impact... the emotional side of what sex and relationships means, what you know, the combination, all the turmoil that people will go through when you start having feelings towards somebody and the hormones kick in.'

(Adriana)

The need for the biological part of SRE to be preserved was supported, but Adriana linked this to the need for emotion education. An example she highlighted was a possible intersect between two elements in SRE, which was teaching about puberty and the hormonal changes it encompasses.

To emphasise this inclusive approach that the participants would prefer SRE to have, Monica said, *'because it's actually about the feelings ... I think it should be called relationships and sex education.'* This is supported by the government's proposal to introduce statutory relationships education at a primary level and relationship and sex education in secondary schools in 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). This also could signal a move away from the biological focus in SRE, which Sanjakdar (2011) describes as being 'biologised', to a more equally inclusive educational approach. However, to (re)focus on the 'relationships' aspect of SRE, risks education being approached from a sex-negative or 'sex-phobic' perspective. Throughout the interviews, there was a sense that the participants placed more importance on education regarding emotions and relating to relationships education rather than sex education. There was an implication that education about emotions was linked to education about values and morals (see Chapter Eight).

It could be argued that the desire for emotions to be part of SRE was borne out of the lack of inclusion of such topics in the participant's own education. There was a sense that, in retrospect and because of their lived experiences, the participants felt it could have been beneficial for them when they were young people. It could be suggested that this consequently informed their opinion of wanting young people to be taught a more varied curriculum, including education about emotions. This supports earlier research which found that parents wanted to ensure their children's generation were better informed and consequently had more knowledge about sex and relationships than they did (see also Kirkman et al. 2005, Walker 2001).

Parental Knowledge Concerning Formal Learning About Sex and Relationships Taught Within Schools

Given the above discussion about parental preferences and their own experiences of SRE, it is important to give attention to how much knowledge the participants had, in practice, concerning their children's education about sex and relationships.

The participants, in general, had little knowledge about the SRE their children received at school and said they would like this to change by having more communication and information provided by the school about their SRE provision. This is in correspondence with previous research which recommended that schools inform parents about what SRE will be delivered (Fisher and McTaggart 2008) and that parents want to be consulted about the

sex education their child receives at school (see also Dyson and Smith 2012, Walker 2001). As mentioned above, however, there was a sense amongst most of my participants that whilst they would like to be informed about the SRE the school is providing for their children, they did not seem keen on being proactively involved in the schools SRE provision as previously suggested by the government (see DfES 2001).

Amongst the participants there was a sense that they held some general knowledge about the SRE provided in schools. However, the participants who had experience of working in schools as a teacher, administrator, or youth worker had greater knowledge of the SRE curriculum (see *Parent's Profession* in analysis Chapter Five). The participants who had experience of working in schools were more knowledgeable about how, when and what SRE was taught in schools. Just before explaining how she had been working in the field of SRE, Monica said:

'but I knew the [SRE] materials and everything and I was absolutely happy, it was the Channel 4 stuff, so that was really good, I knew it was going to be fine and I was just supportive with it.' (Monica)

For some participants, there was a sense that schools provide adequate SRE which encompasses more extensive topics than it did when they were at school. Linda uses teaching about homosexuality as a clear example of how the curriculum has expanded since she was at school:

'I think that most schools now put on reasonable sex education. I'm not going to say that they cover everything, because I don't think that they can cover everything, but they try and cover more stuff and they try and cover attitudes to homosexuality as well now which was never even talked about when I, I didn't know about gay people until I was 16, 17...'

(Linda)

Other participants could be perceived as being less positive in their assessment of how SRE is provided in schools. Anne explained that the knowledge she gained through her involvement in education encouraged her to provide teaching about relationships and sexualities at home, which she would not have otherwise done:

'I thought before that schools did it all and I probably would have kept it at arm's length really, but I think I realised actually how little they actually do and that you need to beef it up around the edges, work with what they're doing but make sure it's, you know, the same sort of thing, you're drip feeding it...' (Anne)

Similarly to what Fisher and McTaggart (2008) reported, my participants who had knowledge about SRE school provision were surprised by the small amount that was provided and how little of the education was statutory. This highlighted

the need for parents to take on their role as a 'partner' (DfES 2001) in their children's SRE by providing it at home.

A strong theme that emerged was the little knowledge about what was being provided in their children's school amongst the participants who did not work within an educational setting. When invited to participate in an interview for this research, some potential participants refused because of their lack of knowledge about the SRE their children received at school. Similarly, some of those who opted to participate said they were originally reluctant because the invitation highlighted that they did not know much about the topic. When talking about SRE at his daughter's school Mateo stated, '*something that strikes me is how little I know*'. This supports previous research which found that many parents report knowing little about SRE (see also Fisher and McTaggart 2008, SEF 2011a).

The interviews also prompted the suggestion of continued SRE after participation:

'My conversation with you has triggered some conversations with my wife and I'm sure it would be the basis for some more conversations with my children and then I shall go and find out what my wife has discussed with my daughter (laughter)... Just thank you for the opportunity. It's not the sort of thing you think about all the time and I think those are the important ones to explore... maybe things are taken for granted.' (Mateo)

The above quote is representative of many of the end of other interviews in that the participants said they were grateful for the space and time to think and talk about their children's sex education. It was suggested sex education might be taken for granted by parents and that having the time to talk about it as part of this research might prompt some new communication and reignite some previous conversations within families. There is further discussion relating to the SRE provided within the family in Chapter Seven.

It is possible that the participants had little knowledge about what schools were teaching because there was little or no communication from the school to inform them. Similarly to Dyson and Smith (2012), the participants in my study said they felt uninformed about how and what SRE is being delivered to young people at school and would like (more) communication with the school about the SRE that will be, or is being, provided. Another recommendation was that schools need to inform parents about the content of SRE taught at each stage of their education 'to build a stronger dialogue between schools and home' (Fisher and McTaggart 2008, p1). This echoes the Government's recommendations (DfEE 2000) for schools to give parents reassurance that their children are receiving good, clear SRE which enables them to make the appropriate, informed and safe choices. Even though many of my participants stated their concern over their lack of knowledge about the SRE their children received, many of the participants were unsure if they'd received any communication from the school and they were not proactive in asking for information regarding SRE from their child(ren)'s school. The participants said if they were informed about when and what SRE was being provided at school it

might help to prompt discussion at home. As a result, such discussions could complement the school-based SRE young people were receiving and parents could ensure the family's values were being taught (see also Walker 2001).

Whilst lacking knowledge about what is taught at school, some parents made an (incorrect) assumption that schools *must* teach 'the basics' of relationships and sexualities within the curriculum.

'To be honest I would have to admit that I don't know ... but I would imagine they have... you know, the schools have to teach the basics to fulfil the curriculum.' (Paul)

Mateo described a scenario where his daughter saw a condom on the street which led to an informal conversation about contraception and prompted him to assume that this had been covered in formal SRE at school. His questioning is illustrated in the quote below:

'she [daughter] said, "ohhh, I recognise that, we talked about it at school" and I said "oh yeah?" (laughs) ... so I assume "we've talked about that at school" meant in class (laughs) maybe... she gave me the impression that they had covered it because I remember saying "so, do you know how to use it" and her saying "no! but I know what it is used for" so, err obviously because of the age and all that I'm not

sure they would tackle it that way but probably they have mentioned the idea of contraceptives.' (Mateo)

As demonstrated above, there was a sense that the participants relied on their assumptions to replace authentic information about the sex education their children receive in school. There also seemed to be an assumption that the school has the same judgement about what topics were age appropriate. Mateo pointed to his daughter's age as a marker for whether her school would have taught her about contraception or not. This is an area, on reflection, which I could have explored further; I could have asked the participants why they rested on their assumptions instead of enquiring with the school about whether, for example, contraception was included in their formal sex and relationships policy.

Conclusion

For the participants in this study, their own experience of receiving very little biological sex education (if any) in school influenced their view of SRE and encouraged them to support it being provided in schools. A more varied curriculum than they received was favoured by the participants for young people. They also highlighted their desire for an inclusive education which placed significance on teaching about relationships and emotions. Given their stipulated preferences, however, the participants had little or no knowledge of the SRE their children had received at school.

Chapter 7. How Catholic Parents Provide SRE and the Barriers Encountered

Introduction

This chapter focusses on the education about sex and relationships which parents provide within their family and it is divided into two sections. Firstly, the approaches Catholic parents use to provide learning about sex and relationships are identified, and secondly, the barriers which parents might experience when trying to implement education are recognised.

Approaches to learning about sex and relationships within the family: ‘...There’s going to be an impromptu sex education lesson now.’

This section looks at how the participants provided informal education about sex and relationships outside of school and the differing strategies they used to provide this for their child(ren). Much of the research exploring parent-child communication about sex and relationships tended to focus on the content of the interaction rather than the practical engagement by the parents and children’ (Kuhle et al. 2015).

Parenting styles were not explicitly identified by the participants. One reason for this could be because most of the participants did not acknowledge they were providing sex education within the family. This supports Walker’s (2004)

research which found that parents unknowingly adopt strategies to provide sex education. Effective parent-child sex education and communication is reliant on early and ongoing communication, which is essential within the family system (Ballard and Gross 2009). Most of the participants in my study provided education about sex and relationship matters on the basis of opportunistic, ongoing communication which was led by their children.

In most cases, the participants had unknowingly provided more comprehensive information than they had initially realised. This might have been because they were, in some circumstances, unknowingly providing SRE using a broader format than that through which they were taught. Some participants only identified education that fit the formula of the well-known 'talk' (see Kuhle et al. 2015) as providing sex education where the broader approach was unknowingly applied. One participant used the phrase '*the conversation*' as a way of identifying when they had provided the first formal instalment of sex education, in this case relating to menstruation, though she had (unknowingly) been providing education implicitly long before she had '*the conversation*' with her daughter. For example, Claire had previously discussed how she had spoken with her daughter about her pregnancies and using tampons but had not made the association that those informal conversations were a form of SRE relating to menstruation. This supports previous research which also found little evidence of parents only providing their children with SRE in the form of 'the talk' (Walker 2001, Stone et al. 2017).

Opportunistic Sex Education

As already mentioned, family-based education about sex and relationships was provided by the participants for their child(ren) but, in contrast with formal SRE provided at schools, it was delivered on an ad-hoc basis, without any prior planning, and often prompted by cues. Different kinds of cues were identified as opportunities to initiate informal discussion about sex and relationships, for example, seeing a condom machine in a public toilet or a discussion about topics that are covered on television programmes:

'I can think of times when you're in a public loo and there's been a condom machine or a tampon machine and one of them has asked a question about that, but not specifically relating to anything they've learnt about at school...' (Claire)

Here Claire identified a separation between formal school-based SRE and the learning about sexualities and relationships that is provided within the family. Unlike SRE provision in school, the learning provided within the family often *'happened very spontaneously'* and was usually prompted by everyday activities and cues, such as unpacking the supermarket shopping:

'...my wife asked Bryony to unpack... and my wife forgot that we had bought some contraceptives [nodded and looked down to imply condoms] ... so obviously she found (laughter) the box and then she [daughter] was like "right, so! What is this?!" and then asking questions like "when does this happen?" (laughs) "I'm not AWARE of this [sex]

happening" (laughs) and I said ... "are you ok? Do you want to talk about it?" she said, "well, I'm just curious because I... wasn't sure...you and mum, YOU KNOW!! And I imagined you did because that's how I have a younger brother and I know how things happened!" She said referring to what she had been taught at school...' (Mateo)

This is another example that shows that everyday activities which families participate in can lead to potential situations for learning about sex. It also shows that such moments can provide the participants with information about what their children had learned about sex and relationships at school.

The tension between what is personal and private information between parent and child and where the boundary should be drawn in discussing sex and relationships is also highlighted in the example above. The issue of privacy is discussed later in this chapter.

In agreement with previous research (Ballard and Gross 2009), the participants spoke about some other scenarios that prompted discussion, which included being pregnant, being in the bathroom or toilet (public and private) and being naked in front of family members. These examples of times when discussions about sex and relationships arose naturally were found to be common amongst my participants:

'And she was sat in the bath and looking at - like that, "Look at your bump mummy. How is that baby going to come out?" and I said, "Oh it's going to come out with--" (interrupts self with laughter) ... but yeah, she

was looking at herself in the bath and then looking at me and "How does that baby come out?" and I said "Oh, it comes out of your front bottom" [vagina] and she had a good look and she went "Don't be so ridiculous". So, I said "Well where do you think it comes out of?" and she said, "Your mouth, silly". So that was the end of that...' (Claire).

In each situation which prompted these discussions, the learning was initiated by questions asked by the young people, rather than the parents and the participants, which allowed the young person to take the lead. However, as the above example shows, this could be potentially negative as wrong information could be left unchallenged if the child stopped asking further questions. These examples show that the participants were taking advantage of the 'teachable moments' mentioned previously (Dent and Maloney 2017). This impromptu style of learning and opportunistic way of providing information about sex meant that, in some instances, the young people were not aware they were receiving sex education from their parent. This was deemed to be a victory by the participants over giving their children 'the talk', which happened once and had a lot of emphasis on the biological aspects of sex, for example, reproduction. In summary, when discussing SRE provided outside of school, the participants portrayed their 'style' of providing SRE as one with a combination of approaches, which were: informal, unplanned, opportunistic, and in the context of an ongoing open conversation about sex and relationships, which was led by the young person.

Maintaining an Ongoing and Open Dialogue

'The talk' is a customary approach to SRE that is comprised of a one-off talk, planned and presented by the parent(s) and delivered when the parent(s) feel the child is ready (Kuhle et al. 2015). In contrast to this idea, previous research has found some parents aim to establish an open dialogue with their child(ren) from a young age and aim to continue it throughout their lives (Walker 2001). This is in contrast with the common practice of schools implementing 'drop-down' or 'off-timetable' days where the focus is on PSHE education instead of the usual focus on academic subjects.

As well as being unplanned, and at times opportunistic, some participants explained how the teaching that they provided for their children used an ongoing approach, rather than sitting down and implementing 'the talk':

'We've never formally sort of sat down and chatted it's just as part of life goes on...' (Anne).

'We have always talked quite openly about things at home so that as and when things have come up we have dealt with it...' (Linda).

As highlighted here by Anne and Linda, many of the parents demonstrated an ongoing approach to SRE outside of school. Ensuring learning was not only on an ongoing basis but that it also ensured open communication, was important to the participants:

'she [daughter]...said that the teacher had asked how many people had

had [the birds and] the bees talk, and she said about half the class hadn't ... I try to be very open at home and we've talked about this and we've seen the discovery channel documentaries (laughs)...I've tried to keep the openness that my father had with us as children, so she had the opportunity to talk about these things.' (Mateo)

Here Mateo draws on three strategies he uses to provide learning at home: maintaining an open dialogue, using resources available (television programme), and also using the skills he learnt from his own parents.

For my participants, it was important that any opportunistic teaching they provided for their children was reinforced by an environment which allowed for open and on-going conversation. In the interest of maintaining open discussion, instead of a narrower selection of topics like those which were discussed in the participant's own sex education, my participants aimed to be willing and capable of talking about a broad range of topics with their children (see also Ballard and Gross 2009). Such topics which were open for discussion included dating, gender roles and body image (these are discussed in other sections; see, for example, the 'Illness' section and 'The Influence of Pornography?' section in Chapter Five). There was a sense that the participants had a desire to be open and approachable sex educators who facilitated their children's learning, as Anne said, '*as part of life goes on*'. Parental support for endeavouring to include a selection of wide-ranging topics when providing SRE within the family contrasted with the common belief that parents as sex educators are obliged to give 'the talk' to their children, which only happens once and purely focusses on

the basic biological information about reproduction (see Kuhle et al. 2015, Hirst 2015). There is little evidence, however, to suggest the use of the stereotyped 'talk' as an established approach parents use to provide SRE within the family. Learning about sexualities and relationships is recognised as a 'lifelong learning' process and so there is importance placed on parents recognising that from birth they are educating their children about sexualities and relationships, whether they intend to or not (see SEF 2011a, p1).

Young Person Led Sex Education

Ogle et al. (2008) found that the barriers experienced by parents in communicating about sexual health matters with their children derived from a reluctance from young people rather than their parents. Rather than being able to divide the parents into two camps of proactive and reactive educators, as Stone et al. (2017) did, my participants were mostly reactive to direct questioning and comments. This was primarily because of fear-based feelings based on the idea of their child being in a harmful situation having been given the wrong information.

Whilst most of the participants assured their children they were available to talk about sex and relationships on a continuing basis, they also wanted to endorse such communications being led by the young person, when the opportunity arose (see also Walker 2001).

Even though, often unknowingly, parents start informing their children about sex and relationships from birth (see Ballard and Gross 2009), most of the participants in my study specified when their child started asking them questions as the time that they started providing education:

'you see for me it was quite easy because I did it [taught her children about sex and relationships] when my children started to ask me questions.' (Adriana)

This young person led approach provided the participants with insurance that they were imparting information at an age appropriate level because it was assumed that the young person would ask questions that were relevant to their level of understanding. For example, Cara said she always taught her children about relationships and sexualities from an early age which was led by her child in an age-appropriate way:

'...it's [sex and relationships] part of life, yeah, so I think that it's just something that I've just, from an early age, talked about and if they've asked any questions...I've just answered them truthfully because I believe you should tell kids the truth, to an extent obviously, to what their understanding is.' (Cara)

Cara implemented the Sex Education Forum's definition of SRE in the UK by acknowledging sex and relationships are 'part of life.' Likewise, other participants displayed their willingness to cover any topics their child asked

them about, deeming their child's asking of the question to be an assurance of the age appropriateness of the topics that would be discussed:

'...sometimes they ask me things... I answer the questions about these things when they ask me, so if they ask me... "I understand how gay people...make love but I can't understand how two women make love", you know things like that so...you answer "...sex is not all about penetration ... and it's other things that you can do to show affection..." , they seem to be alright about it.' (Adriana)

Here, Adriana illustrated that the questions her sons asked her instigated the comprehensive and inclusive education that she provided.

The participant's trust in their child(ren) to decide what was appropriate was also demonstrated by Claire when she said:

'we have always said that if they did ask any questions that nothing would be off bounds.' (Claire)

In contrast to the above, one participant seemed somewhat relieved that he did not to have to provide information about sex and relationships to his children, particularly his daughters:

'I would say I was happy to avoid the subject...If they'd come to me and asked then I would have answered any of their questions as best I could, but the fact that they never asked, I was happy never to raise the

subject.' (Paul)

Paul's reluctance to approach the topics of sex and relationships with his children reflects some of the findings from Walker's (2001) research.

In comparison to Paul, most of the participants' approaches to providing sex education were more enthusiastic and, in some circumstances, pre-emptive in their manner. In keeping with what has previously been found (Walker 2001), of the participants who could be described as proactive in providing sex education and who talked openly with their children about sex, some had concerns that they provided their children with too much information:

'when you... say something...[and] they're not quite ready, like that time he said " Naaaahhh... think I've had enough now!" (laughter)... "I THINK YOU HAVE GONE A LITTLE BIT TOO FAR, JUST LEAVE IT" (laughs)... "that's too much, just too much information at this time thank you" (laughter).' (Adriana)

Here Adriana also highlights that the education she provides at home is led by her sons, it starts when they ask questions and finishes when they request it to.

Anne highlighted a scenario which she thought could be a good opportunity to start a discussion with children but it resulted in her son becoming embarrassed and vacating the location:

'Ray [son] and his friend were in the car and Maria [daughter] had found

a bag with this doll where you pull it out and James was sat next to her... Ray said, 'Let's get out, there's going to be an impromptu sex education lesson now' and him and his friend jumped out the car... I think Ray was embarrassed because of his friend, so they got out the car and walked in. So, in some ways they feel like they've had too much [sex and relationships education within the family].' (Anne)

This strategy relied upon parent-child relationships to be open enough for young people to feel able to talk about issues relating to sex and relationships with their parents. However, some young people might not feel comfortable or able to ask their parents enough, or any, questions and this led one participant to not expect any questions to be asked until their child was in a relationship:

'Neil [son] has always...been big into his football... he's never really been chasing after girls that much yet...he hasn't brought a girlfriend home (laughter). He has a lot of friends and a lot of them are girls but, no, no, I've never broached the subject with him.' (Paul)

Most of the participants agreed that discussion about sex and relationships became more pertinent once (they were aware) their child had started dating and they were more likely to make a deliberate effort to initiate discussions about certain topics. For example, Monica identified pornography as a topic she would like to discuss with her daughter when she starts having relationships:

Monica: *'I worry about the whole pornography thing and its impact on young men and women in their relationships... We haven't really had a conversation about porn yet...'*

Interviewer: *'Is it a conversation that you could see you having in the future?'*

Monica: *'Yes, I think certainly when she starts to date and there's boys in the picture for her.'* (Monica)

Here Monica suggests that even though pornography is a topic of importance for her, she would withhold discussing the topic until she felt it was more relevant to her daughter's life. Monica felt this would be more applicable when her daughter was in a relationship with a male, thus implying her daughter might only view pornography when encouraged by her (male) partner rather than on her own initiative. Although based on what Monica had said previously, if her daughter asked her about pornography she would have a discussion with her at any age her daughter deemed appropriate.

Though this young person led approach to learning about sex and relationships relied predominantly on young people to initiate the communication with their parents, usually in the form of asking questions, it also allowed for the young person to regulate the amount of information their parent(s) provided. For example, if the participant felt it was necessary to provide sex education, they aimed to forge an environment which enabled the young person to decide whether they wanted to initiate and take control of how much, and the depth of

information that was provided. The participants identified the sex education they provided as child led from when they started asking questions until they started dating. At this time the participants intervened but whilst still mindful to enable the young person to control the delivery of information that was provided. By allowing young people to take the lead on their sex education at home, it offered the participants reassurance that the content and delivery was age-appropriate. In having such an open communication with their child(ren), a minority of participants said their child sometimes felt they provided them with too much information but the young person took the lead in the discussion and could communicate if they did not want to continue the discussion. All the participants had the desire for their children to feel able ask them questions without restriction, even if, at times, the participants felt unequipped to answer. In keeping with earlier research, (Ballard and Goss 2009, Foster et al. 2011) the participants in this study valued the importance of young people learning about sex and relationships. To varying degrees, they had made strategic decisions on how to approach talking and educating their children about sexualities and relationships.

Barriers to Parents Providing SRE

The second part of this chapter will now focus on what the participants implicitly identified as factors which acted as barriers that could, at worst, obstruct SRE or at best, be detrimental to provision within the family.

Personal Experience of Sex Education at Home: ‘Just trial and error and bumping about in the world getting a bit damaged’

There was a consensus amongst the participants that they personally felt they did not have enough sex education when they were younger. As previously discussed in Chapter Five, Paul spoke of how the Catholic school he attended as a young person provided the minimum teaching of sex education and provided just enough to act in accordance with the authorities.

It is a common assumption that parents have appropriate levels of knowledge about sex and relationships in order to impart this to their children. My participants felt that their own experience (or lack) of sex education did not equip them with (enough) knowledge about sex and relationships. Isobella stressed the damaging experience she had in learning about sex and relationships because of the lack of provision she received:

‘Just trial and error and bumping about in the world getting a bit damaged really...I think some sex education would have been good.’ (Isobella)

The participants spoke of how they wished they had received better SRE which support existing literature (Morawska et al. 2015). The participants indicated that their own poor (or lacking) experiences within the family and at school had resulted in low levels of conviction in their abilities as sex educators. This lack of confidence impacted on their communication with their children.

The participants’ experiences, if any, of the sex education their own parents

provided within their family, influenced the way in which they provided sex education for their children. Even though all of the participants recalled either receiving little or no sex education, in contrast with what Ballard and Gross (2009) found, my participants seemed to have good sexual knowledge. When asked what had influenced her perspective on education about sex and relationships because she received no formal sex education or any explicit education outside of school, Adriana replied:

'life teaches you...basically outside of school, you meet people and you talk to people more interesting and you learn by experience and then you spend quite a few years kind of not knowing whether you're coming or going... that's probably what has made me take the attitude that I take towards teaching my children about sexuality.' (Adriana)

Similarly to Isobella, Adriana makes the point that she learnt about sex and relationships by her lived experiences because of the absence of any sex education at school or within the family. There was a sense that that the participants had experienced a period of feeling 'lost.' Both Isabella and Adriana used phrases referring to a lack of direction. For example, *'for a few years...not knowing whether you're coming or going'* and *'bumping around in the world'* both express a sense of feeling disoriented in a vast space for a long period of time.

Such descriptions evoke an impression that being without any (appropriate) sex education when the participants were young may have left them in a position of

vulnerability. It offered the sense that they had felt alone and that they had 'gone astray' to stumble upon experiences, which acted as ways of learning about sex and relationships.

Adriana also explained that she wanted to contrast the little and negative education her parents had provided for her:

'I didn't want to hide things, and whenever they asked me a question I tried to answer as openly as I can, sometimes I think it's too open...I want them to feel that what they're doing, that sex... is actually something good and that if they're gonna do it, they're gonna do it with somebody they love... and they have to experiment and they have to try different things but, all those things within context,... which are things I never got openly from my parents.' (Adriana)

Due to the poor sex education their own parents had provided them with (see also Morawska et al. 2015), there was a desire amongst my participants to provide fully open and inclusive education within their family, which supports findings from previous research (Kirkman et al. 2005, Walker 2001, Ballard and Gross 2009).

It seemed like the participants in my study felt that their role in their own children's SRE was more valuable than their parent's role in their own SRE because they had more knowledge and ambition to provide better SRE than their parents did (see also Morawska et al. 2015, Stone et al. 2017).

There was a sense that providing their children with comprehensive education could help to eradicate the difficult journey the parents had when trying to learn about sex through trial and error. This meant the participants wanted their children to be better informed than they were (Berne et al. 2000).

Above, Adriana explained she wanted to provide an education about sexuality for her sons that was free of the guilt that Catholic teachings had imposed on her. To do this she recognised that she needed to acknowledge their sexualities within a positive way and to expect them to experiment, though this was viewed that it would be happening within the context of the information they had been given from trusted sources which could inform their actions. Whilst this seemed to imply that Adriana taught her sons about sex in a secular way, she then referred to the (Catholic) requirement that if they were going to have sex that it should be with someone whom they love. This view neglects to accept that people have sex for many reasons and illustrates that even when participants try to be fully open and sex-positive, their Catholic lens can still act as a filter. This supports Jerves et al. (2014) who suggested that parents' provision of SRE at home can sometimes be confusing and patchy and that this reflects their (unintended) ignorance and lack of awareness. It is argued this is a result of being caught between (Catholic) traditions and the hope for a better future for their own children. The influence of religion on the participants' views and experiences is discussed in further detail in Chapter Eight.

Privacy and Sex Education: Parental Privacy Preventing Progression?

Privacy was discussed when talking about education about sex, rather than relationships and, in particular, practicalities about sexual intercourse and solo sex. Some of the participants remembered relatives relying on techniques to avoid sex education and to conceal their sexual selves. For instance, Claire spoke of how she remembered her uncle had placed menstrual products in a basket in her family's shared bathroom and that she replicated this for her own daughters as they reached puberty. She said this was to help overcome any embarrassment her daughters may have about asking her for menstrual ware when they started their periods. However, this could also be interpreted by their children as a sign that their parents were avoiding a discussion about menstruation and, in turn, re(produced) the idea that menstruation is a private issue only for the concern of females.

When talking about the sex education she received from her parents, Adriana mentioned some private books which belonged to her parents:

'there were books that were hidden around the house because we were not considered adult enough to read them.' (Adriana)

Adriana knowing the books existed means her parents' intentions could be interpreted differently. Being staunch Catholic, they may have hidden the books because of their own embarrassment and as a ploy to communicate that they did not want to talk about the content with Adriana and her siblings. Later,

Adriana recalled another example of her parents restricting access to media they deemed to be inappropriate. She said:

'you would not talk about it [sex]. I've got images of, if something would appear on the screen on television, I've got an image of us watching a film... "Padre Padrone" and there was some images... my father just stood up, switched off the television and there was no explanation, there was nothing. To me that's not the right approach.' (Adriana)

Now, as a parent, Adriana explained that she disagreed with her parent's method of dealing with media they deemed inappropriate by restricting access to it. Instead, she saw situations like the above as an opportunity to provide her sons with sex education.

When discussing how they aimed to take impromptu situations and use them as an opportunity for education (see above), the participants highlighted that they preferred to implement it in an isolated and non-public setting. Ensuring conversations about sex happened in a private setting meant sex education conversations were postponed until a later time in a less public location or environment. This could potentially reinforce and reproduce the sense of taboo that surrounds sex, which can act as a barrier to providing good sex education. Replies to young people's questions were often delayed if asked in a public setting which is demonstrated by how Claire discussed the environment where these questions were answered:

[if we were] in a crowded area probably you [Parent] won't want to talk about that; "in a minute let's go and find somewhere quiet and we will do that privately." (Claire)

Claire stated the reason being because of the needing somewhere quiet to discuss the topic, however, there was a sense that the preference was to answer questions relating to sex away from public areas, such as public toilets. In a similar vein, although the participants aimed to achieve an open and ongoing dialogue with their children, it was apparent that they wanted to keep their own sexual agency concealed and they wanted to protect their personal privacy when discussing sex within their family life.

In discussing how the participants provided sex education, there was a sense that the notion of personal privacy could sometimes be used as a way of disguising the participants' own potential feelings of awkwardness. Personal privacy, therefore, could potentially be employed as an excuse to validate avoiding discussions about sex and relationships that evoked feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment.

Isobella set out the boundaries of what she deemed to be parental responsibility in sex education:

'I think sex is private basically and I think as a parent you've got some role in getting your kids some basic idea of the mechanics, a basic idea about safety and behaviour and then other than that it's just completely

private. And I just think it's completely mortifying for everybody, not to be ashamed of it, it's not a shame thing but it's just private I just don't, I don't want to know...I like boundaries.' (Isobella)

Isobella stated that there are certain boundaries in parent-child communication about sex and that she does not want to know any information beyond those boundaries. Likewise, she would not share any information with her children about her sex life beyond the boundaries that she defined. The impression was given that, because of the nature of her role as sex educator, there was little need for her children to know details of her sex life. Just as Walker (2004) identified, my participants established the importance of respect for personal privacy relating to both their own and the young peoples' sex lives.

When discussing balancing the preservation of an open environment that is conducive to sex education with their own need for privacy, Adriana concluded:

'I haven't really hidden things from them, erm, I mean don't get me wrong I do close the door if I have to.' (Adriana)

Doors were used as both metaphor and literally to express how privacy was performed within their families. The participants aimed to have an "open door" policy for questions about sex and relationships but a "closed door" policy for personal sexual activity.

When discussing their actual knowledge of their children's experiences of sex

and relationships, it was evident that the participants knew few details. When talking about a family friend's in-depth knowledge of their children's sex and relationship encounters, Paul explained:

'I mean I wouldn't want to know...That's their private life, I don't need to know, I don't know why she seems to need to know.' (Paul)

Paul showed he was satisfied with not knowing any details about his children's experiences of sex and relationships because he felt that part of their life was private.

In contrast with this common view of young people's privacy, Mateo wanted to know everything about his daughter's life. Mateo said within his house there was an *'open-door policy'* which applied to his children's lives only. This meant he had access to his daughter's online passwords and mobile phone and he would implement random checks. It also meant she literally had to have her bedroom door open at all times. However, Mateo explained it was deemed acceptable him and his wife to close their bedroom door at times when they wanted to be intimate. Amongst my participants, there were differing views relating to privacy at home and within the family unit. The examples above illustrate how these different approaches to privacy influenced the education young people received from their parents.

Young People and Masturbation

Even for the participants who seemed to be the most liberal thinking when it

came to matters of sex and sexuality, masturbation as a topic of conversation and an action was prohibited. This attitude could have been influenced by the participants' Catholic education in which sex is viewed as only for procreation. Masturbation could have been perceived as too far removed from what is accepted within Catholicism because its key purpose is as an act of pleasure. Adriana spoke in the most detail about her feelings towards the topic of masturbation and how she felt uncomfortable when her sons raised the topic:

'lately this year masturbation has been erm a topic and they just laugh about it... [oh breath out- sounds relived] ...I said "hello! I'm your mother! I'm here I don't want details!" you know what I mean?' (Adriana)

She then went on to discuss how hearing her son masturbating in the bathroom made her feel uncomfortable:

'it doesn't mean you have to be in the bathroom making noises - I DON'T WANNA KNOW!' (Adriana)

Here, Adriana was setting out her boundaries for what she considered to be appropriate sexual behaviour and what is not. The participants' perceived notion of young peoples' right to privacy could have been used as a barrier to protect participants when they felt too much detail was being shared by their child.

Masturbation, as a topic of conversation and as an action, was censored by the participants possibly because they felt it was beyond the realm of the

boundaries of parent-child communication. This could also have been because of the association of masturbation with sinning within the Catholic Church and the resulting shame or guilt attached to it. Although, it should be mentioned that masturbation can also be a taboo within wider society and not just within religious discourses. Even when disregarding the reason why masturbation was categorised as forbidden, this could result in the poor education the participants received being reproduced.

Discussing personal privacy and boundaries for communication between parent and child uncovers the dichotomous challenge that the participants faced. They had the desire to provide their children with open and comprehensive information in theory, but they were clear they did not want to offer or receive more applied (real-life) information.

Embarrassment and Discomfort: ‘The squirmy embarrassment of it.’

Many of my participants tried to talk openly with their children, however, some of the participants identified embarrassment as a limiting factor (see also SEF 2011b). This feeling of embarrassment related to both providing SRE as a whole as well as specific topics, for example, masturbation.

Parents have said they found it difficult to know what age to talk to their children about sexuality, and what words to use when they do (Ballard and Gross 2009). Ensuring education was age-appropriate was one of the reasons why my participants let their child take the lead in asking questions about sex and relationships. However, one of my participants spoke about some regrets she

had about the words she had used. Claire found that using the correct anatomical names for genitalia when teaching her daughter had led to some embarrassing situations:

'when she was really little we had decided that we were going to call private parts by their anatomical name, and so she knew that Paul had a penis and we felt we had made a mistake there because she was telling everybody that her dad was a boy because he had a penis, on the bus, in church. And I can just remember being in a really quiet church at a friend's wedding and she was telling everybody. So, when it came to it, because she asked about ladies - because obviously you don't see anything on a lady, and "Oh, what's that called?", so we have always called it the front bottom, although she knows the name now.' (Claire)

The social taboo around sex within society (see Foucault 1990) led to the development of embarrassing scenarios for Claire and her family. This embarrassment acted as a barrier to Claire's daughter receiving important and factually correct sex education. To reduce the risk of embarrassing scenarios socially, a restricted version of sex education was provided instead. There was a sense of embarrassment and restriction when Claire was retelling me about the above scenarios. This was demonstrated by her use of the term *'private parts'* instead of *'genitals'* or *'genitalia'* within our interview. Using the term *'private parts'* or nicknames for genitalia could uphold the secrecy and taboo which already surrounds sex and can lead to a lack of knowledge being shared with (young) people.

Additionally, the above quote highlights the way in which binary notions of gender and sex are used when educating children. This approach to sex and gender is fitting within Catholic teachings (for example, Catholicism does not accept that a female could have a penis). Throughout the interviews, it was highlighted that this perspective which refutes diverse gender identities was being used to educate young people.

When discussing receiving sex education from their own parents, there was a strong impression that many of the participants had felt awkward:

'I remember her coming in with one of her medical books and explaining it to me, but in a very informative, biological way...Erm, I felt very uncomfortable with it.' (Charlotte)

Similarly, it was assumed that their children were embarrassed if my participants initiated sex education. For example, Isobella said she assumed her sons received sex education at school because she had vague memories of them coming home from school and telling her about it. She recalled the consequent discomfort that was felt around the discussion, saying she remembers *'the squirmy embarrassment of it...for me, well, for everybody.'* None of the participants said they had asked their child if they were embarrassed by SRE. However, Isobella's perception of generalised embarrassment raises the question of how she knew her children were embarrassed. For the participants who experienced embarrassment when

discussing sex and relationships, either as a child or as a parent, there was a sense that they presumed their children felt the same.

Embarrassment was explicitly referenced as a barrier to providing young people with sufficient sex education at home:

'I probably wasn't quite doing enough [sex education] but I was too embarrassed...' (Isobella)

Sex of Parent/Young Person

In contrast to previous research (Farrington et al. 2014, Ogle et al. 2008), the participants in my study felt that who was best to deliver the SRE within the family depended on the sex and assumed (cis) gender of the child. This was ostensibly because the parent who was the same sex would have experienced the same physiological changes and so hold more knowledge which they could offer to their child. Hence, parents felt ill-prepared talking to their child if they were the opposite sex because they had not experienced the same biological and physical changes when going through puberty as their child:

'what their dad can tell them, I can't tell them, I don't know what it's like to be a boy... I've got no brothers and no dad so I've got very little shared experience. Until I had boys I didn't have any boys in my family so it was quite a sort of, I just felt a bit like "well, I don't know what to say...'
(Isobella)

This links to the participant's lack of knowledge about sex and relationships because of their own poor sex education (see above). Linda explains that her sons were less embarrassed approaching their dad instead of her if they had any questions or concerns about their genitalia. Though, unlike the other parents, Linda would have been comfortable talking with her sons:

'I do remember one of them having ... was it an infection? Something had happened to his penis and I can't remember and obviously he asked his dad and he didn't say to me and one of them did once have a little cyst in his scrotum. Again, it was Gary [Dad] that they went to, it wasn't me, because I think that they still perceived that that was - it would be a bit embarrassing saying to your mum "Look at my penis because I think there's something wrong with it", you know (laughter).' (Linda)

Similarly to the findings of earlier research (Walker 2001, Stone et al. 2017), participants who left it up to the other parent to provide SRE were not sure if the other had provided it when using this strategy and were hopeful the other parent had provided it:

'[my son] has never had a steady girlfriend so I've never had to broach the subject with him. I don't know whether his mother has. She'd probably be better at it, because she was a stay-at-home mum, she hasn't worked since [daughter] was born and I've always worked...'
(Paul)

As reflected in the above quote, Paul was happy to presume that the responsibility lay with this '*stay-at-home*' wife. This supports Walker's (2001) findings that it tended to be fathers leaving the responsibility to the mothers to provide sex education at home. Where applicable, this research found that, to the contrary, some mothers were abdicating the education to the fathers (Mateo and Isobella). Similarly to Walker, other research suggests that fathers are not educating their sons about sex (Goldman and Bradley 2001, Lehr, Demi, Dilorio, and Facticeau 2005). In contrast, my participants who were fathers (n=2) planned to provide their sons with sexual education when they deemed it to be age appropriate (or when they were in a relationship). This supports previous research by Walsh et al. (1999) who only interviewed fathers and found that they wanted to participate in their children's sexuality education. However, as discussed in 'Time for Participants to Provide Education about Sex and Relationships' in Chapter Five, the participant's profession and the amount of recreational time they had with their children also had the potential to influence how the parents provided education within the family.

Conclusion

When discussing the ways which they provided education about sex and relationships within the family, the participants highlighted barriers which challenged their approach to educating their children. The approach they used to provide SRE was often shaped by the barriers they experienced. For example, their embarrassment about a particular subject may have influenced the approach they used to provide education within the family. A relevant

example is masturbation, which most of the parents viewed as a private behaviour and were too embarrassed (barrier) to initiate or provide adequate education, even when it was raised by their child (approach).

Overall, there was no framework or standard practice identified which the participants followed to provide SRE within the family, however, there were similarities in the approaches used and the barriers experienced by the parents. The participants provided more SRE within the family than they acknowledged but they did experience many barriers which at times hampered their approach. Despite such challenges, there was a sense that the parents would like to have provided a better standard of education within their family for their children.

Chapter 8. Catholic Parents' Perspectives on Young People's Learning about Sex and Relationships within the Context of Catholicism

Introduction

The previous three analysis chapters (five, six and seven) explored the various perspectives Catholic parents have on the way their children learn about sex and relationships, both within school and the family. The former chapter (seven) also explored *how* the parents provided SRE in an informal way within the family and the factors that influenced their approach.

This chapter will concentrate on how the participants relate to religion, their definition of their relationship with Catholicism (or lack of) and how these can interplay with their perspectives on young people's learning about sex and relationships.

The Participants' Relationship with Religion

To gain further insight into the participants' religious identity, there was a discussion at the start of each interview about the topic '*you and religion*' where each participant guided the conversation in which they self-identified and described their religious affiliation. This enabled each participant to describe what religion means to them and the extent to which this plays a part in their lives. During this research, it was recognised that religious relationships are

more complex than binary categories of 'religious' and 'non-religious', and there are many differing types of religious affiliation. Given the differing levels of religious beliefs and practice or 'religiosity' (Manlove et al. 2008), the commonly used binary terms of 'secular' or 'religious' are unhelpful in trying to recognise the diverse range of religious identities and their multidimensional and complex arrangements (Rasmussen 2010, Sanjakdar 2016). To highlight the diversity of religious belief, practice, and affiliation amongst the participants, an overview of each parent's religious identity and some of their key reasons which have influenced their affiliation is provided within the description of each participant in the section 'Introducing the Participants' in Chapter Four.

The Catholic Lens: 'Once a Catholic, always a Catholic, for better and for worse.'

This section explores why the participants chose to include Catholicism in their children's education either at school or within the family. This is notable because many of the participants clearly identified grievances with their own Catholic upbringing and with the views of the Church relating to sex and relationships.

As my literature review outlined, stereotypes of religious parents objecting to SRE have been substantiated by lay persons, some politicians and the media (see Chapter Two). This assumption may fuel the power of policy makers and school administrators to influence sex and relationships policy to 'avoid

confrontations with imagined angry parents' (Dent and Maloney 2017, p149). Furthermore, considering the lack of empirical evidence to support the view that Catholics, per se, oppose comprehensive sex education, combined with the methodological challenges of measuring this opinion, and the complexity of parental attitudes about sex, it is reasonable to question the uniformity of opposition Catholics parents are supposed to have regarding SRE. This is borne out in my data, wherein as mentioned in the previous analysis chapters (five, six and seven), the participants were in favour of unbiased, comprehensive SRE taught (mostly) without the constraints of strict Catholic edicts. For instance, they did not want priests to teach SRE and wanted young people to be taught about controversial topics which the Church opposes, for example, contraception use. This contrasts with other studies that found that although religious parents wanted their children to be taught positive sex education, they embraced such teachings within the ethos of their religion (Dent and Maloney 2017, Sanjakdar 2014) and wanted the religious elders to be involved in the provision so parents could be guided on how to provide accurate and religiously sensitive information (Farrington et al. 2014). It could be argued, however, that most of my participants were not 'staunch' Catholics, although they each had a varied degree of affiliation in the aim that many perspectives of Catholic parents could be explored.

Catholicism as a Moral Framework

This section grapples with the contradiction of the participant's desire for their children to be taught Catholic morals irrespective of their transition away from traditional Catholic beliefs on some topics relating to sex and relationships.

Most participants chose to educate their children within a Catholic context. This included both formal education, such as Catholic school and Sunday school at mass, and informal education, such as passing on learned Catholic values through informal conversation.

As already established, my participants reported a desire for positive and comprehensive sex education for their children. However, they differed from those in other studies cited in Chapter Three in that most were united in their expectation that the majority of the topics in their children's sex education at school should not be influenced by religion. If ideologies of the Catholic faith were included, or, in other words, issues about sex were taught through the Catholic lens, some of the participants would correct this at home by offering their children unbiased information (see 'Parental Views On SRE').

When talking about having her sons baptised, Isobella said it was regardless of lacking full agreement with Catholic beliefs but rather that she had them baptised because her partner's mother was a staunch Catholic and also because she found comfort in the familiarity of Catholicism (discussed below). In relation to sex and relationships, Isobella explained the Catholic teachings she disagreed with:

'I think that contraception isn't wrong, I don't think abortion's wrong, I don't think homosexuality's wrong... I don't agree with the rules and the judgements and my mum got divorced so she had a lot of judgement

from the Catholic Church.’ (Isobella)

.

The participants were clear they wanted parts of SRE (which is taught in PSHE) to be secular. When Mateo was asked ‘How do you see SRE fitting with religion?’ he said:

‘I’d rather it didn’t (ha) I think erm based on my experience, the fact that religious education didn’t do very well in explaining, err in helping me feel good about my sexuality and... I do associate religion with a certain level of repression that might be counter-productive to ... what I would want P-SHE to be or to do, probably better to keep them apart (laughs).’ (Mateo)

As Mateo spoke of repression, Adriana spoke of other failures she recognised from her own religious education. These were the reason she chose to provide her sons with open and secular sex education:

‘I mean we all have to go through a period of confusion and not knowing whether we’re coming or going as you grow up but it’s bad enough but if on top of that it’s [Catholicism’s] making you feel, you’re a sinner and everything you’re doing is wrong, so that’s what I don’t want for my children.’ (Mateo)

The participants wanted parts of sex education to be secular; they wanted their children to be taught about contraception, abortion and LGB issues in an unbiased and inclusive way. They rejected sex education which was taught

according to Catholic teachings. The topics they wanted to be delivered in a non-religious way often related to sex education, rather than relationships education. There was a sense that they preferred for their children to be taught about relationships through a Catholic lens. In sum, it seemed that the parents who sent their children to Catholic school embraced an ethos of Catholicism to guide their children's broader learning about morality and respecting other people. It is arguable that this is little different from other parents' desires (irrespective of religious affiliation) to guide their children's sexual development and well-being through applying principles of egalitarianism and mutual care. Some scholars refer to the latter as 'ethics-focussed sexualities education' (Allen, Rasmussen and Quinlivan 2014, p8). In particular, Sharon Lamb (2010) developed the Sexual Ethics for a Caring Society Curriculum (SECS-C) to 'encourage young people to apply the values of democracy, justice and care to issues of sex' (Lamb 2016, p20). This framework resembles participants' descriptions of their preference for SRE. In this regard, the participants felt Catholicism seemed to offer a framework of respect and values rather than an edict to control everyday life. An example of this is offered by Claire when asked why she chose to have her daughters baptised:

'...because that's [Catholicism's] the thing that I knew and I had always considered my upbringing and the morals that come with a religion are not such a bad thing. I think that that is probably a good thing to try and emulate in your children... something that I had already done myself and knew about and really just a good way of bringing them up.' (Claire)

It was often assumed by the participants that a Catholic upbringing and/or education would instil decent morals and values into their children because they felt it had provided a good moral base for themselves. However, for most participants, there was some uncertainty. As in the above quote, Claire describes Catholic morals as *'not such a bad thing'* and *'probably good'*, rather than confidently appraising them as a positive force. This hesitant tone is unsurprising given the quandaries the participants identified within Catholic teachings relating to adversarial topics, such as contraception use. Irrespective of the participants' feeling aggrieved by their Catholic education in relation to sex, all but one of the participants opted for their children to be taught about Catholic ethics and values, either formally at school, Sunday school, or informally within the family and at home. Mateo placed importance on his responsibility for educating his daughter about ethics and values:

'making decisions is difficult so I always say, "you need to believe in something" at the moment she is encouraged to adopt our [Catholic] values but I say one day she will have to choose her own.' (Mateo)

Mateo differed from the other parents because he acknowledged that his daughter's values might change from his Catholic perspective as she grows older. Of those parents who instilled Catholicism, it seemed other participants assumed their children would always behave according to Catholic ethics.

Reliance on faith as a moral compass extended beyond sex and relationships

with several participants identifying Catholic education as offering a ‘blueprint’ for raising their children. Isobella noted:

‘I was quite a long way from home... in a big city and it was all quite unfamiliar and I kind of wanted to ...not impose but find some blueprint and one of those blueprints...was actually the children going to Catholic school.’ (Isobella)

Similarly, Isobella explains how she chose Catholic school for her children because it offered her a sense of familiarity and belonging when she was in unfamiliar surroundings. There was a sense that sending her children to Catholic school acted somewhat as an anchor to help keep her grounded when she was feeling overwhelmed. Similarly, many of the participants based the education and guidance they provided for their children on their own Catholic beliefs and experiences and amongst the participants there was an assumption that an education about ethics was more likely at a Catholic school than a non-religious school.

Pick ‘n’ Mix Approach to Religion

As has been intimated above, there was a sense throughout the interviews, and on reflection, that the participants’ Catholic education (and mine, at times) had resulted in a belief, not consciously, that those who had a Catholic upbringing held superior morals and values and that Catholics have a better understanding of how to behave as a “good” person and how to treat others with respect. Notwithstanding the many doubts on specific issues (e.g. homosexuality,

abortion, contraception), this belief was the basis of many of the participants' reasons for raising their child(ren) in a Catholic context. When discussing moral education, many of the participants assumed a religious framework, rather than a non-religious one, would provide their children with superior values. Louise illustrated her views by comparing her own Catholic education with the non-denominational school where she works:

'I think school plays a big influence on Catholic children...looking at where I am now [a non-denominational school] and seeing the senior school children...I don't think they're taught any moral issues or anything about life or about what they should be giving or taking from society.' (Louise)

Louise called into question the behaviour of secondary school pupils at a school which is not affiliated with a specific religion compared with her experiences of attending and sending her children to Catholic schools. She alludes to an assumed sense of entitlement by suggesting that young people raised outside of Catholicism are not educated about equality or how to be considerate or contribute to society.

The participants implied there is a moral hierarchy in which Catholicism perhaps holds the superior view on morals in comparison to other religions, agnosticism or atheism. Whilst none of the participants acknowledged that their children could be guided by a framework of values and morals outside religion, Mateo said that he had forged a set of values for himself which also has influences in

addition to his Catholicism:

'I think I've found a set of values erm, very useful especially as I was growing up but err as I grow older I think I've adopted some of the values I had as a Catholic but I've probably incorporated some others and I've probably distanced myself from the organisation, sort of the institutional side of religion but I would like to think I still live my life on the basis of a set of values.' (Mateo)

When Mateo discussed the decline of his religious affiliation with Catholicism, he attributed having friends from other religions to be one possible reason for the decline, thus confirming that peers are a key source of information for young people (Davies and Robinson 2010). Having other religious practises and beliefs revealed through his friendships with non-Catholics encouraged Mateo's critical thinking about the Catholic establishment:

'I have friends from different religions and maybe that's something else that changed the way I saw my religion and not as the holder of truth but then I started to see people who didn't have a religion but did great things for the community and they were very nice people and [there were] people who were very religious and were not very nice people.'
(Mateo)

The realisation that (his) religion was not the (only) '*holder of truth*' and, therefore, did not inevitably give the congregation superior morals or values, led

to the lessening of Mateo's religious affiliation. This contrasts with other participants who made implicit assumptions that being raised Catholic unquestionably ensued in the child being a virtuous member of society. But this did not mean that Catholicism held the only key to ethics and morals.

When discussing the Catholic moral education, the participants had opted to provide for their children. Adriana explicitly stated she opted not to send her sons through formal Catholic education because of the indoctrination of religion she had experienced as a child. Adriana spoke of how this preference gave her the freedom to choose the religious values she wanted to educate her sons with:

'There are a lot of things about Catholic schools that I like but I didn't particularly want the other part of it [indoctrination]. So, what I have done when bringing up my children is try to teach them the values of religion that I think are right and they're fair.' (Adriana)

Adriana had struggled with the process to undo the Catholic '*indoctrination*' she experienced. She said she '*didn't particularly like the process of having to shake off*' all the negative Catholic teachings to be where she is today. Adriana went on to imply that religion teaches people the key moral principles, for example, not to hurt another person. By omission, she implies that those not taught through a religious lens may not have the same understanding of such principles:

'I am a Catholic culturally speaking...you know, I would not hurt anybody ...and those [good] values are there but I don't want the indoctrination I went through [for my sons].' (Adriana)

When referring to being culturally Catholic, Adriana is referring to the implicit sense of belonging to Catholicism as well as suggesting that she was no longer a practising Catholic who, for example, attended mass regularly (this is discussed more below). This is fitting with the idea of *'belonging without believing'* (Hervieu-Leger 2003).

Whereas the other participants wanted to teach their children about Catholic principles, Adriana wanted to select the principles she felt most suitable, from religious teachings more generally. She spoke of the indoctrination she experienced and that she felt that Catholic teachings on morals encouraged people to view their beliefs as superior:

'[In Catholicism there is] a lot of judging what's around you and thinking you are in the right. I don't think I'm in the right, I think I'm making the decisions that are right for me...When I was in a Catholic school, "we were in the right!" ...Erm, so, that's why I can't really- when I started to study philosophy and I started questioning things, I said actually I can't really come to the conclusion there is a god. I can't come to the conclusion there isn't but I'd rather think that I'm ok as I am and I'm not saying I'm right! That's what I'm choosing, however, from the point of view of a Catholic I'm thinking, "I'm right" and that's what I don't want. I

don't want my children to think [only what Catholicism teaches them is right].' (Adriana)

Adriana identified that Catholic education *could* lead to the *idea* of moral superiority and acknowledged the role of unaffiliated education about philosophy as a tool to help think critically about Catholic beliefs. To try and stem this perceived judgmental outlook, Adriana opted to only teach her sons the parts of Catholicism which she selected. This reflects Bruce's (1995) contention that people are not becoming less religious but instead of subscribing to a religion they are instead selecting the parts of religion that appealed to them most: this is commonly referred to as a pick 'n' mix approach to religiosity. It signals a move away from practising organised religions to a more diverse and individualistic religious affiliation. Religion can be taken and customised to fit with one's lifestyle and with an ever-increasing focus on consumerism within society. As a self-identified non-practicing Catholic, Adriana's '*pick 'n' mix*' approach to educating her sons using the parts of Catholicism she found most useful and to intentionally exclude the parts of Catholicism she found to be detrimental to her own development was representative of other participants.

Whilst most participants assumed that if one had a Catholic upbringing one had been educated about morals, Louise acknowledged that this did not necessarily mean they informed behaviour:

'I'm not saying you've got morals but you've been taught morals, as to

whether you take them on board is your decision.' (Louise)

Even though Louise raised the point that whether moral education is put into practice depends on the individual and not their religion, there was little indication that most participants did not indicate that they felt those raised outside of Catholicism would possess suitable morals. Furthermore, many of the participants did not reference being able to educate young people about values through different frameworks other than religion, for example, political positions such as humanism or socialism. Catholicism was the preferred choice for parents to instil what they thought to be appropriate morals.

Familiarity with Catholicism

The main reason the participants noted for opting to include Catholicism (either fully or partially) in their children's upbringing was because Catholic education was a context that they were familiar with. Many of the participants referred to a preferential sense of familiarity borne out of nostalgia relating to their own experience. Claire explained that she felt more fondly for a Catholic school she visited rather than a non-religious school:

'It [The Catholic school] just felt nicer there. I don't know why. Whether that's because I'm Catholic and it just felt like part of my community really, I don't know.' (Claire)

The notion of Catholicism providing a (sense of) community is discussed in

more detail in the next section. Some participants chose this sense of familiarity even though they did not identify with all Catholic teachings or beliefs about sex and relationships. Isobella explained that she chose a Catholic school for her sons because she was accustomed to it even though she opposed some of the Catholic teachings:

'I wanted to go back to what I was familiar with and understood even though I didn't fully agree with it all.' (Isobella)

Charlotte spoke of how the Catholic school she sent her children to was 'old-fashioned' which referred to a familiarity to the type of school she attended:

'So the ethos of it is obviously driven by the religion... so for example, when we went there it felt old-fashioned, you know, the kids were in proper classrooms with proper teachers and at other [non-Catholic] schools we went to it didn't feel like that. It felt open plan and kids were running around and I just kept thinking "Why aren't they in a lesson? What is this little child doing wondering around on its own?" ...whereas we went to that [Catholic] school and it was strict.' (Charlotte)

When referring to the preferred ethos that the Catholic school had, for Charlotte the more regulatory style of education seemed to lend itself to the status of a 'proper' school. Though the focus was on the ethos, the term 'proper teachers' implies Charlotte placed importance on the educational standard of the school.

It was often indicated that the participants felt a framework of morals and teaching about values were not present in non-Catholic schools. Isobella spoke about when her eldest son attended their non-religious local primary school for one term before moving to a Catholic school. She said it provided 'very laid-back schooling' and that the laidback ethos translated to:

"we don't have desks, we don't have lessons, everybody does what they want" you didn't go in and sit down at a desk, they had a double bed in the classroom...it was all like "we have rest time." (Isobella)

Similarly to Charlotte's quote above which talks of young people 'running around' when they *should* be in lessons and not being left on their own, Isobella draws on similar unruly description of a non-Catholic school. These portrayals could render non-denominational schools as possibly chaotic and potentially engendering children who behave in an almost feral disposition. The different framework and the unstructured approach to schooling through which the schools functioned did not appeal to the participants. Isobella explained this was because:

'I think that was such a contrast to what I'd had and I just felt so out of my depth that I thought 'I can't equip my child to cope in this situation, I don't know how to bring a child up to deal with this being their education' because it was kind of a free for all and I thought I want what I know and understand...' (Isobella)

Like Isobella, many of the participants affirmed the comfort they gained from a school with a familiar ethos to the one they attended increased their confidence in undertaking their parental role whilst their children completed their education.

Several participants chose to use the Catholicism they had been taught to educate their children about values. For example, as mentioned above, Isobella sent her sons to Catholic school even though she opposed Catholic teachings about sex and relationships and felt the lack of sex education she received (because of being raised Catholic) had been detrimental to her development (See Chapter Five). Yet she chose a Catholic school for her children because of the familiarity of the structure which the ethos offered. The awareness of the everyday routine and method of teaching (e.g. morning prayer and singing hymns) was a comfort to her but another reason for her preference was her fondness for the safety and structure of the Catholic school ethos:

'I was seeking to recreate that very sort of... Catholic school and church I went to... it was [a] completely nice safe little environment and we had the Church on Thursdays and it was very structured and I liked it, I liked that sort of safety and structure and that's what I think I was sort of seeking for the boys really.' (Isobella)

Isobella, like many of the participants, felt she had a good experience of school in relation to the structure and ethos and tried to duplicate that experience for her children. She also noted the importance of the feeling of safety in the environment and routine in her Catholic education which she strived to

reproduce for her sons.

Most of the parents who favoured Catholic education suggested this related more to the pastoral aspects of the Catholic education system rather than the academic component, though a minority of participants mentioned Catholic schools' reputations for being 'good' schools academically. Similarly to Isobella, Claire commented that she felt she had a good education when attending Catholic school. When asked what factors helped her to decide to send her daughters to a Catholic school, Claire responded:

'we just felt that the Catholic schools seemed to – I suppose give more pastoral care than I suppose the educational bit, the SATs results were alright at the school that we were looking at but what struck us really when we went to visit was the pastoral care. They seemed to care about the children. I'm not saying that they don't at other schools but [at the Catholic school] that really kind of shone through...they all care. You know, they've got a fair number of children with special educational needs and the children are all taught to care for each other and look after each other and they're given ownership of each other's welfare really – yeah, so that side of things, more than the religious side of things, was important to us.' (Claire)

Here Claire emphasises the importance of welfare and teaching children to care for others. In the extract above Claire used the word 'care' five times. It was implied that the notion care and action of caring was more honed at Catholic

schools. This suggested that, compared with non-denominational schools, Catholic schools care for their students and place importance on teaching their pupils to be considerate of others (this is discussed further below).

In contrast to the participants who opted for formal Catholic education in schools, those who did not want their children to be taught Catholic values formally, still drew on their own Catholic knowledge and experience of its teachings to educate their child(ren) about values:

‘even though I don’t go to church and I don’t see myself [as religious] I don’t pray...I still like to draw on things like parables the stories...kind of draw on that shared knowledge with my daughter, I’ll say “do you remember these stories?” and then sometimes she’ll say no and I’ll sort of retell the story so I wouldn’t say I do it intentionally because I see myself as a Catholic sometimes, it’s just because it’s something familiar...So I would say that religion, in this case the bible would come as one resource...I have available for when I come to discuss values.’

(Mateo)

Showcasing the complexity of religiosity (‘the doing’ of religion) and the fluidity of affiliation, Mateo starts by saying he is not religious and then identifies as ‘Catholic sometimes’. Despite this ambiguity, he brings to the forefront the usefulness of shared knowledge he and his daughter have gained from Catholicism. Sanjakdar (2016, p3) asserts that ‘religious beliefs and practices can form an important resource when discussing human sexuality’. While many

of my participants did not draw on their religiosity as a means for assisting sex education, some did find it useful when providing education about values and relationships. For Mateo, the familiarity of Catholic teachings and religious sources he was familiar with, led him to unintentionally use the information he acquired from his Catholic upbringing as a tool to prompt education with his daughter about values.

Community and Cultural Catholicism

As Day (2006) suggests, concern and caring for others are key to maintaining the highest standards of social cooperation. Participants shared this view in justifying the choice to include Catholicism in their children's lives because of the sense of community it created. Community is constructed through forging relationships with other people. It seeks to bring together people by emphasizing and focussing on their similarities whilst overlooking their differences (Day 2006). Each participant spoke of how identifying as Catholic (whether lapsed or practising) gave them a sense of shared understanding with other Catholics about the upbringing and education they received. Linda said that “*emotionally and tribally*” she still feels like a Catholic even though she identifies as a lapsed Catholic. Similarly, Adriana said:

‘I don't consider myself religious, I was brought up a Catholic, so if somebody ever asks me, "are you a Catholic?" I would answer "yes I'm a Catholic because I understand Catholicism, it's a bit of a funny one because I don't see myself as a Catholic from a religious point of view

but I can't just wipe out all the cultural things that... a Catholic upbringing means. So, for me once a Catholic, always a Catholic, for better and for worse. But, my current beliefs are ... I do not believe in god and I am not a religious person.' (Adriana)

Both Linda and Adriana highlight the importance of the *'tribal'* or cultural aspects of being raised as a person who belongs to a religion. A distinction is made between religious Catholicism and cultural Catholicism. Adriana explains cultural Catholicism, unlike religious Catholicism which you can opt out of, is cemented in your culture and your identity.

Charlotte also acknowledged the cultural tendencies that developed through being raised as a Roman Catholic and that this was inherently part of her identity, similarly to being Welsh:

'I am Roman Catholic. If somebody says what are you I'll say I'm Roman Catholic because I have a strong identity with it. And I'm proud to be...but it is a part of everyday life as being Welsh... it's what I am. It's all I know. I'm not anything else.' (Charlotte)

Prior to the above quote Charlotte had declared that, at present, she was not religious, highlighting the complex and changeable nature of affiliations to religion and faith.

In contrast to the participants above who no longer identify with Catholic religiosity, Cara spoke of how she still believed in most Catholic teachings but she no longer participated in Catholic practices with a community aspect, such as attending mass. This type of religious affiliation is reminiscent of Davie's (1994) notion of 'believing without belonging' (see chapter two for discussion about this). Cara said she did not think people need to attend church to be religious:

'...I don't go to church an everything... I don't believe that you have to either, 'cause I'm sure it says in bible somewhere "go to your room and pray" and I think that if God's with you, he's going to be with you wherever you are not just at church on Sunday because you've got your Sunday best on.' (Cara)

The shared values the participants attributed to their Catholic childhood added to a feeling of belonging to a community. Mateo spoke about a parent-teacher association meeting where he bonded with some other parents because of their shared Catholic identity. When asked if they thought their religion provided them with a sense of community, the participants spoke about how it had offered the chance to forge networks with other Catholic families:

'Yes, I do [think there is a sense of community]. Very much so – yeah. Like it did when I was a child. Probably not quite as much now...but

certainly there's still a community of people I know through church and through going to school.' (Claire)

Similarly, to Monica, Claire placed importance on the sense of community her family gained from practicing Catholicism, explaining that '*a lot of our socialising is around people at church.*' These networks were viewed as benefits of being part of the Catholic institution. Bourdieu (1979) refers to such networks as social capital and these are one facet of measuring capital. Though Claire spoke about social capital as forging relationships or friendships with other families, for others it was that they felt more familiar with others who attended church who they would see regularly:

'Even though you might not have any more to do with it than... just clocking them, and never actually speak to them but you get a sense of [other families] - and I think that is a really good thing. I'm massive on family...' (Charlotte)

Similarly to Claire, for Monica, religion was about a sense of community and belonging to a diverse group of people with shared ideas. The Catholic Church prohibits marital divorce and as a divorcee it was important for Monica that she belonged to a liberal Catholic parish where she still felt included and part of the congregation. Monica was the most involved with her parish outside of a school community:

'I'm still a practising Catholic despite being divorced. I attend mass regularly, I try every week...I'm a Lay Minister in my parish, I read and I train other people to read...we try and be supportive of each other, it's a nice community...it's a really diverse community...I love the diversity, I love the openness, it's a very liberal church, much more so than the Church I went to [as a child]... even though I don't fit into the mould they accept and welcome me and are happy for me to still be a part of the Church even though technically they don't recognise divorce and I am [divorced].' (Monica)

Being Catholic and regularly attending mass gave Monica a sense of community and belonging. The parish she belonged to was of most importance to her because it represented a diverse congregation made up of many parishioners who were acknowledged and embraced by the Church. This contrasts with Cara, discussed above, who did not feel that she belonged to, or was welcomed, by a parish church.

Overall, the sense of community a Catholic upbringing provided the participants with was favoured. For some, this sense of community materialised into opportunities to socialise and forge networks. Whereas for most of the participants, simply becoming familiarised with other families by seeing them at

school and mass provided them with a sense of community which they attributed to being Catholic.

A sense of community as derived from being Catholic is related to participants' views on the importance of relationships with others and what they desired for their children vis-à-vis their own intimate relationships. Sexual ethics education encourages young people to focus on the other person in the relationships and on other people in society (Lamb 2010, 2016). Whereas sex education taught through a framework of prevention encourages young people to focus on protecting themselves. Though, the participants placed emphasis on young people being provided information to protect themselves, they were also eager for their children to be considerate and respectful of others. This was pertinent when discussing the dynamics of their sons' heterosexual relationships. Linda said that she was looking out for her sons' girlfriend's interests and that she hoped her son was also doing this (See Chapter Six about SRE at home). As mentioned above in the discussion about moral education, there was a sense that the participants believed Catholic education would encourage their children to think of others more than a secular education could provide.

‘Get in the real world!’: Reduced Participation in Religious Practices and Beliefs?

Along with previous research (O’ Brien 2009, Rolston et al. 2005), my findings suggest that there is a mismatch between what the Catholic Church advocates with what the congregation believes. O’Brien (2009) found that the congregations’ behaviours did not adhere to the Catholic hierarchy’s teachings. This, and other research (O’Brien 2009, Rolston et al. 2005, Rasmussen 2010), found that the attitudes of those in the Catholic congregation towards sex and relationships are becoming more fluid in comparison to those of the Catholic Church. As already noted, the participants viewed Catholic teachings about sex as unrealistic and anachronistic. Overall, the participants’ perspectives were not in keeping with Catholic teachings and this was particularly pertinent regarding topics which relate to sex. Rubin’s (1984) notion of the Charmed Circle is usefully applied here. As described earlier, Rubin positions sexual acts and relationships deemed as ‘normal’ within society (for example, monogamous, heterosexual and reproductive sex) within the ‘Charmed Circle’. The ‘Outer Limits’ of the circle include those practices and identities deemed to be deviant by dominant and traditional institutions (for example, casual, homosexual or solo sex).

When assessing sex education, Lees (1993, p216-218) identified three ideological approaches, conservative, liberal and feminist. The conservative approach focusses on preserving the family, promoting sex only within marriage, and educating boys and girls about their roles ensuring they fulfil these. While the priority of the liberal approach is to provide young people with

information to help them make informed choices, a key aim is to uphold the traditional family unit which results in a heteronormative model. Finally, the feminist stance is described as the 'most progressive' because it encourages critical thinking about sex and gender inequalities. In doing so it challenges sexism and encourages equal responsibility within relationships.

Traditional sex education taught through a Catholic lens would be placed at the conservative end of the spectrum of approaches because of the importance of heterosexual marriage and procreation viewpoints. The participants for this research would be placed in the middle at the liberal stance because they generally wanted their children to be provided with evidence-based sexual health information but they also tended to favour and wanted to uphold a more traditional model of the family. On some issues deemed to be controversial, for example, abortion, contraception and LGBTQ+ identities, some participants would be placed nearer to either the feminist or conservative stance.

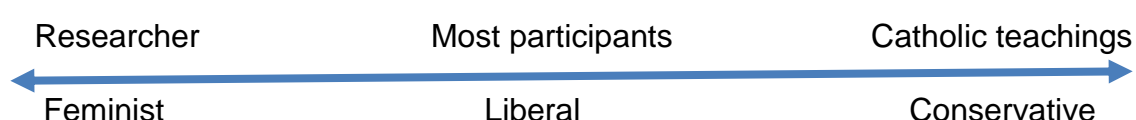


Figure 4: Spectrum of Approaches to SRE.

The diagram above shows my research placed on the spectrum of the approaches to teaching sex education concept which was developed by Sue Lees (1993).

When placed on the spectrum according to their beliefs, this framework depicts

the movement of the participants' beliefs relating to sex education towards a more progressive approach. In comparison, the Catholic Church upholds its position at the conservative end of the spectrum.

Gender appeared to be a key influence in articulating personal values based on faith. The women in the research offered more tangible examples of why they thought Catholic beliefs and teachings in relation to sex and relationships are anachronistic, for example, the Catholic stance of being anti-abortion and anti-contraception. Isobella highlights some issues women face within Catholicism:

'... I think there's things about Catholicism that are completely indefensible... like that judgement of women in particular, err like being anti-abortion, like being anti-contraception ... I don't keep that closely involved with sexual health but ... I think condoms now are more important than ever...' (Isobella)

My participants suggested that most people who practice Catholicism do not adhere to the lifestyle choices which the Church advocates. This suggestion was tied into the contradiction within their own, and their children's lives. For instance, many of the participants in this research had five or six siblings and commented on the noticeable reduction in family size in the Church congregation from six or seven children to two or three. Most felt this was a blatant demonstration that Catholic teachings on contraception were broadly flouted. Claire said, *'most modern Catholics don't believe the rules'* and that *'the rules [are] widely ignored.'* Similarly, in commenting on SRE in schools Cara

said it was antiquated:

'They need to address sexual health in Catholic schools, seriously they need to ... stop going by rules of the Church and get in the real world!'
(Cara)

When I asked Cara what she meant by the 'real world' and if she could give me examples she said:

'Well, they [young people] need to be taught about contraception and I know [the] Catholic Church doesn't believe in contraception but in this day and age everybody needs to know about contraception and protecting themselves from all the diseases that are about, from unwanted pregnancies because it's alright going on about unwanted pregnancies and we don't believe in contraception but then to me, they're giving them kids no choice if their families live by the Catholic ruling they're giving their kids no choice but to have kids, when they're kids because obviously if they're going to have unprotected sex and they're going to get pregnant and they don't believe in abortion then they've got one option.' (Cara)

Cara is talking from personal experience because when she was a teenager at the convent she became pregnant and had an abortion. Throughout the interview(s) with Cara her voice had been very quiet, she spoke in short sentences, and came across as quite a shy person. When she spoke about

young people having a right to information about contraception, however, her voice became louder and she spoke with passion. This portrayed a view that she felt her experiences might have been different if she had been taught about contraception. She highlighted protection as a key reason for teaching young people about contraception and in doing so assumed that young (Catholic) people will go against the Church's teachings and have sex outside of marriage.

Cara's acknowledgement that young people have sexual agency supports the liberal approach to sex education (Lees 1993). Of those who object to sex education, Rasmussen (2010) identifies that they are not all on the religious right (conservative). However, it could also mean that some parents who identify as Catholic and who might object to SRE may not necessarily live by the Church's traditionalist teachings. Similarly to parental behaviour, Rolston et al. (2005) found that for some of the young people they surveyed and interviewed, some of their practices contradicted their religious beliefs. As Cara has evidenced above, this was also applicable to some of my participants who also identified strongly as being Catholic but felt the Church no longer reflected their beliefs or behaviours. This was particularly notable regarding potentially controversial topics such as the use of contraception. When speaking about his use of contraception and sex before marriage, Paul said, *'I'm a devout Catholic but I wouldn't describe myself as a good one...I wouldn't say I'm without sin...'*

Some of the participants in this research displayed some sex positive views about young people's sexualities and how they should learn about sex and relationships. A sex positive approach means prioritising positive aspects over

negative ideas about sex and relationships (Dent and Maloney 2017). Being sex positive means that some of the participants, at times, acknowledged the sexual agency of young people and the importance of diversity and equality. Albeit inconsistent, this view of a forward-thinking and comprehensive approach to sex education contradicts the beliefs of the Catholic Church and what it advocates. Of the participants who still identified as, and practiced Catholicism, there was a sense of acceptance in this contradiction. The idea of a Catholic moral education was of more importance than the unbiased sex education the participants favoured. Even though when it came to teaching their children about sex and relationships they said they felt unprepared and lacking in skills and knowledge (see Chapter Five), they were willing to attempt this in order for their children to access a moral education.

The participants identified a reduced rate of participation in their religious practices, compared with their parents. This was partly attributed to the dissonance experienced relating to the Church's teaching on sex and relationships and their own practices:

'I suppose it's the values, the general values that they try to teach you as Catholicism, which some of them, as you grow up you think "yeah, that is Ok but it's not necessarily a Catholic value" and at the same time and personally I can see somethings that do not quite match from what the Church does and what it says and that is part of the reason why I don't follow religion...I mean the attitude towards sex...it was always very, very hypocritical.' (Adriana)

Adriana went on to say it is hypocritical because sex was not discussed and she recalls a time (mentioned previously) when a sex scene came on the television and her staunch Catholic father turned off the television and left the room. She laughed about a time when a priest was talking about '*those dancers, immoral dancers, where girls and boys rub against each other*', giving a sense that Adriana felt the Church's teachings and policing of sexuality was too strict. She gave the impression that she was resentful of how long it took to learn that those behaviours were not 'dirty' and that pleasure was not a 'sin' but 'something good', within or outside of marriage:

'you don't have to have only sex within the confines of marriage and that actually even if you do it is right to enjoy it.' (Adriana)

In Adriana's quote above she highlighted that she has since realised that some of the values she was taught within a Catholic framework are not necessarily only Catholic values. This links to the discussion above about superior morals.

A difference between the participants' religious practice was realised when it was compared with their parent's. Paul was different to the other participants because he was the only parent that described his own religious affiliation as 'devout.' Other participants used words to describe a very strong affiliation (e.g. staunch) with the Catholic religion only when describing their parents or other

family members. With the more relaxed views and reduced participation of the participants, it could be argued that their children's affiliation, in terms of views and practice, will decline further.

Obligatory Religious Practice

The most notable religious practice that participants disclosed they had reduced was their participation in mass; they had either entirely stopped their participation in mass or had significantly reduced their attendance. Anne spoke of how she stopped going because, as part of a traditional Catholic ritual, she used to fast from Saturday evening until after mass on a Sunday morning so she could receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. This fasting often resulted to her fainting and having to sit outside of the Church during mass. When I asked how her parents felt about her not going to mass anymore she replied:

'They were alright, as long as we came when other people were there...it was all about face for them. If we went to Ireland, which is where the majority of our relatives live, aunties would try and make us all go to church but their children were exactly the same, they weren't going to church.' (Anne)

Anne said she now only attends mass when invited by other people for shared celebration of occasions such as christenings and weddings. Similarly to Anne, Adriana spoke of how she was encouraged to attend on behalf of family members. This is little different to the practices of others brought up in

denominational schools and churches who no longer 'practice' their religion, as Adriana explains:

'My current beliefs are ... I do not believe in god and I am not a religious person. Having said that I do respect religious people and when I go back to Spain, I'm quite happy to go to mass with my mother if she asks me to because there is something quite nice about it. So, it's about doing things in the right context for me. So, for me personally I don't need religion but I'm quite happy to integrate religion in my life when I'm with others.' (Adriana)

Using the word '*current*' to place her beliefs, Adriana suggested the fluid nature of religious affiliation and practice. Another example of practicing religion to appease family members was when Louise disclosed that religion plays a part in her life but this was probably due to her sense of duty to her mother, who was a staunch Catholic. She admitted that she might not attend mass as often under other circumstances, for example, if she was not responsible for assisting her mother to attend mass.

All the participants were raised as Catholics and had participated in religious practices, such as attending mass. Whilst traditional Catholic practices and beliefs have a broader and historical legacy, practices were viewed, by the clear majority of the participants, as no longer relevant to their personal everyday life.

Conclusion

Religious identity, as well as views on learning about sex and relationships, are complex and personal matters. When discussing their affiliation with religion many of the participants were contradictory in their descriptions. An example of this is when Charlotte was talking about her religious identity she said, '*religion isn't part of our everyday life*' and then shortly after said '*I have a strong identity as a Roman Catholic.*' This shows many of the participant's relationship with religion was changeable, at times ambivalent, and had been fluid throughout their lives. As Adriana said, Catholicism was a part of their '*cultural identity*'; a given in their lives which they had not previously thought much about.

There was an assumption that being Catholic, or identifying with a religion more generally, resulted in the individual maintaining moral standards that would not be possible independent of religion. There was the sense that most of the parents lacked recognition of an applicable values base existing outside of religion, or Catholicism more specifically.

Another reason for including Catholic education was because it was what the parents knew and what they were familiar with, even if they did not agree with all that it advocates. Along with a sense of fondness, Catholic education also prompted a sense of confidence in the participants in their parental role which supports their children's formal education.

An additional benefit of including Catholicism in their children's lives was the access they had to belonging to a community and in forging relationships with others. Even those who self-reported as 'lapsed' Catholics, through the shared values and understandings of their Catholic upbringing, had developed a strong sense of identity and belonging.

Though many of the participants still attended mass occasionally at the request of a close family member, very few attended mass regularly as a result of a personal commitment to their faith. This supports previous research which found that certain religious practices, for example, attending mass, have substantially declined (Davie 1994).

The participants were clear that, in relation to sex, the Catholic Church is outdated and its teachings do not reflect the society in which they live with their families. They held the same views as other non-religious parents about sex education because they disagreed with the Church's stance on many topics relating to sex and relationships. This conflict in beliefs about learning about sexualities stems from their own poor experience of Catholic schooling and sex education specifically. Poor experiences (or lack) of sex education encouraged the parents to take a more sex positive view of how they wanted their children to learn. Despite this, they were willing to risk including Catholicism in their children's education for the advantage of a moral framework to guide their children's behaviour. They highlighted the value of Catholicism within their lives because of the significance of the associated moral education most believed

was only attainable through either formal or informal Catholic education.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This study has explored perceptions of Catholic parents on young people's learning about sex and relationships. This concluding chapter revisits the study's aims before drawing out the key findings from within the data. It also explores potential practice and policy implications, and acknowledges the limitations of the study. It concludes by identifying potential avenues for future academic research. Overall, the chapter summarises my project and highlights further opportunities to develop this area of research.

Restating the Research Aims

The primary purpose of this study was to explore Catholic parents' perceptions of young people's learning about sex and relationships. Furthermore, this inquiry endeavoured to understand Catholic parents' perceptions of formal SRE provision provided in their children's school, and to also gain insight into their experiences of providing education within the family. The influence of the participant's Catholic upbringing on their perceptions, practices and experiences of providing education about sex and relationships was explored.

Contributions and Key Findings

As indicated throughout this thesis, several key findings emerged from the research.

- The factors that influenced Catholic parents' perceptions and experiences of SRE provision included both contextual factors such as discourses about gender stereotyping and heteronormativity, and individual factors, for example the experience of divorce and dealing with illness.
- The parents supported SRE provision at school and mostly wanted it provided in an unbiased (non-religious) way. They also wanted further content to be included in SRE at school regarding emotions and relationships education.
- Most of the participants provided SRE within the family and commonalities in their approaches and the barriers they encountered were identified. For example, SRE was mostly provided within the family in an ad hoc and on-going way which was young-person-led. A common key barrier identified by Catholic parents to providing SRE within the family was their own poor experience of receiving SRE at home and school, if any.
- Catholic education was favoured because of the moral framework it provided, even though Catholic teachings relating to sex and relationships were not supported. The parents' 'Catholic lens', therefore, did influence their opinions about SRE but not in the way that is often assumed.

Influences on Catholic Parents' Perceptions and Provision

Firstly, Chapter Five discussed the contextual and subjective factors which influenced Catholic parents' perceptions on how young people learn about sex and relationships, and how they provided education within the family. As might be expected (for any parents), specific personal life events mediated approaches and views on what and how to support their children but my thesis also explored participants' views on factors documented in wider literature. For example, young people have clearly stated their desires and need for more SRE, however, it is clear that many adults and adult-led institutions fear the loss of 'childhood innocence' if young people are taught about sex and relationships (Morawska et al. 2015, Lenskyj 1990). The common stereotype that parents (especially religious parents) object to their children learning about sex and relationships can often be used as evidence to support the lack, or withdrawal, of SRE provision in schools, or as the basis for an assumption that such parents do not provide education about sexualities at home. However, in line with preceding literature (see Goldman 2008, Kidger 2006, Lees 1993), my participants rejected the notion of 'childhood innocence' because they felt that objecting to SRE to maintain 'innocence' would leave young people in a precarious and vulnerable position. Rather, the participants felt that young people should be provided with information as a tool to protect themselves and, beyond this basic requirement, as a way to encourage more positive expectations of their first (assumed to be heterosexual) sexual encounters.

Pornography is another issue among wider discourses of 'concern' regarding young people. Whilst none of my participants knew whether their children had

consumed pornography, all assumed that they had or would view pornographic imagery in the near future. Some participants had concerns about the 'pornification' of young women but, in support of existing literature (Attwood and Smith 2011), they also questioned if these concerns were legitimate or having been founded on media sensationalism. Participants identified that having the skills to draw distinctions between 'everyday life' sex and relationships and those portrayed in pornography was important for young people.

In line with other studies, for example, Abbott, Elis and Abbott (2016), my participants felt that young women were particularly vulnerable and this implied that, in some scenarios, boys were a threat. As a result of this perceived threat, young women's behaviour was often regulated to 'protect' them from boy's sexual advances (see Ringrose 2010, Holland et al. 1996). Some of the parents in my study showed they had what might be considered 'progressive' views on young people's sexuality, but these were still bound within the binary norms which are endorsed by Catholic teachings and which could be described as 'vanilla' discourses (Rubin 1984). In having more 'progressive' aims for their children's sexual experiences, there were also intimations that the participants (albeit unintentionally) reinforced the 'pleasure imperative' (Allen and Carmody 2012, Lamb 2013, Rasmussen 2014) by suggesting that 'good' sex results in an orgasm for both the (assumed) man and woman involved (also known as the 'orgasmic imperative', Frith 2015). Encouraging a more 'progressive' take on sex and relationships than traditional Catholic teachings highlighted the potential to overlook the important notion of sexual consent and mutual agreement in pursuing the 'pleasure imperative'.

There have been recent discussions about including consent and enthusiastic consent within SRE (see Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013, Coy, Kelly, Vera-Gray, Garner and Kanyeredzi 2016) and the government have stated that consent will be part of compulsory RSE when it is implemented in 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). However, the concept of consent was not discussed by my participants with their children. This may have been because of traditional Catholic heteronormative and gender binary beliefs acting as obstacles to young people learning about equal and inclusive sex and relationships. As mentioned previously, in Catholicism the focus is purely on hetero sex/relationships with the woman being viewed as passive. From this, I speculate that the engrained gender roles from Catholicism and societal norms influenced the reproduction of heteronormative and gender binary thinking about how to provide young people with SRE. With the assumption that there is only one type of 'appropriate' relationship (heterosexual) within the Church and any other relationship arrangement being considered 'sinful', the topic of consent could be disregarded. Challenging the Church's binary views of gender and sexuality could encourage the inclusion of education about (informed) consent in SRE provision, whether delivered by teachers or parents.

Participants also identified other individual factors which influenced their perceptions of how young people should learn about sex and relationships. These included: dealing with illness, divorce, and the Sacrament of Penance

and Reconciliation (Confession) wherein their priest had asked inappropriate questions of the participant.

As discussed in Chapter Four, four out of 11 participants had experience of working within sexual health or education and this resulted in them having more confidence to provide SRE within their family. During the interview, however, it seemed that this enabled the participants to draw on many professional experiences rather than purely their own personal experiences compared with other participants who had no professional experience. I prompted the participants to discuss their own experiences as a parent providing education for their children within their family, however the conversation would often bend towards a discussion of providing SRE in a professional capacity. Though this was not the intended focus for this project, such discussions provided useful insights into the participants' views on young people's learning about sex and relationships in general, rather than simply their own children's education.

The participants confirmed that their conversations between parent and child about sex and relationships increased when they had more time available with their children (see also Turnbull et al. 2010). Of those participants where two parents were present within the family, it was sometimes assumed that the parent who spent most time at home looking after the children would provide the SRE. This was often linked back to traditional gendered roles where the husband would be at work earning money and the wife would look after their children and home. This outlook contradicts the changing nature of family

structure where work commitments are more equally shared by all genders, and young people are increasingly being raised in single-parent and same-sex families (Office for National Statistics 2015, Sandfield 2006, Smith 1997).

Support for Unbiased SRE in Schools

As highlighted in Chapter Six, parental opinions about formal SRE provided in schools are important to understand, especially in the context of the parental right to withdraw young people from SRE up to the age of 19. Similarly to previous research (Sanjakdar 2014, Walker 2001), a parental lack, or poor experience, of sex education at school seemed to have influenced the desire for better provision for their children. Catholic parents supported SRE being taught in schools and most preferred it being provided in an unbiased way. Moreover, they wanted further content about the emotional aspects of sex and relationships to be included.

This thesis contributes to recent debates concerning SRE provision in school. When asked about how they wanted SRE to be provided, there was a desire for a programme of compulsory SRE that had a comprehensive curriculum. There was a sense that the stereotype of Catholic parents being insular regarding young people and sex education was overridden by a more 'progressive' notion that positively acknowledged and aimed to value young people's sexual agency. The participants believed formal SRE was good for their children because it would give them information to make healthy choices, as Goldman (2008) also

notes. Generally, however, the participants' opinions were still steered with a view to physically and/or emotionally protect young people.

The participant's decision not to employ their right to opt their children out of sex education could be viewed as an example of their support for SRE in schools. Even when they may have been concerned about the way some subjects were approached, they chose to remedy this with home-based sex education rather than withdrawing their children from SRE lessons. Such findings challenge the notion that SRE provision in schools should be altered because of the fear of backlash from small, usually religious, groups of parents (Ingham and Hirst 2010, Jerves et al. 2014, Walker 2004).

There were contradictions about who the participants thought should teach SRE, which supports the findings from previous research. In general, it seemed that the participants viewed SRE as a joint task which should be shared between school and home. In contrast with previous research and government guidance, which recommend parents to be either the primary educators or active partners in SRE at school, the general sense was that the participants preferred to maintain the role of passive partners. Being a passive partner means they would have minimal input in SRE development at school but would like to be more informed about the content and delivery of programmes.

When discussing who they wanted to be SRE teachers at school there was a consensus amongst the participants that priests should not be involved in the

development or implementation of SRE. One reason for this was because priests were viewed as inexperienced sex and relationships educators. This could also have been seen as a response to some inappropriate experiences the participants had with priests and because of the historic abuse scandal within the Catholic Church. An additional reason could be because the participants did not want all SRE provision to be taught through a Catholic lens. This is in contrast with previous research which recommended that religious elders should liaise with sex educators to offer advice on how parents could provide their children with sexual health information that is both accurate and religiously sensitive (Farrington et al. 2014).

In relation to the preferred content of SRE, there was support for an equal focus on both the biological and emotional elements of sex and relationships in education programmes. At times, it seemed as though more importance was placed on education about emotions but this could have been because the parents felt it was lacking from the SRE curriculum. There was a lot of discussion about the inclusion of education about emotional wellbeing and this was often spoken about in the context of content that was lacking from the parent's own education and as a topic they now believe would have been beneficial.

As discussed in Chapter Six, participation in this research prompted the parents to consider their knowledge of the SRE their children's schools provided and thus many became aware of what little knowledge they held. Despite this, in general there was an assumption that schools provided sufficient SRE.

However, if their children's school approached SRE in a way that opposed their family's values, the participants would counteract this with more 'suitable' education at home, even though there were certain topics that participants did not feel comfortable discussing with their children.

The Approaches Used and Barriers Encountered by Catholic Parents when Providing SRE within the Family

Thirdly, regarding approaches to sex and relationships within the family, my participants relied on ad hoc opportunities, as well as trying to ensure open and on-going dialogue between them and their children. To stem the fear that their children might be taught from an inappropriately young age (see The Christian Institute 2011), my participants employed a young person-led strategy. This meant most education provided within the family was instigated by the young person and this provided the parents with assurance that the content being provided was age-appropriate. In keeping with earlier research (Ballard and Goss 2009), the participants in this study valued the importance of young people learning about sex and relationships. As discussed in Chapter Seven, they had also (often unintentionally) made decisions on how to approach talking and educating their children about sex and relationships each to varying degrees.

The attitudes and approach of the Catholic parents in this study differed from the religious views in other studies (Dent and Maloney 2017, Sanjakdar 2014). Whereby the participants in my study did not want their children to be taught

about sex in a religious context, instead, they preferred unbiased and holistic information to be provided and, as mentioned above, in accordance with such views they did not want priests involved in this teaching.

Even though there is no single strategy which the participants used to provide sexual communication with young people (see Davies and Robinson 2010, Stone et al. 2017, Walker 2001), there were some commonalities in the approaches my participants used. For instance, as well as preferences for the aforementioned comprehensive and holistic approach to SRE, they did not want to repeat the reductionist biological input that they had experienced as young people (see also Ballard and Gross 2009). In contrast with existing (albeit limited) studies, the majority of my participants communicated with their children about sex and relationships (Berne et al. 2000). As evidence of their own poor education, however, they did not always acknowledge this because of their own limited definition of what constituted SRE within the family (Walker 2004). Therefore, in some circumstances they were unable to recognise their actions/practices as SRE and, furthermore, were unable to acknowledge 'good' SRE.

Echoing previous research on parents' opportunistic approach to SRE within the family (Ballard and Gross 2009), my participants took advantage of 'teachable moments' (Dent and Maloney 2017). In contrast to the traditional planned, one-off 'talk' provided by parent(s) (Kuhle et al. 2015), the participants spoke about aiming to provide open and ongoing dialogue with their children and, in a similar

vein to previous research, there was little evidence of 'the talk' (Stone et al. 2017, Walker 2001). When parents say they are providing an open and full sex education, their definition of open is often narrower than the academic definition (Frankham 2006, Jackson and Scott 2004, Stone et al. 2017). However, most of my participants underestimated the amount of SRE they were providing for their children insofar as it was invariably more than the basic one-off 'talk' (Kuhle et al. 2015).

The participants identified that a key barrier to them providing (adequate) SRE for their children was their own poor personal experience of receiving SRE, as mentioned earlier. They spoke of their own parents censoring 'sexual content' in television programmes and books, which reinforced the taboo around sex. In agreeance with existing literature (Morawska et al. 2015), the participants wished their own parents had talked to them (more) about sex and relationships. This sense of receiving insufficient information from home or school when they were younger, fed into feeling ill-equipped to provide their own children with suitable SRE.

The idea of sex being taboo and the notion of privacy acted as a barrier to the participants providing SRE at times was discussed in Chapter Seven. For example, if a young person asked a question in a public place, the parent would wait until they were in a more private place to continue the discussion. The idea of personal privacy relating to sexual practices and behaviours (particularly masturbation) was key to the boundaries which the parents identified. Even for

those parents who had a more 'liberal' outlook, details of their children's sexual thoughts, behaviours or practices were prohibited and they made sure their own bedroom doors were closed because it was important for their personal sex life to be respected.

Educating young people about public and private spaces is an important part of good sex education. However, the notion of keeping education about sex private contrasts with the open and ongoing communication style the participants (claimed to) strive to provide for their children (discussed above). One reason why some of the participants waited for a private space to provide SRE was because of the embarrassment they experienced, but also because they assumed their children would be embarrassed by being provided with information about sex and relationships publicly. However, if the young person asked the question in public, it could be presumed that they were comfortable to have the discussion in a public space.

A parent being a different sex to their child was also identified as a barrier which the participants encountered in SRE provision within the family. The participants felt they were unqualified because they had not had the same biological experiences. As a solution to this barrier, in the families where a parent of the same sex was present, they would often be responsible for any learning which took place within the family. This was an assumption made by both parents and one which emphasises the legacy of the poor personal sex education they received. Even though many of my participants who received sex education stressed that it was too scientific, they lacked understanding about the biology

of people who were a different sex to them. This suggests there are opportunities to explore parent's the lack of knowledge which can prevent them from being able to provide SRE for their children who are a different sex, particularly within the context of single-parent and same-sex parent families, or families where transgender parents are present. Being a single-parent, in a same-sex relationship, or a transgender person/in a relationship with a transgender person would presumably bring with it a level of 'education' about gender, sex and sexualities beyond traditional Catholic teachings, therefore, it could be argued that such parents may have a greater level of knowledge.

The Catholic Lens

Finally, I have shown that (perhaps unsurprisingly), when discussing Catholic parents' perceptions of learning about sex and relationships, there was evidence to suggest their Catholicism influenced some of their thinking relating to these topics, even though many of the participants no longer subscribed to Catholic teachings. This influence, as evidenced in Chapter Eight, was often discussed in relation to teaching young people about morals and values rather than the expected discussions of topics traditionally viewed as controversial in the context of Catholicism, for example contraception, LGBT issues and abortion.

Selected Catholic teachings, however, were included in their children's lives in the hope of providing them with a moral framework. This was also perceived as a useful tool for parents to use as a guide for education about relationships.

Other notable reasons for including Catholicism within their children's education were because it was familiar to the parents and that it provided the family with a sense of community.

Having summarised the key findings from this research, it is essential to remain mindful of the complexity and diversity in the participants' experiences and perceptions. In consolidating 'religious parents' into a homogenous group and by forming policy based on assumptions of their preferences, the full diversity of Catholic parents' views on young people's learning about sex and relationships are often overlooked.

Limitations

This study has evidenced aspects of Catholic parents' experiences and perceptions, and endeavoured to understand them in relation to empirical and theoretical literature. However, there were inevitable limitations to this research, which I will now identify.

One key limitation of researching Catholic parents was the challenge of defining religion and religious affiliation. Articulating who I was recruiting for the project, and making potential participants aware that they could participate was difficult because many identified as '*not Catholic now*' but I wanted to access a variety of Catholic parents and explore their experiences and the diversity of their beliefs. In trying to access '*lapsed*' Catholic parents, I included a proviso on the

participant flyer which stated, *'It doesn't matter if you're a strict-practicing, liberal or lapsed Catholic'* to try and gain access to a diverse range of 'Catholic' parents' voices (see Appendix C). Another strategy to recruit non-identifying 'Catholic' parents was to access them through existing social networks and via snowball sampling.

On some occasions I had difficulty in getting parents to participate generally because, as they would state, *'I don't know enough about my kids' SRE'* and do not want to *'waste your (researcher's) time'*. This admission, however, was an interesting finding in itself which was explored further within the analysis of the data. Some of the participants also noted at the start of the interview that they had had brief chats with their children to prepare for the interview as it has prompted them to realise they had little knowledge.

One of the limitations in reporting the findings from this research was in trying to preserve the nuanced experiences and complexities of perceptions which the parents reported. In attempting to retain such diversity, individual factors which influenced the participants' perceptions were explored in Chapter Five. This highlighted some common or shared perceptions amongst the parents but their influence led to a variety of experiences and opinions unique to those parents. For instance, four out of the 11 participants had experience of working in sexual health and/or education and I found that those with professional experience did not speak as freely (as the other seven) about their own private experiences. This meant, maybe because they often had conversations regarding this issue

on a professional level, that their interactions with their children felt less influenced by their own family biographies. In retrospect, I could have probed this in more detail.

Some of the parents had children who were older (in their twenties) and this meant a greater reliance on their memory when discussing their experiences of their children's learning about sex and relationships. For such parents, the time they had experienced since their children received SRE could have provided them with time to reflect on their understanding of their experiences and perceptions. If time and resources were permitted, it would be useful to also explore the children of the participant's perceptions and experiences of learning about sex and relationships, as well as their parents'. This could potentially add a layer of rigour to the data because both parent and child's memories of their experiences could to be compared from different perspectives.

This was a small-scale study and the conclusions drawn are specific to my participants. However, the purpose of this study was not to provide data for generalisation or from a representative sample. Rather, the methodological approach facilitated an in-depth exploration that revealed the complexities and nuances of experiences that have relevance for wider studies and other groups of people, particularly in looking at the place of parents, faith, religion and SRE. The provision of SRE in English schools is inconsistent and, as my findings in Chapter Seven illustrate, the way parents provide SRE at home is unique to each family. Therefore, further investigation in this context involving a broader

sample is warranted. However, the participants in my study were aware that not all parents were able to provide SRE for their own children and recognised that this made school provision essential to ensure that all young people had access to (unbiased) information.

Another limitation is the potential bias created by my position having been raised Catholic and received (minimal) sex education at school. Due to being a practicing Catholic for the duration of my childhood and some of my adulthood, it was inevitable that I would have internalised some ideologies which perhaps imposed some limitations on my analysis of the data. As discussed in Chapter Four, I have aimed to maintain a reflexive position throughout this study but it is likely my experiences (past and present) will have influenced my interpretation of the data. However, it is also possible that my positionality helped in developing rapport with participants and allowed more nuanced and 'insider' questioning and analysis. Given that sex and religion can be taboo subjects for anyone to discuss, being raised according to Catholicism can make such subjects even more 'off limits', especially in discussions with a stranger. While I cannot be sure if or how far this limited their discussion, I feel I built respectful rapport with the participants and was able to put them at ease. If the participants asked, I was honest and revealed that I was raised as a Catholic in the hope that it would help them to understand that I appreciated the sensitive nature of the topics that we would discuss. In line with a feminist approach to doing research (Reinharz 1992), I found that sharing small amounts of personal information about myself with the participants helped to strengthen our rapport.

These limitations should be considered for further studies in this field.

Research Implications

This is the first study to provide in-depth, empirical evidence regarding what Catholic parents think about SRE. It adds to the growing existing body of literature regarding parents' opinions about SRE, as well as the small number of studies exploring religious parents' experiences of their children's learning about sex and relationships.

This research has attempted to contribute to the literature by offering a sociological account of Catholic parents' perceptions and experiences. Though empirical data is lacking, there is often an assumed 'backlash' from Catholic/religious parents about schools providing SRE. This is not supported by my findings which provide an alternative view whereby the majority of the participants supported unbiased SRE. Though the findings offered in this thesis are based on a small number of participants, it is hoped that they will begin to problematise assumptions about Catholic parents and their perceptions in relation to young people and learning about sex and relationships.

Policy and Practice Implications

Due to my familiarity with the topics covered in this thesis and my feminist position, I have some personal motives for how the findings from this data could be applied in a way to bring about the change the Catholic parents desired in this study, but ultimately to help young people access holistic information about sex and relationships, regardless of their or their parent's/parents' religion.

Although this was a small-scale study which would require further investigation, the data does point to some tentative policy and practice suggestions.

To inform and implement SRE that is suitable for all, there is a need for sustained discussion and consultation with all parties involved: young people, (Catholic) parents, schools, and governors with policy makers at national and school levels. Also, whilst parents retain the right to withdraw their children from SRE, a particular push to reach religious parents to ask what they would like for their children in SRE is essential in gaining insights and being able to base future programmes of SRE on empirical data rather than supposed assumptions based on traditional Catholic beliefs. In providing evidence that some Catholic parents are supportive of formal SRE, schools could receive some assurance that their fear of a 'backlash' may be unsubstantiated. This could lead to parents being invited to be more involved in SRE provision at a national and local level.

It is essential to include

the children of religious parents in the development and evaluation of SRE because of the UN Rights of the Child to information. Where traditional Catholic beliefs are held, there is potential for LGBT young people to be disregarded or discriminated against based on their parents' religious beliefs regarding SRE. However, few parents opt to withdraw their children from SRE, so moving forward I would suggest this needs to be reconsidered for when RSE is implemented in 2019. Young people who are sent to Catholic schools may not be educated about LGBT issues amongst other contentious issues which the

Church does not endorse, for example, contraception use or abortion. To counteract this, it is recommended that the government makes a clear decision that RSE will be implemented in all schools, including faith schools, unlike previous proposals for compulsory SRE.

The majority of the participants wanted unbiased sex education to be provided for their children within school, with some recommending that it should be entwined throughout the entire curriculum. For example, there were suggestions that certain aspects of it could be covered within English literature or art lessons, suggesting this could encourage more holistic SRE provision because it would be provided from different perspectives.

As well as parents and school governors, it is essential to include young people in discussion about the provision of SRE because a number of my participants were not aware of what their children had been taught and so asked their children prior to our interview. This highlights the participants' lack of knowledge about the SRE that was being delivered in their children's schools, which is another persuasive reason for young people's opinions to be prioritised when consulting on SRE or RSE.

Ideas for Future Research

Throughout this thesis I have highlighted potential areas of further investigation. Due to the exploratory nature of this project and the approach used, this was

plentiful. Though not all the topics suggested here are directly linked to this project, they are relevant to furthering this area of study.

One idea borne out of this study was the broader investigation of religious parents' views to establish whether the stipulation that faith schools may not be legally required to teach RSE is justified when it is planned to be implemented in 2019 (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017). Leading on from this, is one of the fundamental reasons parents were the chosen participants for this research: they have the right to withdraw their children from SRE and will retain this right when RSE is implemented (Great Britain, Department for Education 2017, Great Britain 1996). Yet according to the most recent available figures, only one percent of parents opt to withdraw their children from SRE (OFSTED 2002) and it is often implied that this is for religious reasons. Further investigation is therefore needed to understand the reason(s) why a minority of parents choose to withdraw their children from SRE lessons in order to prevent further young people from missing out on receiving important information.

As stated in Chapter Eight, many of the parents opted to include Catholicism in their child's life and send them to Catholic schools, even if they were disillusioned by the religion themselves. A key reason for this was to provide their children with a moral framework. Further exploration is required to determine whether the ethical education which Lamb (2010) advocates is more prevalent in Catholic schools than non-Catholic schools, which my study suggests.

Building on from initial findings in this project, it seems logical to ask Catholic parents' explicitly about their views on the inclusion of the topic of pleasure in education about sex and relationships. Building on from this, exploring how attitudes are moving in the direction towards supporting a more 'sex-positive' approach at a Catholic individual and family level, but not within the Catholic hierarchy, could offer interesting insights. In this context, consideration should be given to the potential tensions and conflicts that could arise from this disjunct in beliefs and practices.

Another interesting idea to further develop this research is to also conduct interviews with the children of the participants, and any other parents/carers who are present in the family unit to build each family as a case within the study. This would enable access to insight from the young person's perspective about their SRE and to compare it with their parents' views.

Final Thoughts

As evidenced in the previous chapters, by exploring Catholic parents' views on young people's learning about sex and relationships, both within school and the family, and whether this was influenced by the Catholic context, this study's aims were accomplished.

In conclusion, the process of creating and writing this thesis has taught me so much and created more questions than it has answered, as is often the outcome with qualitative inquiry, generous participants and reflexive thinking. I hope it offers the impetus to other researchers to interrogate assumptions about religion, sex, relationships, parent and child communication, and the meanings we might infer.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Example of SRE Teaching Material

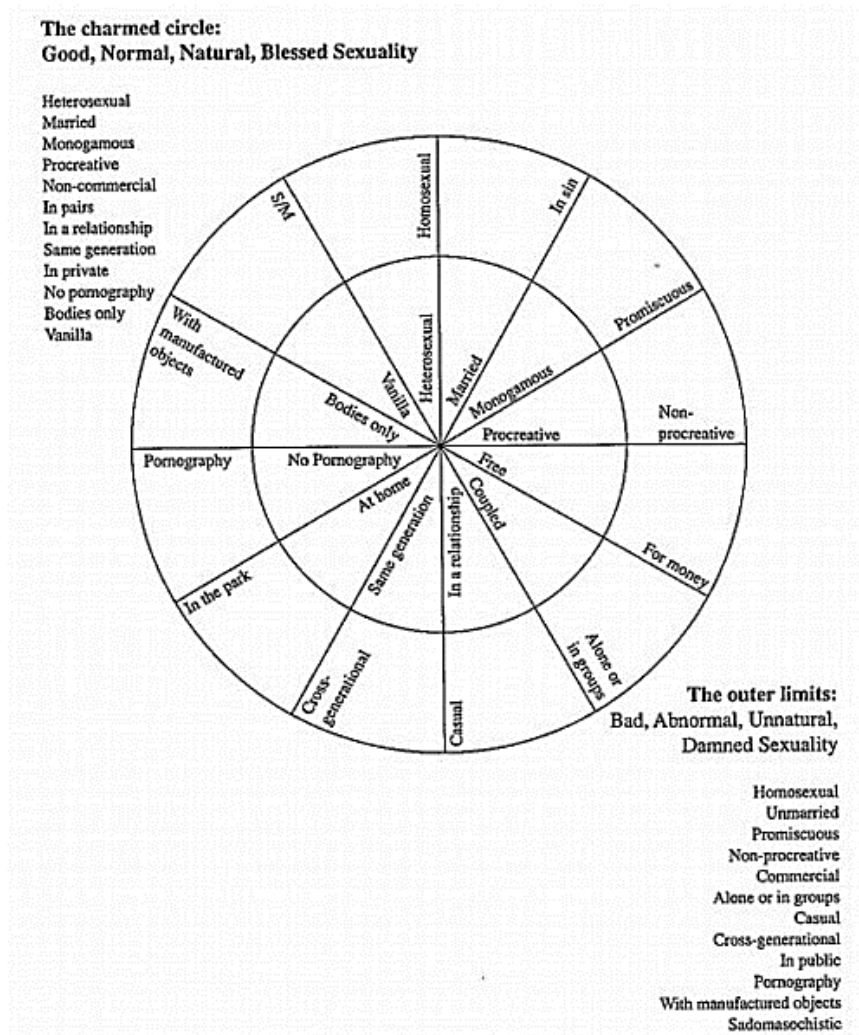
Cole, B (1995) *Mummy Laid an Egg*, Red Fox in The Christian Institute (2011).

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Appendix B: The Charmed Circle (Rubin 1984)



The Charmed Circle (Rubin 1984)

Appendix C: Participant flyer

Are you a Catholic Mother, Father or Carer?*

Is your child (or children) currently between 11-24 years old?

If the answers to the above are both **'Yes'** I would like to invite you to have an informal interview (as part of my PhD research) to gain an insight into your feelings, opinions and experiences of your children's learning about sex and relationships.



If you have any questions about taking part in this research please contact:

Georgina Burns-O'Connell Email: gurns2@my.shu.ac.uk 01142256541

Or, my Supervisor Dr Julia Hirst j.hirst@shu.ac.uk 01142252543

***It doesn't matter if you're a strict-practicing, liberal or lapsed Catholic.**

Appendix D: Demographic Information Sheet

Catholic Parents'/Carers' Views on Children's Learning about their Sex and Relationships

Demographic information is requested for the purpose of identifying some background information about each participant during the analysis stage of this thesis. All information you provide will remain anonymous.

Please provide a response for the following questions:

1. How would you describe your gender?

2. What was your age last birthday in years? _____ Years

3. How would you describe your ethnicity or cultural identity?

4. What is your relationship status? (e.g. single/living with partner, married)

5. How would you describe your social class?

Thank you for taking part in this research.

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Face-to-Face Interview



Information Sheet

Catholic Parents'/Carers' views on Their Children's Learning about Sexualities and Relationships

Thank you for giving your time to participate in this research. The purpose of this project is to explore Catholic parents' and/or carers' views on their children's learning about sex and relationships with a focus on Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) taught at school.

This study is part of a PhD research project which is approved by Sheffield Hallam University. This research is unique because the voices of Catholic parents/carers have not been explored previously in relation to SRE.

I would like to conduct an informal interview with you to gain an insight into you own feelings, opinions and experiences of how your child/children learn/learnt about sex and relationships. This interview will be arranged at a time and place which is most suited to you. Before the interview starts, we can further discuss your participation in the research; you can also e-mail me at any time during the research if you have any queries (please see below). During the interview I

would like to use a voice recorder, however if at any point you are uncomfortable, I can stop recording.

The confidential recorded information from your interview will be analysed and extracts may be used in the final thesis but you will remain anonymous throughout the research. The voice recording will be kept on my personal, password-protected computer and will be deleted once the interview has been transcribed. The transcription will only ever be labelled with an alternative name or code for you and any identifiable information will be removed e.g. your child(ren)'s name(s).

If you choose not to take part in the research, there will be no consequences as participation is voluntary. If you do decide to take part but later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the interview. After the interview, any information that you have given to the research can be withdrawn until August 2013. If you feel you would like further information, guidance or support in relation to SRE please visit either:

The Sex Education Forum (national charity)

www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/parents-carers.aspx

Parent to Parent (local charity based at Centre for HIV & Sexual Health in

Sheffield): <http://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk/projects/parent-to-parent/>

Or for further details please contact Kath Broomhead via

Telephone: 0114 305 1818 (answerphone). *Email:* Kath.broomhead@nhs.net

If you have any concerns about the research project (or the researcher) that you don't feel you can discuss with the interviewer then please contact:

Dr Julia Hirst, Reader in Sociology, Faculty Public Health Lead, Postgraduate Research Tutor via

Telephone: 0114 225 2543. *Email:* J.Hirst@shu.ac.uk

Thank you again for participating and if you have any questions about the research please do not hesitate to contact me:

Georgina Burns-O'Connell

Sheffield Hallam University: *Email:* gurns2@my.shu.ac.uk

Telephone number: 0114 225 6541

Participant Consent Form



Consent Form

Parents'/Carers' views on Their Children's Learning about Sexualities and Relationships

Please answer the following questions by circling your responses:

Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study?	YES	NO
Have you been able to ask questions about this study?	YES	NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to any questions you have?	YES	NO
Have you received enough information about this study?	YES	NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study Until August 2013?	YES YES	NO NO

Without giving a reason for your withdrawal?		
<p>Your responses will be anonymised before they are analysed.</p> <p>Do you give permission for anonymised extracts from the data to be included within my thesis and in potential articles and conference papers in the future?</p>	YES	NO
Do you agree to take part in this study?	YES	NO

Your signature will certify that you have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study having read and understood the participant information sheet. It will also verify that you have had sufficient opportunity to discuss the study and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

Signature of participant: Date:

Signature of Interviewer: Date:

Georgina Burns-O'Connell
Sheffield Hallam University

Email: gburns2@my.shu.ac.uk **Telephone number:** 0114 225 6541

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Second/Telephone Interview



Information Sheet

Catholic Parents'/Carers' views on Their Children's Learning about Sexualities and Relationships

Thank you for giving your time to participate in this research. The purpose of this project is to explore Catholic parents' and/or carers' views on their children's learning about sex and relationships with a focus on Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) taught at school.

This study is part of a PhD research project which is approved by Sheffield Hallam University. This research is unique because the voices of Catholic parents/carers have not been explored previously in relation to SRE.

I would like to conduct an informal interview with you to gain an insight into your own feelings, opinions and experiences of how your child/children learn/learnt about sex and relationships. This interview will be arranged at a time and place which is most suited to you. Before the interview starts, we can further discuss your participation in the research; you can also e-mail me at any time during the research if you have any queries (please see below). During the interview I

would like to use a voice recorder, however if at any point you are uncomfortable, I can stop recording.

The confidential recorded information from your interview will be analysed and extracts may be used in the final thesis but you will remain anonymous throughout the research. The voice recording will be kept on my personal, password-protected computer and will be deleted once the interview has been transcribed. The transcription will only ever be labelled with an alternative name or code for you and any identifiable information will be removed e.g. your child(ren)'s name(s).

If you choose not to take part in the research, there will be no consequences as participation is voluntary. If you do decide to take part but later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the interview. After the interview, any information that you have given to the research can be withdrawn until November 2013. If you feel you would like further information, guidance or support in relation to SRE please visit either:

The Sex Education Forum (national charity)

www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/parents-carers.aspx

Parent to Parent (local charity based at Centre for HIV & Sexual Health in Sheffield): <http://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk/projects/parent-to-parent/>

Or for further details please contact Kath Broomhead via

Telephone: 0114 305 1818 (answerphone). *Email:* Kath.broomhead@nhs.net

If you have any concerns about the research project (or the researcher) that you don't feel you can discuss with the interviewer then please contact:

Dr Julia Hirst, Reader in Sociology, Faculty Public Health Lead, Postgraduate Research Tutor via *Telephone*: 0114 225 2543. *Email*: J.Hirst@shu.ac.uk

Thank you again for participating and if you have any questions about the research please do not hesitate to contact me:

Georgina Burns-O'Connell

Sheffield Hallam University

Email: gburns2@my.shu.ac.uk *Telephone number*: 0114 225 6541

Consent Form

Parents'/Carers' views on Their Children's Learning about Sexualities and Relationships

Please answer the following questions by circling your responses

Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study?	YES	NO
Have you been able to ask questions about this study?	YES	NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to any questions you have?	YES	NO
Have you received enough information about this study?	YES	NO

<p>Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study</p> <p>Until November 2013?</p> <p>Without giving a reason for your withdrawal?</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p> <p>NO</p>
<p>Your responses will be anonymised before they are analysed.</p> <p>Do you give permission for anonymised extracts from the data to be included within my thesis and in potential articles and conference papers in the future?</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Do you agree to take part in this study?</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>

Your signature will certify that you have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study having read and understood the participant information sheet. It will also verify that you have had sufficient opportunity to discuss the study and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

Signature of participant: Date:

Signature of Interviewer: Date:

Georgina Burns-O'Connell

Sheffield Hallam University

Email: g burns2@my.shu.ac.uk Telephone number: 0114 225 6541

Appendix G: Aide Memoire

Catholic Parents'/Carers' Views on their Children's Learning about Sex and Relationships

Thank you for agreeing to this interview and for giving your time to this research...

Recap information from consent form info- be clear!

- Consent has been given but you can withdraw etc.
- permission to record- can switch off recorder at anytime
 - If this happens and something really valuable is said ask if they could repeat it and if it could be recorded/ask if I can write it up (or if they want to) or ask to take notes
- All data will be anonymous (i.e. refer to 'the Church', 'the school', 'the teacher' etc.)
- I like to think of this as an informal conversation which is led by you...
- Can take a break if you want to...
- I'm hoping we can get through all my questions in one session but you never know how quickly we'll get through it, or you may wish to raise things in addition to my question, or you might want some time out for reflection - if this happens, how would you feel about a second interview?
Could be over telephone if you'd prefer...

Overview of topics to be covered during the interview

This is just to give you an idea of the topics I'd like to be covered during the interview:

1 You and Religion

2 Child(ren) and School(s)

3 SRE in school

4 SRE out of school/home

Icebreaker

So, would you like to start by telling me a bit about yourself

- Icebreaker/ as much or as little as you choose...

You and Religion

- Can you tell me something about **what religion means to you?**
- Would you say you are **religious?**
- Is being a Catholic part of your **everyday life?** (past and present) Can you give **examples** of this...?
- Is your partner/ children's other parent/ child's grandparents religious?
- What sort of **schools** did **you attend?** (Faith schools? Mixed?)
- Can you tell me something about **religion** in the **schools you attended?**
- Did **you** receive **SRE?** How was it? Can you tell me any memories or stories about this?

Child(ren) and School(s)

- **How many children** do you have? How **old** are they?
 - Do they go to the **same school?**
 - What **sort of school?** (I.e. faith? Mixed?)

- What factors helped to make this decision? Why? How did this make you feel?
- Can you tell me about how **your religious belief/ experiences/practice** had a **bearing on your choice** of school to send your child(ren) to (if at all)?
- Did anyone help you to decide what school to send your child(ren) to?
Can you tell me a bit about their faith?
- Did **you think about SRE** and how that was **taught**? (Distinguish: Science/PSHE/in Religious Studies-sex education or SRE?) Why? How?
- Did **anyone else broach the subject** of SRE with you when **choosing** schools?

SRE in School

- What **kind of SRE** do/did your **children** get at school? (In what subject/how long for?)
 - **How do you know** about this? (E.g. who told you about this?
How? When? (E.g. did you have to give consent via a letter sent home?))
- Did you ever attend an **open evening**/a meeting about SRE at your child's **school**?
- Have **you** ever **seen** or **requested** to see the SRE **policy document** at your child(ren)'s school? Could you sum up what it entails?
 - How did you get **access**? What did you think of it?
- **Content** -what **topics** were/are they taught about?
 - Do you know **what age** (range) they were taught these topics?

- **Who** taught the subject (**subject area/gender of teacher**)?
- Do you think **SRE should** be **taught** at **school**? How? Why?
 - **YES:** What **topics** should it **include**?
 - In what **subject area** should it be **taught**?
(Science/PSHE/PE/Religious Studies?) Why?
 - **How** do you think **children** should be **grouped** when being **taught** about sex and relationships? (Academic achievement/gender etc.)
 - How **often** should young people **receive** SRE at **school**?
 - **Who** do you think **should teach SRE**? Why? (E.g. sexual health worker/RE teacher etc.).
- What **resources** do you think **schools should use** to help assist **teaching SRE** (videos/health visitors, magazines, internet etc)? **Why** those? **How** should they be used/ put into practice in lessons?

Examples?

- Does the **gender/sexual orientation** of your child(ren) **alter** your opinion of **how** they should be **taught SRE** (i.e. what topics should be covered-content)?
 - And does this affect **who** you think **should teach** your child(ren) SRE? (gender/sexual orientation of teacher/sexual health worker)
- **How do you see SRE fitting in with religion?** E.g. the Catholic ethos? (Abortion/contraception/sex before marriage...)
- **Withdrawal** until 19- has this affected you/your child(ren)s participation in SRE?

- (If you did withdraw) - What was **in your mind** when you **thought about** your **option** to **withdraw**?
 - What caused you to **think that way**? (At what age were you? do you feel the **same now**?).
- Would you like (**more**) **information** about what is being taught at your child's school?
 - **How** would you like to **receive** this information?

SRE Taught at Home/ Outside of School

- Should SRE be taught in other home/settings-home/ youth clubs?
- Can you tell me whether **your child(ren)** has been **taught about S&Rs at home**?
- **YES: Who** spoke to the child about sex and relationships?
 - **Why** that person? (Faith?)
- **How** did you/they go about it (**approach** the discussion)? Did **child** bring it up? Something on **TV** prompted it, your responsibility? etc.
 - At what **age** (adult and YP)?... More input as got older?
 - Had they **already received SRE at school**?
- What **topics** were discussed? **How** were they talked about (i.e. anything used to assist? Books/magazine/internet etc.)
 - Would you consider giving advice on contraception or condoms?
Or consider discussing abortion or same-sex relationships?
- Which issues do you think are the most important to discuss with your child(ren)?

- Was it done **within Catholic teachings**? How do you feel about that/Why?

Not spoken to child(ren):

- **Who** made the decision to **not** teach/talk about sex and relationships **at home**? How did you feel about that?
 - if you could go back...Would you talk to them about it now?
- Do you think there is **any situation/circumstance** where your children **should** be **taught** about sex and relationships at home/outside of school? Examples... Why?
- **What/who** do you **think is** the **main source** your child(ren) use to learn about S+Rs? (Friends/ internet/ porn etc?) **Why?**
- What/who do you **think should** be the **main source** of children's learning about S&Rs (e.g. Parent/family member/ friend/ sexual health worker in other youth setting outside of school/ religious figure/books/internet etc.)? **Why?**

Other Sources of Learning Rise of Technology

- **How** do you **think** the rise of **technology** *could* affect how **SRE** should be taught-at **school/home** (if at all)? (E.g. digital- T.V, computers, phones etc.)
 - How **should other sources** of learning be used (books/internet etc.)? By **who** and at what **age**?
- **What** do you think **young people take** from **TV/Films/internet** about sex and relationships?

- **How much** do you think **learning about sex and relationships/society** **has changed regarding sex and relationships** since **you** were at **school?** (**Compare** with your **own experience** of SRE?) **How** do **you** feel about this?

It looks like we're just coming to the **end** now...Is there **anything else you'd like to add** (overall or specific)...?

If you do have any **further thoughts, reflections, questions** (it doesn't matter how small/big) after the interview (in between interviews- about the research or feedback about the interview) please don't hesitate to **get in touch** with me by e-mail or telephone. Thank you again for your time! (If anything useful is said once recorder is switched off ask to recorder/type up and send version).

Appendix H: Diagram of overall Analysis Themes

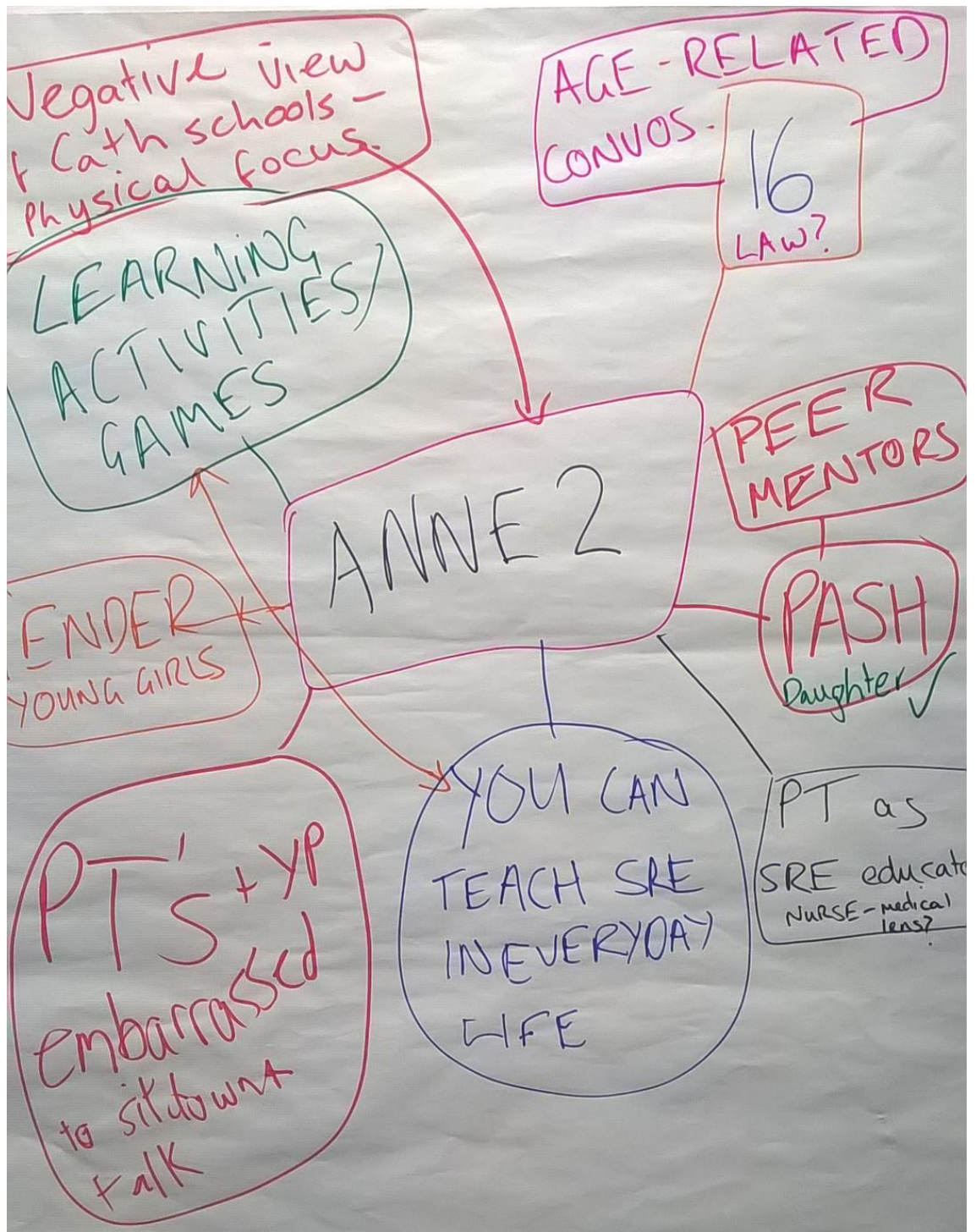


Appendix I: Diagram of analysis for one participant's interviews

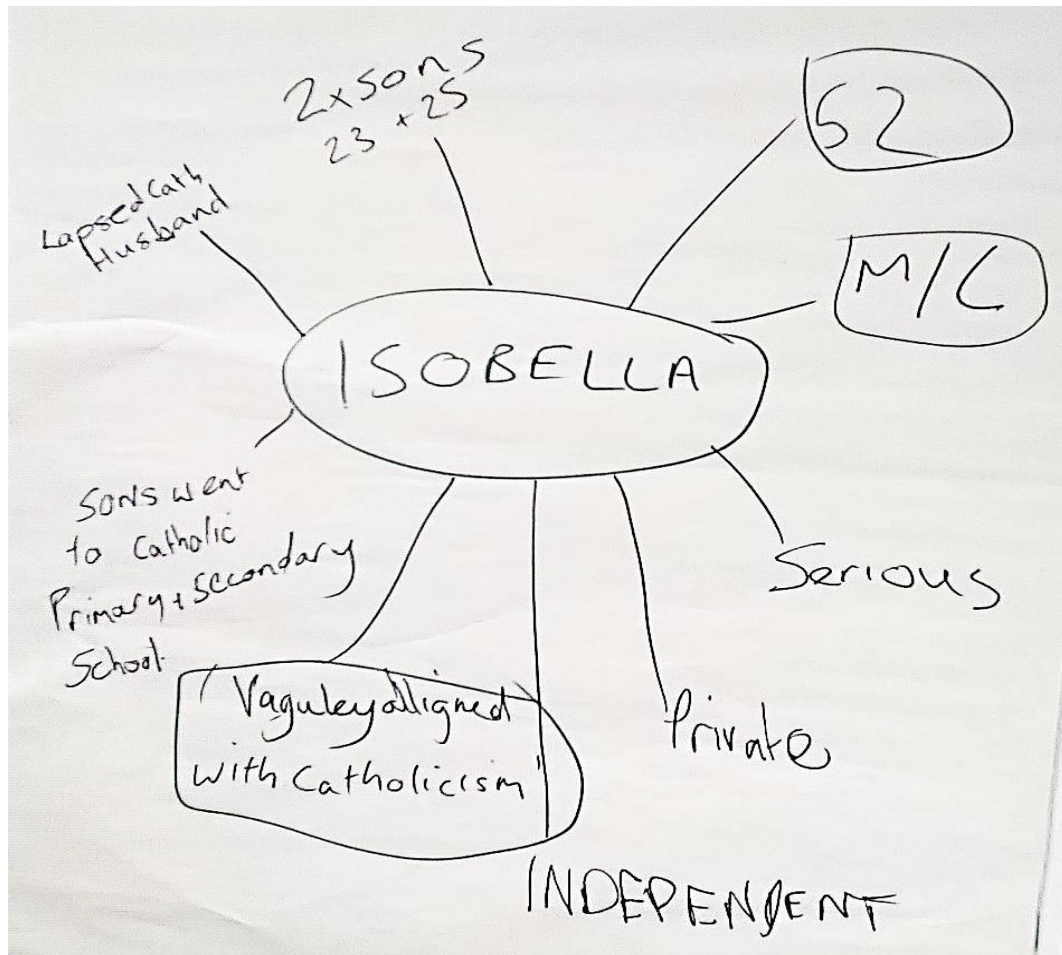
Example of a diagram for analysis from first face-to-face interview:



Example of a diagram for analysis from follow up telephone interview:



Appendix J: Diagram of description of participant



Appendix K: Table of Self-Identified Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity or cultural identity	Relationship status	Social class	Participant's occupation	Involvement in SRE provision
1. Mateo	male	44	other white (non-European)	married (to a Catholic)	Middle-class (double income family: professionals)	Lecturer and researcher	No involvement
2. Linda	female	61	Scottish	Married (to a Catholic)	Middle-class ex working-class	Retired teacher	Previously taught PSHE and covered relevant SRE topics during English lessons

3. Claire	female	38	White British	Married (to a non-Catholic)	Middle-class	Medical professional	No involvement
4. Paul	male	50	Irish/British	Married (to a Catholic)	Working-class	builder	No involvement
5. Isobella	female	52	White, English	Married (to a lapsed Catholic)	Middle-class	Business director	No involvement
6. Anne	female	50	'non-believer'	Living with partner	Middle-class	Special educational needs school nurse	Led SRE provision within her school

7. Cara	female	44	Mixed Race Black/White. Caribbean	Single	Working-class but said: 'lesser class' - unemployed	Unemployed	Had experience of youth group work and aspired to work with young people in future
8. Monica	female	46	White American	Divorced	Middle-class	Director, consultant and facilitator	Experience of facilitating PSHE and SRE in secondary schools
9. Louise	female	53	White British	Married	Middle-class	Secondary school administrator and receptionist	No involvement
10. Charlotte	female	52	Welsh! (British)	Married (to a Catholic)	Middle-class	Business director	No involvement

11. Adriana	female	1967 (47/48)	Spanish	Single	Middle-class	Postgraduate student and worked for the local council	Studied SRE in a health context as part of her post-graduate degree
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