

Reimagining Postsecular Sexuality Education: A Narrative Study with Heterosexual

Christian Young Men

by

Joshua Michael Heyes

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY

University of Birmingham

2019

School of Education

Department of Education and Social Justice

University of Birmingham

September 2019

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Abstract

Sexuality education is secularist insofar as it omits religion, relegates religion to a matter of private concern, positions religion as a problem to be overcome, or permits the inclusion of religion only in forms that support existing progressive secular sexual ethics. The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis is a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education developed using four themes from a narrative study with six Christian young men age 16-19 on their experiences of and learning about sexuality and relationships. While there is a growing body of work that is critical of secularist sexuality education, there is little existing research supplying rich accounts of young people's religious sexual subjectivities that might challenge secularist assumptions about youth sexualities. Drawing on narrative theory and employing biographic narrative interpretive methods, the study shows the different way that the religious sexual subjectivities of six Christian young men fracture under the conditions of postsecularity and how experiences, evaluations and recommendations regarding sexuality education emerge from these shifting subjectivities. Four cross-case themes emerging from a narrative analysis are then developed into a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education that is both responsive to these subjectivities and potentially enriching for all young people.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my sixth form classics teacher, the late Mr Peter F. Barnett. His kindness, humour and erudition modelled the Christian inquiring mind to me at a critical age and his extra time supporting me to write my A Level coursework on Plato's analogy of the cave was the genesis of my academic career. As is often the case with school teachers, he never got to see the fruit from the seeds he planted in this life – I hope that someday I will be able to thank him.

Acknowledgements

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisors Dr. Tonie Stolberg and Dr. Sarah Hall for their wisdom, patience and support throughout the research and writing of this thesis. They have been present and readily available in ways that I did not expect coming into doctoral research. This thesis would not have been possible without their insight, guidance and constant encouragement.

Prof. Andrew Yip was present at two critical junctures of the research project and helped me to look at seemingly impassable problems in a new light.

Prof. Michael Hand and Dr. Ian McGimpsey gave me the opportunity to teach on the Education BA during my final year; this experience contributed significantly to the overall approach and argument of this thesis.

Phoebe Hill and Lucie Shuker at the Youthscape Centre for Research helped shape my approach to recruitment and were vital in getting the study off the ground.

My friend and fellow PhD student Dr. Sarah Nussbaum proof-read substantial portions of this and other important formative work over the last four years. Her keen eye has inspired me to be a more precise and careful writer.

My participants, even those who do not appear in this thesis – Mark, Ethan, Tim, Rob, Jack, Dan, Sam, Henry, Caleb and Lawrence – thank you for making this work possible.

Acknowledging also the young women whose lives are present here only as echoes in the mouths of the young men.

Finally, my wife Stephanie has supported me steadfastly through the peaks of joy and valleys of despair, making many sacrifices, large and small, to enable me to pursue this dream.

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Glossary of terms

BDA – Biographical data analysis

BDC – Biographical data chronology

CSE – Comprehensive sexuality education

BNIM – Biographic narrative interpretative method

HCE – History of the case evolution

LGBTQ – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer

SEF – Sex Education Forum

SQUIN – Single question aimed at inducing narrative

SSS – Successive states of subjectivity

TFA – Teller flow analysis

TPS – Teenage pregnancy strategy

TSS – Text structure sequentialization

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

Setting the scene

In February 2019, a group of Muslim and Christian parents gathered outside Parkfield community primary school in Birmingham to protest the school's use of the 'No Outsiders' programme, developed by local headteacher Andrew Moffat (2015) as a way of teaching in conformity with the 2010 Equality Act. One goal of the 'No Outsiders' programme is the promotion of LGBTQ inclusivity through education about diverse family structures using children's storybooks. Protestors claimed that the programme promoted forms of sexuality that were against the religious values that they were trying to instil in their children. The protests received extensive news media coverage and at the time of writing, resistance looks likely to continue as schools prepare to implement the new statutory relationships education (at primary level) and relationships and sex education (at secondary level) curriculum in September 2020. While protesters outside Parkfield school have been banned by injunction, copycat protests continue to appear in other English cities.

Although the main work of this thesis was completed before the Parkfield protests began, its relevance is now all the more clear in light of these events. While there is much to be said about the role of the media in representing the events, one important issue highlighted by the protests is the deep entanglement of sexuality education with the political influence and public claims of the religious. The entanglement of sexuality education and religion thus represents the broad intellectual and practical set of problems to which this thesis speaks. If this doctoral project were being planned today, it would perhaps seem odd to be conducting research with Christian young men when the protests are led by Muslim parents and campaigners. However, as this thesis unfolds, I hope it will become clear that my research

has relevance beyond particular religious identity categories and opens up possibilities for the seeming impasses around sexuality education and religion to be reimagined.

Protests from religion communities are however, only one of many obstacles faced by campaigners for consistent, high quality sexuality education provision in England. Since the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, initiated in 1999, sexuality education (then titled ‘Sex and Relationships Education’ or SRE) was non-statutory in English schools besides the coverage of human reproduction in biology and mandatory provision of teaching about HIV/AIDS. Many schools did however include SRE topics as part of Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and were required, if doing so, to follow guidelines provided by the DfE (2000). As described in more detail below (see section 1.2.11), the passing of the Children and Social Work Act (2017) places a requirement on schools to provide sexuality education in the form of (newly re-named) Relationships Education (at primary level) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). RSE continues to be grouped under PSHE education, though now with the addition of ‘Health Education’ including topics around physical and mental health. There is now a full curriculum and updated, detailed guidance on topics to be taught which, at the time of writing, is due to be implemented imminently in all English schools. The extent to which religious protests will impact this implementation remains to be seen.

Background to the research and the researcher

While the Birmingham protests frame the immediate, pressing relevance of this thesis, I want to continue this introduction by jumping further back in time to give a short narrative of how this project came about. Part of the task of reflexivity incumbent on qualitative researchers is to consider the kinds of change of researcher subjectivity taking place over the course of the project. Doing a PhD is not just the production of a static text, but a time-extended set of

complex interactive subjective processes. Producing a PhD thesis can be seen as a professional research apprenticeship aiming at the transformation of an individual into a capable and effective researcher with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. At the same time, doing a PhD is a personal transformation that can call into question the constitution of identities and the beliefs and commitments they are assumed to be associated with. In light of this, I will begin with a short biography of how I came to be involved in this work.

One of the first areas of reading I undertook for my doctoral studies was in the sociology of religion and Christianity. This sensitized me to the diversity of Christianity and the influence of my own particular expression of faith on the research. I was brought up by Christian parents who became Christians themselves as young people through the evangelical, charismatic movement. Although my family stopped going to church in my teenage years I continued to go to charismatic summer camps and regard them as the key sources of the formation of my religious identity. At university, studying philosophy and theology and regularly attending a church of my own choice (a large, evangelical charismatic church that I still attend with my family to this day) led to my commitment deepening and I began to consider a future career involved in some form of teaching or ministry in the church. I spent a year working as a children and youth worker for Scripture Union, a large Christian charity, during which I decided that I wanted to return to study and pursue an academic career. I worked part-time as a church youth and children's worker while completing my MA in philosophical theology at the University of Nottingham, focusing on the relationship between theological metaphysics and Christian sexual ethics.

My plan following this was to do a PhD in theology looking at the intersections between Christianity and sexuality in Victorian literature. As I adjusted my expectations through processes of failed applications and discouraging conversations, I happened upon an internet advert for a PhD on sex education and religion with potential funding attached. Thinking this

to be a way of continuing to pursue my academic interests in religion and sexuality in a more practical vein, I applied. On my successful application and beginning of my ESRC funded PhD programme, I began the transition from philosophically minded theologian to theologically minded social scientist. Through the painful process of learning about methodology and other social scientific conventions I continued to be inspired and driven by the fascinating topic of sexuality education and its persistent ability to variously generate controversy, fear, consternation and activist passion, exaggerated tenfold when considered in relationship to religion. Without question, I would not have completed this project had it not had an exciting, agitating and frustrating effect on my own religious identity as a Christian.

My place in the project

The forms of Christianity I have been involved with throughout my life are committed to what some might call a ‘traditional’ or ‘orthodox’ sexual ethics by which the only appropriate expression of sexuality is for opposite-sex couples within marriage. While many of my personal beliefs about how this should be approached amongst Christian communities have significantly changed, I still hold to this basic sexual ethic. Most of the participants in my study also hold to these same views. However, reading the immense literature on sexuality produced by the predominantly secular field of sociology and psychology of sexuality has naturally supplied significant challenges to this.

Considering my adherence to this increasingly unusual set of beliefs, questions may arise about the overall argument of this thesis – whether this project should be understood as an attempt to defend my own views and ethics against their eroding social influence. Indeed, these are questions I have asked myself during times of reflection on my project and the extent to which this compromises my arguments. However, one significant shift in my approach has been to move beyond the mere inclusion/preservation of a declining sexual

ethic (that happens to be my own) and to consider in a far broader sense what accounts of religious sexual subjectivity make possible for sexuality education. This has been accompanied by a growing conviction that these accounts need to be approached in their diversity and complexity, not reduced to a particular set of religious commitments or sexual practices. My fear has often been that my thesis is merely an attempt to ‘use’ my participants to insert myself and my own experiences and struggles as a Christian teenager into the conversation. However, I do believe that I have, at least to some extent, helped my participants and through the work of analysis been able to think bigger than the rather limiting notions of ‘inclusivity’. Rather than make arguments that either my (psychologically disguised) own subjectivity or the subjectivities of my participants have a power-claim for ‘inclusion’, I try and show what these subjectivities make possible and how they enable a reimagination of sexuality education. This is partly why I have continued to use the term ‘religion’ rather than just ‘Christianity’ throughout the thesis despite my own and my participants distinctive and differentiated ‘Christianness’ – my hope is that this reimagination opens up new, constructive possibilities beyond the concerns of me or my participants.

Part of my argument in this thesis concerns the way in which the religious identity of the participants introduces ‘fractures’ into their sexual subjectivity (see section 1.3.7). In the same way, I feel my own Christianity has ‘fractured’ my negotiations with sexuality education such that I have learnt to accept the absence of ethical closure regarding the vast majority of my argumentative positions taken here. Many of the philosophical, ethical, and even methodological positions in this thesis feel like compromises of my religious beliefs, while in many cases it seems there is an inherent contradiction that has not and perhaps cannot be resolved. In many cases it would have been far easier to bracket or set aside my Christianity, yet it has become to me a wonderful inconvenience, pulling me constantly into

oppositions with which I do not feel comfortable but which are ultimately creative and productive.

One may not find the approach taken in this thesis to be distinctively Christian, yet for me the fundamental drive to *make things better* that drives many educational researchers is profoundly shaped by my Christianity. Indeed, the core of the argument of this thesis flows from a distinctively Christian set of commitments as to the common good and how public life can be shaped for human flourishing. Sadly, I do not have space to discuss the theological negotiations underlying much of the intellectual work here, but I do want to note here the core Christian theological idea of *gift*. Just as Christ is given to the world as a gift, so it goes that we reciprocate by the generous offering of all of our resources for the good of the world and the glory of God. Thus, I present this thesis as a gift to those involved in the scholarship, politics, policy and practice of sexuality education in the hope that it will enrich, enliven and prosper the vital work that has been and still is being done. My hope is that this thesis and any other products that come from it speak in some way to the fears and anxieties of all the different groups implicated in the Birmingham protests and shed some light on a way forward.

Thesis overview

The aim of this thesis is to reimagine postsecular sexuality education through a narrative study with Christian young men. In chapter 1, I set out my use of postsecular social theory and argue that progressive sexuality education, such as that which dominates in English sexuality education discourse, carries a secularist bias. I then go on to outline a small, disparate body of sexuality education scholarship that has a postsecular sensibility, work that opens up new possibilities for thinking about sexuality education and religion. I introduce my research questions, designed to make an intervention into the literature on religion, youth and

sexuality, for the purposes of reimagining postsecular sexuality education. In chapter 2, I describe the theoretical underpinnings of my methodology designed to answer these questions and describe the sampling, recruitment, interviewing and analysis methods used in my study. In chapter 3, I present my study findings and the four cross-case themes developed through my analysis. Finally, in chapter 4, I draw on the four cross-case themes along with my wider reading of educational theory and philosophy to outline four features of postsecular sexuality education. I note the need for further research building on this and evaluate the methodological approach used.

1 Chapter 1 – Querying Secularist Sexuality Education

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify a set of practical and scholarly problems that I aim to address through the original contribution of this thesis. The chapter has three sections. In section 1.1, I outline the three major aspects of postsecular social theory informing my approach. I clarify the usefulness of this approach by showing how it is drawn on in qualitative research with a population of particular relevance for my narrative study – Christian young people in Britain. I then show how postsecular social theory challenges scholarly and popular narratives equating secularization and social change around sexuality. I argue that a postsecular approach opens up new possibilities for research on contemporary sexualities.

In section 1.2, I begin by showing why progressive sexuality education should be understood as secularist, drawing on the work of Mary Lou Rasmussen (2015). Next, I review a body of temporally and globally disparate research engaging the relationship between sexuality education and religion. I show how this research draws on the three aspects of postsecular theory I identified in section 1.1. Through this review, I identify the primary problem that this thesis aims to address – the failure of progressive sexuality education scholarship, policy and practice to acknowledge and respond to this body of work. I highlight the possible negative consequences should this failure be perpetuated. I then suggest that one weakness within this sexuality education scholarship engaging religion is the absence of detailed engagement with religious young people’s sexual subjectivities. Research with religious young people represents a significant possibility for drawing together some common concerns about religion and sexuality education across the literature and for reimagining postsecular sexuality education.

In section 1.3, I outline relevant literature on religion, youth and sexuality that might help shape this reimagination. I show that youth sexualities research has an uneven engagement with religion that creates limitations for the potential of this body of work to shape a reimagination of sexuality education responsive to postsecular sexualities. I argue that literature focusing directly on the intersection of youth, religion and sexuality is instructive for future research but contains omissions and methodological problems that limit its usefulness for making an original contribution to sexuality education scholarship. This frames the main task of chapter two, which is to describe the biographic narrative study I conducted with Christian young men addressing these problems and omissions.

1.1 Postsecularity, Christian decline and sexuality

1.1.1 Contesting British Christianity

There is a strong consensus among sociologists and historians of religion that British Christianity has been in decline throughout the 20th Century (Peterson, 2017). Macro-level research using quantitative data has shown steadily declining Christian service attendance and declining affiliation to Christianity (Voas & Crockett, 2005). This decline has been theorized as part of a global trend of secularisation (Brown, 2009). Charles Taylor has given an influential account of this process, arguing that Western societies like Britain have become “disenchanted” (2007, p. 26) and detached from a transcendent or cosmological order, with modern subjectivities “buffered” (ibid., p. 38) against the supernatural rather than open to spiritual influences. Taylor distinguishes this descriptive account of *secularity*, in which religious belief becomes an option rather than a given, from *secularism* (ibid., p. 2). Jürgen Habermas argues that secularism as a mode of governance arose through the rationalization of the public sphere, with political discourse increasingly governed by scientific rationality rather than religious or theological reasoning. In this way, religious authority gradually

receded from newly formed modern publicities, leading to the privatization of religious concerns and power-claims (Habermas, 1992). In Britain, an example of this can be seen in the emergence of a new, rational, public language of welfare that led to the state taking on the responsibilities of education and social care that were previously part of Christian social practice (Dinham, 2016). Other noted features of this process in Britain are the phenomenon of vicarious religion in which a non-committed majority are aware of and approve of the religiosity of an active minority (Davie, 2007) and the replacement of religion with new forms of non-institutional and individualized spirituality (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005).

However, the popular and scholarly narrative of secularization has been challenged by postsecular social theory. The term postsecular first emerged substantially within scholarship in the early nineties in a volume by Phillip Blond (1998) addressing the ‘turn to religion’ in the work of influential French continental philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Since then postsecularism has gained influence across the humanities and social scientific disciplines reflecting, as Gregor McLennan puts it “a *spectrum* of concerns and possibilities” (2010, p. 4, my emphasis). While I am not able to give a comprehensive review of this literature here, I note three features of postsecular social theory as I draw on it in this thesis.

Firstly, postsecular social theory has set out the case for the apparent resilience and resurgence of religion in the public sphere despite secularization, described as deprivatization by Jose Casanova (1994). Global examples of this are the emergence of Islamist terrorism following 9/11 and the increasing influence of conservative Russian Orthodoxy in post-soviet Russia. In Britain traditional denominations such as Anglicanism, Methodism and Baptism are experiencing significant numerical decline, however, the localized growth of youthful, urban Christianity has been framed as a sign of the increasing salience of postsecularity as descriptive of British Christianity (Wolffe, 2017, p. 540). However, research has also shown

how in tandem with its general decline, the power and public visibility of Christianity has shifted form from the exertion of the church's moral authority to political activism and social action. Grace Davie calls this the "persistent paradox" of religion in Britain – the continued influence of Christianity on the public sphere despite its ongoing decline (2015, p. 177).

Beyond Christianity, the growth of British Islam's population and public visibility, as well as of New Age and folk spiritualities, provide further evidence against the narrative of inevitable secularization.

Secondly, postsecularity denotes a blurring of lines between religion and non-religion. Recent work by Linda Woodhead has noted a trend of 'de-differentiation' within the religious pluralism of Britain, in which people decreasingly consider both religion in general and their own religious beliefs as strongly differentiated from others and increasingly resist identification with authoritative religious or spiritual institutions (2016). Woodhead argues that while religious pluralism has traditionally been considered a key factor in secularization, de-differentiation provides new opportunities for religious groups – she states:

"The forms of religion which are growing fastest in the world have in common the fact that they are fantastically disorganised, allow considerable lay participation, blur the lay-clerical boundary, are entrepreneurial, experiment with new, often charismatic, forms of authority, and are often rather institutionally-fragile and short-lived" (ibid., p. 45).

Along the same lines, a growing body of work, pioneered by Lois Lee, is investigating the phenomenon of non-religion through research on those who identify as having 'no religion' (2015). These 'religious nones' emerge as a complex population with a variety of beliefs and worldviews that might have been previously identified as religious or spiritual (ibid., p. 145). Further, research following the spatial turn in the study of religion finds further evidence for

the blurring of lines between religion and nonreligion/secularism. Kim Knott takes up the notion of the ‘sacred secular’, a term introduced by Margaret Somerville (2008), and integrates it with a spatial theory of religion (Knott, 2005b; Massey, 2005) to show how postsecularity can be found in heterotopic spaces that destabilize the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, like hospital chaplaincies (Collins, 2013) and multi-faith public spaces (Gilliat-Ray, 2004).

Thirdly, postsecularism has also given rise to substantive work addressing the reshaping of democratic life amidst religious and non-religious diversity. Luke Bretherton draws on the concept of postsecularity to articulate a vision of common life between radically different faith (and non-faith) traditions (2011). Critiquing secular multiculturalism, in which religion is forced to make translations into publicly acceptable discourses which threaten its integrity (Bretherton, 2010), research has also drawn attention to postsecular partnerships between religious and secular groups as part of what Cloke and Beaumont call “postsecular rapprochement” (2013, p. 27). Elsewhere, Baker, James and Reader describe this using the concept of “entangled fidelities” (2015, p. 154) outlining how Christian imaginations of the common good are always already entangled with secular ethics that appear inimical to Christian social life. In a similar vein, and drawing on Christian readings of new materialist philosophy (Reader, 2017), Cloke, Baker, Sutherland and Williams outline a politics predicated on postsecularity, characterised by re-enchantment, generosity, receptivity between religious and secular ethics and the shaping of desire towards common life (2019, p. 21). This research identifies a *normative* current within postsecular social theory that is as important as that which seeks to *describe* the conditions of postsecularity.

Thus postsecularity, as I use it in this thesis, denotes three major features of contemporary Western societies such as the U.K. (1) the resurgence of religion as visible and influential in the public sphere (2) the blurring of boundaries between religion and non-religion, or

between the ‘secular’ and the ‘sacred’; and (3) the imagination of new forms of democratic, co-operative political life amidst this blurred religious and non-religious diversity. While there are other ways of theorizing postsecularity available in the literature, this three-fold definition represents my particular use of the concept throughout this thesis.

The strengths of postsecular social theory can be more easily grasped through exploring how they illuminate lived experience. In this regard, I have found Anna Strhan’s (2015) ethnographic work with conservative evangelical Christian congregations in London to be particularly helpful for illuminating the specificities of lived religion under postsecularity in Britain. Strhan describes how Christians negotiate being constantly confronted by the material absence of God in urban spaces. She describes the material processes of subjective fracturing leading to evangelicals’ sense of themselves as “aliens and strangers” within both the immanent city and the transcendent “City of God” (ibid. p. 202). Strhan describes, using theoretical perspectives on subjectivity from Foucault, Levinas and Latour, the essentially fractured nature of all subjectivities. At the same time, she argues that the manner in which subjectivity fractures is unique to specific social and material contexts. She shows how conservative evangelicals’ subjectivities fracture along lines unique to their lived religion, producing split allegiances and the co-existence of incoherent desires. Although Strhan does not expressly use the terminology of postsecularism, her work engages theories of the postsecular in urban spaces and she locates the city and its complex interweaving of secular and sacred spaces as a major influence in this fracturing. I have found Strhan’s concept of fractured subjectivity particularly instructive for forming the methodological approach of my narrative study, further details of which are given in section 1.3.7.

1.1.2 Christian youth within postsecular Christian decline

I turn now to show the importance of a postsecular approach in research engaging a population of relevance for this research project - Christian youth in Britain. Rebecca Catto's synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research notes the increasing difficulty of generalizing about religious youth in Britain (2014). However, her analysis does draw attention to the importance of relationships for this group and their sense of tension between their religious commitments and participation in society. A small body of qualitative research exists exploring these tensions in the lives of Christian youth. Vincett et al.'s research with Christians aged 16-27 in Glasgow found great salience in the concept of performativity in understanding the relational character of Christianity amongst young people (2012). Their findings challenge the assumption of weakening commitment amongst religious youth resulting from secularization, supporting the postsecular feature of resilient religiosity amidst Christian decline (ibid., p. 286). However, they also note the changes in the ways that young people lived their faith under postsecular pressures - "in the face of heterodoxy and hesitancy of belief, belief as a propositional system loses authority to belief as religious action" (ibid.). Olson et al.'s (2013) work draws on data from the same project, focusing on the concept of authenticity as part of what they call 'performance Christianity'. Authenticity is anchored in the body - "for these young Christians, the body emerges as a vehicle for transcendence and the principal site where authenticity can be observed and evidenced." (ibid., p. 1438). The participants were keenly aware of their successes and failures in fulfilling the requirements of authenticity amidst a persistent climate of potential compromise. For example, this came out particularly through the desire not to be a 'Sunday Christian', ensuring that faith was made relevant to every part of their lives. Authenticity was also entangled with a sense that it is 'not cool to be a Christian' with marginalization functioning as evidence of authentic performance. Olson et al. conclude that their research provides strong evidence for the salience of postsecularity in understanding religious young people, supporting the second

feature of postsecularity in their argument for “the importance of understanding religion as subjectivities formed out of and inserted into a field of diverse social meanings to re-examine social relationships between the sacred and the profane.” (2013, p. 1432). The idea that religious subjectivities are constituted by meanings moving between the sacred and profane resonates with Strhan’s account of evangelical Christians’ sense of being caught between the claims of immanent and transcendent moral orders.

Thus far I have shown how scholarship on religion in Britain, both theoretical and empirical, is increasingly taking into account the three features of postsecular social theory I introduced in the previous section. I now turn to consider how these key features of postsecularity relate to research on the historical and contemporary nature of sexualities in Western societies.

1.1.3 Sexuality and postsecularity

The historical and sociological theories of secularization recounted in the previous section frequently note the central importance of social transformations around love, marriage, sexuality and gender for understanding contemporary religion in Western societies. Scholars have engaged heavily with the overarching cultural narrative of sexual liberation in the West emerging from the significant social and technological changes of the 1960s, commonly referred to as the sexual revolution (Cook, 2004). Recent work on the cultural history of the British sexual revolution notes the growing circulation of discourses affirming a “swift, widespread, inexorable, post-religious and anti-authoritarian revolution in sexual mores” in the 60s (Brewitt-Taylor, 2017, p. 519), including the erosion of defined gender roles, the legalization of homosexuality, the expansion of LGBTQ rights and the reduction of stigma around pre-marital sex and divorce (Weeks, 2007). In this way, the sexual revolution is often taken to be the major driver of Christianity’s loss of hegemony over public sexual morality and the widespread changes in sexual values, attitudes and behaviours that followed.

Zygmunt Bauman argues that we should understand these changes as the “emancipation of eroticism from both sexual reproduction and love - and setting it free to perform a variety of new tasks” (1998, p. 19).

While this evidence for the major scale and extent of changes to sexuality and gender in the 20th Century endures, the recent cultural historiography of sexuality in Britain has raised serious questions about the received narrative that places secularization and the sexual revolution in tandem. Jeffrey Weeks notes that although public discourse widely declared the sexual revolution through the 60s, there was little evidence of widespread change in sexual behaviour until the early 70s (2007, p. 20). Following this, Sam Brewitt-Taylor (2017) argues that a primary cause of these actual measurable changes was the narrative of the sexual revolution created by influential radical Christian clergymen that rapidly circulated through popular media. In a similar vein, Timothy Jones’ review of work engaging postsecularity in the history and sociology of sexuality concludes:

In complex and sometimes unexpected ways, these examples reveal how taking theology seriously in the history of sexuality shows how religious sexual knowledge was not displaced by new scientific regimes, but continued, and continued in a dynamic, rather than static manner. A growing acknowledgement of the persistent relationship between the spiritual and the sexual in the 20th century is thus beginning to erode the secularist assumptions undergirding British sexual historiography. (2013, p. 925)

In this way, recent work is casting doubt on the notion that the changes in sexual and gender standards since the 60s should be considered as ‘post-religious’ phenomena of progressive secularization. This postsecular turn in the history of sexuality in Britain provides important

frame for qualitative, interpretative work on religious youth sexualities as well as sexuality education.

Building on this historical and sociological evidence, feminist scholars such as Rosi Braidotti (2008) and Joan Scott (2013) draw attention to a postsecular turn in feminism, critical of the received narrative that women benefitted unequivocally from the sexual revolution and the subsequent social changes. Scott's concept of sexularism as descriptive of this ideology has been influential on the work of Mary Lou Rasmussen (2012), whose analysis of progressive sexuality education is key to the next section of this chapter.

As I have already argued, it is also important to consider the affordances of a postsecular theory of sexuality for empirical research. Jakobsen and Pellegrini support this agenda in their critical work on secularism, drawing attention to the need for empirical work considering "how practices of sexual and religious freedom can be theorized in tandem with, rather than in constant opposition to, one another." (2008, p. 15) Such a postsecular approach to the qualitative study of sexualities would require the troubling of binary thinking about certain aspects of sexuality as 'characteristically secular/non-religious' and others as 'characteristically Christian/religious' and to open up productive new interpretative possibilities in thinking beyond this binary. The concept of postsecularity and its troubling of received narratives and rigid binaries around religion and sexuality will be drawn on extensively in the final chapter.

1.1.4 Summary

Following the three features of postsecularity noted in section 1.1.1, there are thus three features of a postsecular approach to sexuality, with the first two being descriptive and the third normative: (1) the resilience and resurgence of religion in influencing sexual norms, (2) the blurring of boundaries between secular and religious sexual ethics and (3) the imagination

of forms of political organization supporting the co-existence of diverse sexual moral cultures. There are other ways that postsecularity and sexuality are theorized in sociological literature, but this is the working definition I will draw on throughout the thesis. I will now move from considering postsecularity in the study of sexual cultures to considering how these three features can be found across a disparate body of sexuality education research and how this frames the original contribution of this thesis.

1.2 Religion in sexuality education research

1.2.1 Introduction

In her (2015) book *Progressive Sexuality Education: The Conceits of Secularism*, Mary Lou Rasmussen sets out a fourfold analysis of sexuality education taking place across the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Northern Ireland. According to Rasmussen, progressive sexuality education is defined by four key features:

- 1) optimal when underpinned by rigorous scientific research and rational debate;
- 2) needs to promote sexual autonomy to ensure that young people are able to act as autonomous sexual subjects;
- 3) responsible for the cultivation of tolerance of sexual and gender diversity;
- 4) precludes discussion of the intersections among faith, religion, and morality (such conversations should happen in private settings). (ibid., p. 1).

Rasmussen's fourth point is particularly important for my argument in this chapter. Insofar as it separates discourses of faith, religion and morality to private settings in favour of a public discourse of rationality, autonomy and tolerance, Rasmussen argues that progressive education should be understood as *secularist*. In the rest of the book, Rasmussen supports this analysis by showing how these features play out in various sexuality education debates

concerning matters like homophobia, moral panic and teenage pregnancy. For the purposes of my argument in this chapter, I rely on Rasmussen's analysis as being an accurate diagnosis of progressive sexuality education in the U.K., despite the fact that her study does not extend that far. However it is important to note that just as Rasmussen acknowledges that the secularism of progressive sexuality education is not monolithic but mutates, shifts, strengthens and weakens across temporal and global contexts, so progressive sexuality education in England cannot be seen as simplistically and monolithically secularist. Indeed, one of the major gaps in research that this thesis does not address, but opens up space for, is research tracking English sexuality education provision in contexts of religious diversity.

In her final chapter, Rasmussen outlines her own nuanced critical stance on the limitations and potentialities of secularist progressive sexuality education. She argues that while these four features and the complex network of underlying values should not be abandoned, the hegemony of secularism ought to be troubled. My own position aligns closely with that of Rasmussen's – much of the literature I review here is also addressed in her work. Although Rasmussen does not use the terminology of postsecularism, I consider her critical analysis of secularist progressive sexuality education as an attempt to open up a postsecular space of contestation, and it is these spaces of contestation that this section describes. In this section and indeed in the rest of the thesis, I build on her work by drawing attention to the *postsecular* orientation of both Rasmussen's work and other work engaging sexuality education and religion together. In doing this, I identify the strengths of this body of work for effecting a constructive reimagination of sexuality education inspired by Rasmussen's call for the troubling of hegemonic secularism. I identify research as having a postsecular orientation where it acknowledges, draws attention to, and/or attempts to respond to, the three features of postsecularity and postsecular sexuality as articulated above in sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.3.

1.2.2 Religion resisting progressive sexuality education reform

Histories of sexuality education in the 20th Century draw attention to a notable pattern of religious resistance to sexuality education expansion and reform. In the U.S., sexuality education is often seen as part of what Kristin Luker (2007) describes as the ‘sex wars’, with ongoing contestation over the funding of abstinence-only programmes between conservative evangelical political alliances and progressive campaigns for comprehensive sexuality education (2007). In her book *Virgin Nation*, Sara Moslener shows how the Christian theologies of sexual purity mixed with nationalist ideology buttress abstinence-only approaches and ensure they continue to receive support (2015). However, this analysis of religion and sexuality education is not readily applicable to the U.K. context. The role of Christianity in politics is significantly different in the U.K., with there being little evidence for a ‘U.S. style’ Christian right (Hatcher, 2017). In the U.K., Christian political alliances exerted their influence on sexuality education through the 20th Century by maintaining the ‘medico-moral’ (Mort, 2000) focus on controlling adolescent sexual morality in support of social hygiene, rather than through centrally funded programmes (Pilcher, 2005, p. 154). Since the Education Act of 1993, which made sex education compulsory in all secondary schools, resistance has shifted from buttressing medico-moralism to maintaining the parental right to withdraw their children from non-statutory sex education programmes. This shift can be seen in Dana Wilkinson’s research in which she examined the policy processes around sexuality education in England and Northern Ireland, gathering data on key actors’ views of which organizations were most influential (2017). Notably, 7 out of the 14 influential policy-making sex education organizations (those identified by two or more policy actors in Wilkinson’s interviews) were religion-based (ibid., p. 616). Wilkinson concludes:

Differing interpretations of rights-based values, greater religious and non-faith diversity and the recent Conservative-majority in government adopting an internalised, ‘top down’ policy strategy are major contributing factors to

England's continued non-statutory, comprehensive SRE. The Conservative-majority (since 2010) has exploited the authoritative power of the ruling government to overshadow many of the concerns of those within the larger SRE policy network. (ibid., p. 606)

Thus Wilkinson locates the stalling of progressive sexuality education reform in the conditions of religious and non-religious *diversity* rather than one particular network (in contrast to the U.S. model). This diversity typically leads to a failure of consensus and thus to the frustration of reform. Wilkinson's work also highlights a shift in political discourse increasingly towards the language of legal rights. Sandberg (2014) notes that the emergence of the field of religion and law has increased the tendency of religious groups to appeal to legal rights for the preservation of power and influence in policy spheres, reflecting a concession to the secular force of legal rights. Vaggione calls this movement 'reactive politicization' (2012), showing how increasingly the concerns of conservative religious political actors clusters around public issues of sexuality and gender – "instead of centering on the notions of morality and God, they are turning to scientific data and legal discourses in a sort of strategic secularism" (ibid., p. 240). Though Vaggione's work focuses on Latin America and with rather more hard-line religious activism, his idea of strategic secularism is certainly applicable to the changes amongst religious engagement with progressive sexuality education reform.

A significant change in the status of sexuality education in politics has occurred since Wilkinson's analysis. A Women and Equalities Committee (WEC) report in March 2016 found that a significant percentage of girls and young women had experienced sexual harassment at school and noted the persistent failure of schools to address these issues adequately. The report was given further salience through the wave of sexual assault allegations in Hollywood under '#MeToo' in 2017 and the widespread media reporting

around this. The report argued that high quality, statutory RSE would be a significant step forward in addressing these issues.

Precipitated by the WEC report, campaigns for statutory status that had been ongoing gained significant cross-party support. Finally, in 2017 an amendment to the Children and Social Work Act was made that passed through both the Lords and the Commons with overwhelming support. The amendment to the Act stated “a) relationships education to be provided to pupils of compulsory school age receiving primary education at schools in England” and “b) relationships and sex education to be provided (instead of sex education) to pupils receiving secondary education at schools in England.” (*Children and Social Work Act 2017*) Other important features of the amendment besides the separation between Relationship Education in primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education in secondary schools were stipulations about the content of forthcoming guidance replacing that issued by the DfE in 2000, “ensuring the pupils learn about— (i) safety in forming and maintaining relationships, (ii) the characteristics of healthy relationships, and (iii) how relationships may affect physical and mental health and well-being, and (b) the education is appropriate having regard to the age and the religious background of the pupils.” (*ibid.*). Significantly, the amendment maintained the right of parents to the withdrawal of their children established in the 1993 Education Act.

The explicit inclusion of religion in the legislation is further evidence for the salience of religion for sexuality education. The clause reflects a shift from government concessions to elite political religious resistance to efforts at religious inclusivity. The process of consultation and formation of guidance following the amendment began to precipitate increasing awareness of the tensions between sexuality education and religion, religious schools and religious parents. In particular, concerns were expressed about the stipulation giving ‘appropriate regard to religious background’ concerning the licence for faith schools to

not teach LGBTQ inclusive programmes (National Secular Society, 2017). While religious bodies like the Church of England and the Catholic Education Service welcomed the guidance, the Church of England education secretary Nigel Genders expressed concerns that religion could become ‘ghettoized’ in new approaches (2018). Concerns over the curriculum also arose in other religious communities around the UK. The importance of the relationship between religion and sexuality education emerged most clearly in the protests discussed in the first section of my introduction to the thesis.

The recent passing of the statutory guidance, its religious stipulations, and the popular responses to its impending implementation demonstrates clearly the entanglements of religion and sexuality education, both historically and in changing forms through the early 21st Century, indicating the productivity of postsecularity for considering sexuality education. In the same way that postsecular social theory calls into question the positioning of the social transformations of sexuality post-60s as ‘post-religious’ and thus as secularizing, so the recent history of sexuality education in the U.K. demonstrates the resilience and persistence of religion and religious change in setting the possibilities and limits of sexuality education, in spite of Christianity’s ostensible loss of moral hegemony.

1.2.3 LGBTQ-inclusive sexuality education and religion

The changing visibility and political representation of LGBTQ sexualities is key to understanding the recent history of sexuality education and its entanglements with religion. Vanderbeck and Johnson (2015) show the role of religion in resisting sexuality education reform through contestations over LGBTQ rights and inclusivity. They note in particular the enduring legacy of Section 28, legislation which precluded the promotion of homosexuality in schools as a ‘pretended family relationship’. Vanderbeck and Johnson state that campaign for the repeal of Section 28 was granted immense symbolic significance by LGBTQ

advocacy organizations but was met with significant resistance from various Christian groups (though notably, the Church of England eventually supported its repeal) (ibid., p. 161).

Section 28 and its legacy of religious support continues to be invoked in contemporary progressive sexuality education advocacy in England. The recent protests in Birmingham have been positioned in some popular news media as posing a threat to LGBTQ rights comparable to Section 28 (Jones, 2019) should they succeed in blocking inclusive sexuality education provision.

Vanderbeck and Johnson go on to show how topics around diversity of sexual orientation are repeatedly positioned as requiring adaption to religious diversity through multiple government publications on sexuality education (2015, p. 167). They also draw attention to the ongoing role of politically engaged religious groups such as the Evangelical Alliance and the Catholic Education Service in opposing changes to sex education provision and preserving the right to withdrawal.

Since Vanderbeck and Johnson's research, the Church of England published a booklet entitled *Valuing all God's Children* containing guidance for combatting homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. Following Baker, James and Reader's analysis of Anglican education as a case of "entangled fidelities" (2015, p. 154), it is clear that faith schools organizations are increasingly having to adapt to the shifting legal landscape around sexual diversity in schools following the 2010 Equality Act and its highlighting of sexual orientation and gender identity as 'protected characteristics'.

Vanderbeck and Johnson's critical perspective on the role of religion in sexuality education changes should be understood as part of a broad cultural change in the tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, resulting, as Dagmar Herzog argues from a "feed-back loop" of activism, scandal, and scientific investigation (2011, p. 35). The growing influence of

LGBTQ rights groups such as Stonewall on policy consultation and implementation has been accompanied by analogous shifts in progressive sexuality education discourse, moving in England from a focus on teenage pregnancy reduction for correcting social exclusion to addressing homophobia and various hegemonic sexual stereotypes (DfE, 2019, p. 28). A significant body of research and scholarship is devoted to this project. One study of a sex education programme delivered in Scotland combined classroom observation with teacher/pupil surveys and interviews, finding significant evidence of heterosexism and homophobia in all cases (Buston & Hart, 2001). In another small-scale study on English curricula, the absence of ‘issues around sexual diversity was highlighted’, with the effect of this being ‘overwhelmingly negative’ on LGBT young people (Sauntson & Simpson, 2011). LGBTQ-inclusive sex education advocates predominantly consider a purely ‘anti-bullying’ strategy to be inadequate by itself (Formby, 2015). The Sex Education Forum (henceforth SEF) has advocated for LGBTQ-inclusive sex education since its conception and imagines this to be a stance adopted throughout the whole of a curriculum or pedagogy rather than a bolt-on ‘gay lesson’, particularly through encouraging teachers to change the language they use mindful of sexual and gender minorities. Inclusive language changes are supposed to be part of dismantling heteronormativity, defined by Berlant & Warner as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged.” (2003, p. 15). Decentralizing the reproductive sexuality in typical sex education practice can be achieved through cultivating an awareness of diverse sexualities and sexual practices. Overall, the project of LGBTQ-inclusivity should be understood as being aimed at the *recognition* of diverse sexual and gender identities in sexuality education classrooms. Both implicit approaches, like the use of inclusive language, and explicit approaches, like activities aimed at addressing homophobia, are deployed to achieve this. Recognition is achieved where

LGBTQ students feel their specific concerns are being addressed and their existence acknowledged and welcomed.

How is religion positioned in this body of literature on LGBTQ inclusive sexuality education? Rasmussen argues that progressive sexuality education discourse around LGBTQ inclusivity can be productively analysed using Jasbir Puar's concept of the queer secular (2007, cited in Rasmussen, 2009, p. 3). The queer secular refers to political conditions in which religion and queer sexuality are neatly separated from each other, giving rise to forms of sexual exceptionalism in which it is assumed that only secularism carries hope for the advancement of LGBTQ rights (Puar, 2007). In sexuality education literature, the notion of the queer secular is reified through work on LGBTQ inclusivity in its consistent omission of the role of religion and its positioning of religion and religious political groups as a threat to the pedagogical recognition of diverse sexualities. The problematic nature of the queer secular can clearly be seen in the English context through the Birmingham protests and various news media framings of the events, in which conservative Islam is further entrenched as anathematic to secular legal LGBTQ rights to recognition. However, the queer secular, a manifestly *critical* concept, implies a postsecular theoretical move troubling the neat separation of religion and sexuality. These potentialities can be seen in instances of entangled fidelities such as the Church of England's deployment of theological discourses in their work addressing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.

1.2.4 Religion and sexuality education for gender equality

I argued above that the passing of the statutory guidance for England was precipitated by the publishing of the WEC report on sexual harassment and violence in schools, exploiting a cultural moment in which gender related violence was becoming increasingly visible. The increasingly LGBTQ-inclusive focus of progressive sexuality education has thus also been

accompanied by an increasing focus on the prevention of gender related violence through the addressing of sexism and misogyny and promotion of attitudes supportive of gender equality in romantic relationships and sexuality. Gender critical sexuality education has been high on the agenda of feminist sexuality education scholarship since Michelle Fine's (1988) seminal essay 'The Missing Discourse of Desire'. Fine argues that the typical emphasis of sex education on reproduction excludes female sexual desire and pleasure, as the male orgasm is framed as central to the process of reproduction and female pleasure silenced. Sexuality in this kind of sex education fails to acknowledge many other non-reproductive sexual practices which she argues are required for female sexual pleasure. This limitation, she argues, continues to position young women as passive sexual agents, their bodies at-risk of untimely impregnation; resultantly, they continue to consider themselves as passive victims of male sexual interests. Fine's work showed how sex education could take up and repeat surrounding cultural discourses, and that the wider political task of giving voice to silenced discourses could be instantiated in school sex education. Although Fine is writing about the U.S. context, Sundaram and Sauntson's research draws directly from her work to find evidence for this "missing discourse of desire" in English sex education, through analyses of curriculum and interviews with both practitioners and students of sex education (2015).

Based on these gender critical approaches, sexuality education programmes have been developed that centralize the goal of gender equality. Gender critical scholars have proposed pleasure-inclusive curricula that work towards promoting equality. Crucially, advocates have drawn attention to evidence that a pleasure-inclusive programme that centralizes gender equality also leads to better sexual health outcomes (Haberland, 2015). Ingham (2005) has argued that this may be the case because (especially for young women) the greater sense of sexual agency and empowerment that comes with being given discursive resources for expressing and pursuing their own desires leads to them feeling more able to say 'no' as well

as ‘yes’, or to insist on the use of contraception. In practice, Rogow Haberland & de Valle et al. found that while using the *It’s All One* curriculum (2013), an “empowerment approach... seeks to empower young people, especially girls and other marginalized young people, to see themselves and others as equal members in their relationships, able to protect their own health, and as individuals capable of engaging as active participants in society” (Haberland and Rogow, 2015, p. 515). Research has also attempted to identify the challenges and opportunities of doing sexuality education with boys (Hilton, 2007) and how hegemonic masculinity can be disrupted through gender critical pedagogy (Allen, 2003). However, given the close relationship between religious norms and gender ideals it is notable that religion is rarely engaged substantially through these studies. This is particularly notable given the fact that the *It’s All One* curriculum aspires to be delivered in diverse religious and non-religious contexts featuring very different cultural standards around gender.

Lisa Isherwood’s (2004) article in *Sex Education* is one of the only pieces of published academic work that explicitly relates gender critical sexuality education to a theological framework. Isherwood’s theological perspective on sexuality education, positioned as it is in the frequently controversial space between feminism and Christian theology, draws attention to the fact that the promotion of gender equality through pleasure-inclusive sexuality education, while appearing to be a progressive, secularist agenda, can be anchored within an explicitly Christian theological framework. Related to this, there are many practical, faith-based initiatives working towards the promotion of gender equality amongst young people. Next, I consider how some of these organizations sit within a growing field of research and practice that problematizes religious resistance to progressive sexuality education reform. However, those described below are primarily in the U.S. context and there is need for further research tracking the involvement of faith-based organizations promoting gender equality in schools in the U.K..

1.2.5 Problematizing assumptions around religious resistance

While there is good evidence for ongoing religious opposition to progressive reform of sexuality education, the relationship between religion and sexuality education is far more complex than this both in the U.K. and beyond. For example, Debra Haffner, a Unitarian Universalist Minister, founded the U.S. based ‘Religious Institute’, which describes itself as ‘dedicated to sexual health, education and justice’. The Religious Institute is demonstrably progressive in its support for women’s reproductive rights such as increased access to contraception and abortion. For Haffner, her work in sexual health is profoundly shaped by her Christian theological commitments, particularly the practice of ‘truth-telling’ and encouraging various religious denominations and movements to consider carefully how they teach about sexuality. Haffner states “as of this writing, 19 denominations have published sexuality education curricula for use in faith communities, and more than 20 faith-based organizations are on record as supporting sexuality education programs in the public schools” (2010, p. 4). Both Haffner’s practical work and published writing try to dislodge the assumption that religious groups are inherently opposed to progressive sexuality education.

In a similar vein, Heather D. Boonstra has highlighted that faith-based organizations may in fact represent positive prospects for resisting abstinence-only approaches (2008). She collates various research highlighting religious support amongst institutional bodies, local communities and advocacy bodies for comprehensive sexuality education. Both Boonstra and other researchers taking this approach acknowledge their commitment to progressive forms of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and align themselves with lobby groups such as Planned Parenthood which are typically seen as opposed to religious sexual morality. For example, Landry et. al have tracked faith-based organizations provision of CSE and how they position their own organizational aims in relation to the implicit agendas of CSE (2011), giving particular attention to how religion-related resistance to CSE can be overcome so that

the programmes can be delivered effectively. Further, Dent & Maloney's (2017) research highlight support for CSE amongst evangelical parents in a conservative state, effectively challenging an existing preconception of anxious, resistant religious parents as frustrating of sexuality education reform. Similarly, there are a number of faith-based organizations in England that aim to provide CSE (e.g. acetUK, Lovewise, Challenge Team UK) that have not to this date been researched in the same way as their US equivalents. In this way, the existence of religious (primarily Christian) advocacy for and provision of CSE calls into question the dominant assumption of religious resistance to sexuality education in the U.K.

In their book *Faith, Values and Sex Education* (2002) published through the Sex Education Forum, Simon Blake and Zarine Katrak draw attention to examples of school and community projects that have apparently successfully delivered effective, progressive sexuality education programmes in religiously diverse areas. Further, the main constructive project of the book and the associated pamphlets circulated to SEF members at its time of publication was to ensure effective processes of mediation to deal with the concerns of parents.

The power of this research agenda is in its drawing attention to counternarratives where the assumed oppositionality of progressive sexuality education and religious values have apparently been overcome. These postsecular narratives in which sexuality education oppositions are troubled and even collapsed shift scholarly attention away from conflict and aporia as a sign of failed mediation and negotiation to instances where these failures have been corrected through the application of correct techniques of facilitated dialogue and mediation. In the case of Boonstra and Haffner's work, this is made possible by engaging religious communities adopting more characteristically secular/liberal stances that are supportive of the progressive principles of rationality, autonomy, tolerance and secular privatization and sympathetic to characteristically progressive causes. In the U.K., the pressing need to present a consensus about the positive potential of sexuality education across

cultural differences was the driving force behind work to draw attention to successful cases of programme delivery amidst diversity such as Blake and Katrak's (2002). In both cases, progressive advocates adopted a postsecular sensibility troubling divisions between religious values and sexual rights, which led to strategic advocacy successes.

1.2.6 Consensus and dissensus over values

In response to the apparent prevalence of religious resistance to sex education, during its early days, the SEF and its partner organizations in the U.K. such as Brook, the Family Planning Association and the National Children's Bureau sought to build consensus around the positive possibilities of sex education by working with religious leaders and communities. 1993-4 was a particularly intense period of engagement with religious groups that produced some significant published outputs. A resource titled *Religion, Ethnicity and Sex Education* by Rachel Thomson (1993) was produced for the SEF following a period of interreligious dialogue around sexual beliefs and religion. This booklet positioned itself as part of the 'equal opportunities' agenda of the time and aimed to "challenge the view that religions offer only negative messages around sex, wanting to explore the broader philosophy and rationale behind specific religious prescriptions" (Thomson, 1993, p.2). Part of the motivation for this was to ensure that sex education could be delivered to religiously diverse groups in such a way that parents did not feel the need to exercise their right to withdrawal. It is worth noting that, in contradiction to the current agenda of the SEF, the process was undertaken exclusively in consultation with concerned adult educationalists, not religious young people/religious recipients of sex education. The booklet proceeds through various religious traditions outlining their values and how these apply to specific issues, e.g. abortion, homosexuality, contraception, etc. At the same time as the SEF's project, a pack compiled by Gill Lenderyou and Mary Porter was being produced as part of the *Values, Faith and Sex Education* project. Lenderyou and Porter prescribe 'enabling' values for governing sex

education, meaning those values on which general agreement can be reached (1994).

Subsequently, consensus over values became the dominant approach in articulating the moral/ethical foundations of sex education.

In *Values and Sex Education* (2003) Halstead and Reiss set out a clear framework for values problematizing Lenderyou and Porter's notion of enabling values, articulating instead 'defensible' values for sex education. Defensible values are preferable to enabling values and their tendency to secular neutrality and relativism. A defensible values approach accepts disagreement and moral difference while not allowing this to paralyse the search for common ground (ibid., p. 26). They go on to set out the core defensible liberal values – freedom, equality and rationality – alongside other values stemming from feminism, religion and communitarianism that might be in tension with these. While they acknowledge the tensions between liberal values and these alternatives, the main orientation on the book is towards those places where they do in fact agree – there is resonance as well as tension between these differing values. Halstead and Reiss go on to discuss a range of other possible aims and content for sex education such as love, pleasure and family.

Continuing in this vein, Sharon Lamb has articulated a form sexuality education centralizing values, morality and ethics as philosophically contested. Like Halstead and Reiss, Lamb's *Sexual Ethics for a Caring Society* (or SECS-C) curriculum explicitly rejects the value-neutrality of progressive public health approaches in favour of a dialogical pedagogy centralizing philosophical debate and discussion over a variety of ethically important topics (Lamb, 2010). Lamb's programme is significant in its explicit inclusion of religious perspectives. While the resolutely ethical pedagogy of SECS-C opens up significantly more space for a variety of contradictory positions to be given respectful attention within a democratic classroom, her positioning of religious sexual ethics relies on a simplistic binary

division between ‘sex-positive’ and ‘sex-negative’ religion developed by Robert Francouer (1999).

Elsewhere, Mark Halstead has worked specifically on problems related to Islam and sex education in England. While some earlier perspectives were negative about the possibility of a sex education inclusive of Muslims, Halstead’s work sets out three features of a sex education sensitive to Muslims: 1) provision of single sex classes with a same-sex teacher; 2) checking materials are not considered immodest, indecent or sinful; 3) ensuring that Muslim perspectives (e.g. on marriage and homosexuality) are given equal respect and prominence (Halstead, 1997, p. 328).

Together, Halstead and Reiss’s work lays important foundations and opens up theoretical space for approaching sexuality education as postsecular. Their work has a postsecular sensibility insofar as it resists the notion that religious ethics can be easily absorbed into secular ethics and resists the idea that the values of sexuality education pedagogy should be those that are minimally agreeable by all parties. However, very little has been done since their book and associated articles to build on, extend, or rigorously apply their approach to curriculum, policy or practice. The way the language of values plays out in progressive sexuality education discourse tends towards the neutral, universal values promising an all-encompassing, affirmative inclusivity following Lenderyou and Porter rather than defensible values which emphasize both common ground *and* disagreement. For example, in 2010 a multi-disciplinary group of researchers from Australia developed a framework of 15 domains for “healthy sexual development” (McKee, Albury, and Dunne), which was given support by the SEF in England at their 2017 ‘Healthy Sexual Development Symposium’. While the 15 domains attempt to be as broad ranging as possible and secure some common ground as to the ideal patterns of adolescent sexual development, they do not engage religion and spirituality or reference any research on religion and sexuality. In this way they are

exemplary of how attempts to secure common ground with regards to adolescent sexuality frequently result in the elision of religion or the concerns of the religious.

The neutrality of the values approach is also notable in the shift from the SEF's engagement with *religion* per se in the 90s to the language of *faith* and *values* in the 2000s. While 'religion' implies something rigid and immovable and closing down of progressive reform, 'faith' and 'values' imply something rather more pliant that can be adapted to the conditions of postsecularity. The need to build consensus for statutory-status advocacy necessitated this change of strategy, presenting a secular consensus on values and the minimization of contestation for the sake of successful advocacy. As a result, the attempt to orient the language of values towards both dissensus and consensus represented in the work of Halstead and Reiss was side-lined. Sharon Lamb's ethics-based curriculum represents a more recent attempt to recover this dialogical approach, but her work has remained limited in its influence in both the U.S. and the U.K. and there remain serious problems in the positioning of religious sexual ethics within the programmes. In this way, postsecularity supplies both solutions and further problems for progressive sexuality education. A postsecular positioning of religion as present, but deinstitutionalized, detraditionalized and universalized, supplied progressive sexuality education advocacy with resources for reform at the price of the concealment of real dissensus. It is this cultural dissensus that has re-emerged, having been minimalized, in the protesting responses to the statutory guidance.

1.2.7 Grounding sexuality education theologically

While Halstead and Reiss attempted to secure a values framework conversant primarily with the liberal tradition, recent work has attempted to articulate theological foundations for religious support of and provision for progressive sexuality education. Alireza Tabatabaie has attempted to set out a basis for progressive sexuality education based on Islamic theology

(2015). Tabatabaie attempts to balance the Islamic concern for protecting and preserving the sexual innocence of children through the Islamic idea of the ‘discernment phase’ or ‘stage of intellectual grasp’, beginning at age seven. According to Tabatabaie, this means that “Islamic views on sexuality, childhood and adolescence are not incompatible with the provision of sex education for Muslim children and adolescents” and further, that “Islam has highly valued children’s rights, particularly to education and health, and recognises education regarding sexual matters as a crucial part of every child’s upbringing” (ibid., p. 284). While he clearly notes the inherent tension between secular, progressive understandings of child development and Islamic perspectives, he draws attention to the inherent risks of the discourse of innocence to child and adolescent sexual health and the need for further work from Islamic scholars to address this risk within traditional boundaries.

Similarly engaged with theological ethics, Olwyn Mark’s book *Educating for Sexual Virtue: A Moral Vision for Relationships and Sex Education* (2018) sets out a theological critique of the liberal paradigm of ‘informed choice’ and advances a sex education pedagogy founded on Christian virtue ethics. What makes Mark’s project striking is that although the foundational theological virtues of love and chastity she advocates are at odds with the ‘sex-positivity’ of progressive sexuality education at large, her work resonates with progressive perspectives like Sharon Lamb’s, reacting against value neutrality and the individualizing and privatizing functions of secular liberalism. These two projects of securing robust theological legitimacy for sexuality education within distinctive religious traditions are remarkable within the history of sexuality education. Both Tabatabaie and Mark’s work as distinctively religious projects are at once postsecular in their attempt to identify common ground with secular perspective while maintaining the distinctive traditions they are a part of.

1.2.8 Critical pedagogy for religion-inclusive sexuality education

This leads us to the work of Fida Sanjakdar. Sanjakdar's work advances a form of progressive sexuality education that is inclusive of religion and religious young people, drawing on critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, as developed by educational philosopher Paulo Freire (1996), aims to facilitate students' critical examination of the cultural norms that structure their lives. In sexuality education, critical pedagogy provides a strong underlying framework making possible the interrogation of gender stereotypes, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and various other forms of oppression and marginalization (Bay-Cheng, 2017). Critical pedagogy takes education to fundamentally be a task of social justice and the formation of more equal societies. In sexuality education, these political and pedagogical presuppositions underpin the aims of gender equality, sex positivity, LGBTQ inclusivity and needs-responsiveness. The development of students' critical faculties buttresses sexuality education's liberal centralizing of individual autonomy, but aspires to a more socially conscious sexual citizen through the application of sociological perspectives on power and cultural hegemony (such as the virgin/slut sexual double standard). However, the underlying political philosophy, critical theory, tends to view religion as always already a form of oppression requiring liberation; in this way critique itself is essentially secularizing. Critical pedagogy is thus a potential site of religious resistance, insofar as the fundamental pedagogical goal is to help students question and deconstruct their received religious traditions without also supplying opportunities to support and uphold those traditions (Merry, 2005).

However, critical pedagogy, according to Sanjakdar and her co-authors, can make space for religion as a form of "transgressive knowledge" (Sanjakdar & Yip, 2018, p. 117) or "agitational theory" (ibid., p118). Critique then, is not necessarily a force of secularization but allows space for religion as a resource for problematizing oppressive norms. For Sanjakdar, the critical pedagogical paradigm is not necessarily exclusive of religion. On this

account, the failure of sexuality education to address students ethnic and religious backgrounds limits the potential for effective critical pedagogical practice (Sanjakdar et al., 2015, p. 68). Sanjakdar's appropriation of critical theory and pedagogy thus represents a postsecular move, away from assumptions about the essential secularity of critique, mirroring the arguments of Asad, Brown, Butler and Mahmood in *Is Critique Secular?* (2013). While feminist sexuality education scholarship has typically been suspicious of the claims of religious communities to oppression narratives, Sanjakdar's work opens up this possibility.

1.2.9 New materialism and sexuality education – questioning inclusivity

Critical approaches to sexuality education are increasingly drawing on critical race theory and postcolonial studies to call secularist orientations and their liberal feminist resonances into question. While these approaches do not focus primarily on religion, religion is addressed in its entanglements with race and ethnicity. Miedema and Yaa Oduro argue that the progressive sex education projects they researched in Ghana and Mozambique should be considered as colonizing assemblages, importing Western liberal and secular ideals of adolescent sexual development of individual responsibility through behaviour change intervention (2017). Similarly, Quinlivan locates coloniality in the assemblage of 'getting it right' in sexuality education classrooms and shows how this ends up essentializing constructs of race and gender (2017). In Haggis & Mulholland's (2014) research on cultural diversity and inclusivity Australian sex education centralized classroom interactions with 'Lee', a newly arrived migrant participating in discussions about gender and 'slut' discourse. Haggis & Mulholland observe that "through [the facilitator] taking responsibility for making space to include his difference, an already marginalised subjectivity was made even more visible. In this way, he became the category of difference, which denied the relational production of difference occurring in the classroom" (p. 62). Allen and Quinlivan, working in the Australian and New Zealand contexts, reflect on cultural and religious diversity in sex

education, picking up on the experience of one Muslim young woman they encountered in their research (2017). In one particular sex education lesson, ‘Carol’, they state, “does not follow line of questioning, not wanting or expecting her needs to be met within the school sexuality education as she fears it will be misrepresented” (ibid., p. 182).

Allen, Quinlivan, Haggis and Mulholland’s recommendations for re-thinking sexuality education draw on increasingly influential new materialist philosophers such as Karen Barad and philosophers of education influenced by new materialism such as Sharon Todd. These philosophical orientations tend towards a suspension of the interventionist attitude guiding much sexuality education pedagogy and move towards the cultivation of a greater awareness of the aporias of sexuality education rather than always seeking a normative solution. For example, Todd offers a critique of intercultural pedagogies as “synonymous with a view of individuals as the aggregate of their cultural attributes” (2011 p. 102). She articulates an approach to difference that “offers not so much a space for conflict resolution, or for conflict aversion, but one for conflict articulation” (ibid. p. 111). Elsewhere Todd neatly coins this approach as an “agonistic cosmopolitics” (2010, p. 213). Thus, new materialist approaches to sexuality education, under the influence of philosophers like Todd, thus also carry within them significant shifts in pedagogical approach relevant for any possible postsecular reimagination. I will return to this in considering literature on student voice in the next section.

While at face value new materialism appears anathematic to religious commitments, theological appropriations of new materialist philosophy underpin significant work on postsecular theory and practice, including that of Cloke, Baker, James and Reader noted in section 1.1.1. As such, the engagement with religion, as part of a turn within feminist sexuality education scholarship to race and ethnicity underpinned by new materialist

philosophical orientations, further indicates the power and potential of a postsecular sensibility for sexuality education.

1.2.10 Student voice

The idea that young people's views should be taken into account is itself a distinct position within a philosophy of education that is partially a reflection of the unique character of sex education as a 'life-skills' aspect of education rather than a purely intellectual pursuit. The need for some preceding understanding of the cultural contexts of learners can also be considered as part of the widespread language of 'co-constructed knowledge', part of the legacy of Deweyan educational progressivism.

The earliest work on sex education that moved to consider young people's views was conducted by Isobel Allen (1987), and followed by Measor, Tiffin & Miller (2000), who accented the role of gender in framing attitudes towards sexuality and sex education.

Research has continued to note young people's desires for a frank/explicit approach to sex (Allen, 2005, p. 400), a knowledgeable and competent teacher, working in small groups (Greene, Fisher, Kuper, Andrews, & Mustanski, 2015) and the type of content to be covered (Stevens, Thompson & Vinson et. al., 2013). The SEF have centralized the voices of young people in their campaigns for quality, statutory sex education through reports on young people's views of and recommendations for their education. The tagline of their recent campaign 'It's my right' itself places the rhetorical voice of a young person passionate and desirous for quality sexuality education centre stage (Jones, 2011b). What has been called the 'needs-led' (Blake & Aggleton, 2017) approach in sexuality education thus relies on youth sexualities expertise to position these needs through various representations and interpretations of adolescent sexual cultures.

However, there is very little research directly engaging religious young people's views on and experiences of sexuality education. Rasmussen's book *The Conceits of Secularism* also contains empirical findings from a small project conducted in four schools across Australia and New Zealand. Focus group data is analysed in terms of the positioning of religion and sexuality, revealing that students consider school to be a secular space in which their religion is to be sidelined or 'privatized', and that this limits their expectations of school sexuality education's religious inclusivity and their own willingness to participate in religion related discussions around sexuality (Rasmussen, 2015, p. 68). Another piece of work by Allen & Brooks (2012) summarized a project in which a CSE programme was delivered to religious university students in the U.S., and their responses to the project analysed via written essays. They categorized responses into four categories of the effect of the programme on participants religiously informed beliefs about sexuality – 'Steadfast', 'Strengthened', 'Challenged', 'Informed'. Although this piece of research is limited in its applicability, it does make a rare acknowledgement that sexuality education programmes have a distinct effect on religious young people.

In the English context, during the expansion of SRE under the teenage pregnancy strategy, Testa and Coleman did research with a religious and ethnically diverse sample of young people in London, finding "greater explanatory power in religion than in ethnicity" when it came to sexual health knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (2006, p. 30). Coleman and Testa also examined variations in sexual health knowledge, attitudes and behaviours amongst the same sample (2008), finding that overall, religious students reported poorer sexual health knowledge. They also found great difference between religions in terms of reporting of sexual intercourse and reporting of contraceptive use. Coleman and Testa's work intended to "demonstrate the importance of tailoring health education and promotion interventions to meet the specific needs of young people from a variety of different religions... to find ways

to work with these young people to broach such sensitive issues.” (ibid., p. 55). Bringing this research agenda up to date, the as-yet unpublished doctoral work of Jo Sell is one of the only attempts to listen directly to religious young people’s views and experiences of sexuality education.

The research outlined in this review so far draws attention to a serious gap in the literature calling into question the validity of the needs-led approach – the absence of research specifically engaging the experiences, evaluations and recommendations for sexuality education from religious young people. While it would be possible to imagine a research project focused on religious young people’s experiences of and expressed needs for sexuality education, following the student voice approaches outlined above, it should be noted how difficult it is to draw a simple line from the expression of needs to the implementation of programmes. Critical research on sexuality education and student voice has noted how consultation with students can simply repeat dominant norms around sexuality (Allen, 2011, p. 7). This issue sits within the general topic of the role of ‘student voice’ in education addressed by Michael Fielding, whose review of the literature on voice identifies extensive concerns that voice “smacks of singularity, of presumed homogeneity, of deferential dependence on the unpredictable dispensations of those who deftly tune the acoustics of the school to the frequencies of a benign status quo.” (2007, p. 306). Further, the incorporation of student voice can lead to an echo chamber whereby students only desire to hear messages that they agree with. This echoes Rasmussen’s concerns that as sexuality education attempts to become more responsive to religious and cultural differences around sexuality, it “runs the risk of essentializing” such differences (2016, p. 132).

However, responsive sexuality education is also approached in terms that seem significantly different to the modes of progressivism dealt with hitherto. In recent years, sexuality education scholarship has been increasingly influenced by new materialism, a philosophical

approach based on the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. Emma Renold's work has been influential in the formation of a new sexuality education curriculum in Wales and draws heavily on new materialism (Renold, 2017). One of the main ways that new materialism opens up new approaches to sexuality education is by de-centring the human (Allen, 2015). This involves, as Renold and Ivinson argue, an aspirational move away from any constitution of young people as sexual subjects "needing to be empowered, transformed or rerouted" (2014, p. 371). Instead, they "emphasize the potential of what girls already do and feel and the more-than-human assemblages which enable these desires" (ibid.). This crucial focus on *the potential of what is already being done* makes a new materialist educational orientation apparently different from those which make policy interventions shaped by problematic representations of adolescent sexuality. New materialist approaches emphasize a 'live' responsiveness to possibilities in interactions within educational contexts, seeking, as Renold and Ivinson continue, to "harness and support girls desires to produce genuinely new ways of being in the world" (ibid.). The pedagogical relationship between teacher and student under new materialism then is one of radical openness to the desires of young people and the possibilities afforded by the sexuality education classroom.

Overall the needs-led approach, its foundation in the principles of student voice and the post-human critiques of this advanced by Renold draw attention to the stalling of this important area of sexuality education research in not engaging with religious young people themselves.

1.2.11 Summary

At the beginning of section 1.2 I introduced the work of Mary Lou Rasmussen and her fourfold analysis of secularist progressive sexuality education. I suggested that both her own work and the work on religion and sexuality education she engages could productively be considered as having a postsecular orientation as introduced in section 1.1. Following this, I

have shown the productivity of the postsecular for understanding the literature engaging the relationship between sexuality education. The work I have outlined variously acknowledges, draws attention to, and/or attempts to respond to, the three features of postsecularity as articulated above in sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.3. However, much like the complex concept of the postsecular itself, there is by no means a simple unity between the work outlined here, but rather a set of converging and diverging philosophical, political and methodological approaches within a broadly identifiable orientation. I call this orientation postsecular because I argue that the work has in common a greater awareness of the changing nature of religion in contemporary society and accompanying concerns to disrupt various discredited narratives of secularization and secularism that aim to keep religion and sexuality separate. Postsecular approaches to sexuality education identify a set of enduring problems around the changing forms of religious sexuality in diverse societies, problems that progressive sexuality education's secularist proclivities minimize. Postsecular approaches present these problems and possible ways forward in various converging and diverging ways. For some (like Halstead and Reiss), the establishment of a clear values framework inclusive of religion is most constructive, for others (like Renold and Allen) it is the suspension of all categorical assumptions about cultural difference amongst youthful sexualities in favour of a radically open and responsive pedagogical position.

The postsecular orientations of the literature reviewed range from identifying counternarratives of rapprochement between religious and secular groups around sexuality education to constructing philosophical and theoretical frameworks able to sustain cultural differences in classroom practice. In some cases, postsecularism supports the representation of consensus and in other cases it draws attention to the impasses and aporias produced by difference in sexuality education classrooms. Within the English context, there are indications of a growing awareness of the importance of religion for sexuality education,

alongside similar signs that sexuality education advocates and policy makers have not yet adequately come to terms with the features of postsecularity. This is evident both in the emergence of the Birmingham protests and in the calls of educational professionals for the government to address more explicitly how the new guidance can be fulfilled, being “appropriate to the age and religious background of the pupils” (*Children and Social Work Act 2017*). Turning now to consider the aims of this thesis in relationship to these issues, I argue that there are four potential negative consequences should the project of progressive sexuality education reform not incorporate and build on the postsecular insights of the research outlined here.

1. By not feeling their religious identity to be recognized in sexuality education lessons, religious young people may disengage, leading to their being less able to engage actively and constructively.
2. As a result of (1) religious young people may not enjoy the same positive outcomes currently agreed on in progressive sexuality education discourse.
3. As a result of (1), non-religious young people will not benefit from the participation of religious young people in discussion and dialogue taking place in classes.
4. The dominance of secular/progressive liberal sexual ethics underpinning sexuality education will continue, leading to a less democratic and representative classroom.
5. The wider cultural view of sexuality education as a secularist project resisted by the religious may be reinforced, leading to greater public antagonism.

The aim of this thesis is thus to set out a reimagination of the relationship between sexuality education and religion that addresses these negative consequences, drawing together and solidifying some of the postsecular orientations of the various disparate elements of research on religion and sexuality education. The need for this work has already been identified by

scholars working within a postsecular orientation – for example Sundaram and Sauntson write:

Recent research suggests that sex education centres on normative subjects, treating categories of difference, including religious and cultural diversity, as 'added on' and deviant from the unchallenged norm [...] In contexts characterised by frequent migration flows and increasingly multicultural communities, such as the UK, European countries and Australasia, it is imperative that we begin to question the hegemonic norm and interrogate the positioning of young people who are culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse, noting that the priorities and concerns of religious, cultural, and ethnic minority youth are not reflected within SRE across a range of contexts. (2016, p. 7)

While there is much potential in this varied and disparate body of work for addressing the needs identified by Sundaram and Sauntson, what I have identified as the most pressing absence in the literature is substantive engagement with religious young people. It is of course not possible for such a reimagining to unproblematically 'synthesize' the various postsecular orientations of the literature engaged, but my narrative study does pick up on several important themes within the literature in its attempt to think what possibilities are opened up through attending to religious sexual subjectivities within the conditions of postsecularity. Progressive sexuality education policy aspires to be 'evidence based' and responsive to the lived sexual cultures of contemporary youth, frequently taking up concepts and narratives about adolescent sexuality that are constructed in part by expertise on youth sexualities. However, as identified in section 1.2.10, sexuality education research has failed to engage religious young people adequately as part of its desire to be responsive to young people's lives. Thus, in the next section I turn to the broad field of youth sexualities research

to see how empirical work with religious young people may be able to address the gap identified and clarify how the aims of the thesis might be addressed.

1.3 Religion in youth sexualities research

Introduction

In this section, I review literature on religion and religious young people in youth sexualities research. First, I review work directly engaging the intersections of religion, youth and sexuality, specifically the work of Sarah-Jane Page and Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip (one of the only significant bodies of qualitative work addressing these intersections in the UK context). I will outline some key findings from their important and innovative ESRC/AHRC funded project *Religion, Youth and Sexuality: A Multi-faith Exploration*, showing the strengths and weaknesses of their work. In what follows, I outline other relevant research on youth sexualities. Within this there is a small body of work that does attend to religion, however, I argue that overall there is an absence of attention to religion and religious young people in many areas of youth sexualities research. This limits the possibility of addressing the previously identified gap in the sexuality education literature. I finish by introducing an extension of Strhan's concept of fractured religious ethical subjectivity – fractured religious sexual subjectivity (see section 1.3.7). I show how this concept, along with postsecular social theory, can help ground a narrative study attempting to address the identified gap.

1.3.1 Yip and Page – The *Religion Youth and Sexuality* project

As part of their *Religion Youth and Sexuality* project, Yip and Page gathered questionnaire data from 693 participants, interview data from 61 participants and video diary data from 24 participants. Participants recruited identified themselves across a range of diverse religious and sexual identities (see 2013, p. 15 for full details of the sample). In their co-authored book, they identify five major themes developed through their analysis of the data. First, the theme

religious faith and young adulthood draws attention to the persistent meaningfulness of religion to young people despite a “supposedly secular society” (ibid., p. 153). Second, *shifting power relationships between religious young adults and religious authority structures* draws attention to youth religiosity as increasingly personalized and less resigned to institutional moral authority, noting also that authority continues to be relevant for many. Third, *connecting religious faith and sexuality through embodiment* draws attention to the body “as a site where social, including religious, norms are contested” (ibid., p. 154). Fourth, *problematizing religious and sexual agency* argues for a more nuanced theoretical approach resistant to the idea that religion always tends to corrode agency. Finally, the theme *construction of ethics for life* combines all the themes together and represents the major theoretical finding of the project.

In *construction of ethics for life*, Yip and Page identify two important narratives in the way that young people related to their religion for sexual ethics: “1) the personal choice of conforming to religious tradition, without necessarily labelling it as an act of subordination; 2) conformity as an act of resignation to the weight of orthodoxy and tradition.” (2013, p. 168). They summarize “in cases such as the latter, a certain degree of compartmentalisation between religious faith and sexuality was often evident” (ibid.). As such, one of the great strengths of Yip and Page’s work is its drawing attention both to where religion does *not* produce feelings of sexual incoherence and to where this is indeed the case. However, contestation, struggle, confusion and inner incoherence is a feature across all the themes in their study and shows clearly the various ways that religion and sexuality are wrestled with across different spaces.

The overarching concept/theme of *construction of ethics for life* contains assumptions about the nature of sexual ethics. This can be seen in one study by Page, drawing on a sub-set of data from the project to develop an account of Christian young people’s sexual negotiations

(2014). Focusing on the expressed rationalizations, reasonings and justifications of Christian young people for the particular opinions they hold and the sexual decisions they make, Page found that Christian young people import secular values in order to construct these personalized ethics. For example, one participant, in her desire to distance herself from an ethic of pre-marital sexual abstinence, “utilised a personalized ethic privileging mutual sexual compatibility, removing religious reasoning from her rationalization” (ibid., p. 105). Page’s analysis thus picks up on the interplay between religion and non-religion in terms of the participants sexual and romantic negotiations in ways that offer fruitful possibilities for future work giving more theoretical and methodological attention to this boundary. Page describes this as “strategies for mediating secular and religious values” (ibid., p. 131), giving the example of Christian young people who move to churches that are more accepting of their ‘personalized’ sexual ethics. Besides these social choices, Page draws on the conceptual language of spatiality: “The (secular) sexual terrain that young adults are presented with offers little room for abstinence and celibacy; rather a love and romance culture infuses everyday life, where intimate relationships become extensions of and emblematic of one’s consumer choices.” (ibid., p. 106). By implication, the secular sexual ‘terrain’ is a commercially mediatized terrain where the culture of love and romance dominates, leaving abstinence and celibacy in the ‘border territories’. Overall, the construction that Page describes here implies a model of ethics as drawing on *resources* of values and morality to *construct* a liveable sexual ethic within different spaces of supportiveness and challenge.

There are however, four notable issues with Yip and Page’s research relevant for my particular concerns in this thesis. The conceptual language of construction is the first. This framing of sexual ethics as a ‘construction’ bringing together different component ‘parts’ is rather static in its lack of attention to the temporal *movement* of sexual ethics as a lived practice, graspable through specific situations requiring ethical practice. While the attention

to religious sexual ethics is important for this thesis' critical engagement with the assumptions of secularist sexuality education about the dominance of secular ethics, the framing of ethics as a static construct of combined parts, with each part identifiable discreetly as religious or non-religious, is incongruent with the postsecular approach to sexuality introduced in section 1.1.3.

The second issue is that although Yip and Page's attention to diversity across religion and sexual/gender identity carries many strengths, it loses the depth and richness that a focus on difference across a more homogenous sample might achieve. Further, the theoretical framework of intersectional identities assumes the relative stability of those identity categories in order to develop analysis. Making religious and sexual *identities* the object of the research tends towards a reduction to these categories and leads to a lack of consideration of other contextual factors. It was important in my study to ensure that the accounts had relevance beyond these identity categories, given my aims towards a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education in which religious/non-religious identity boundaries are blurred.

Third, there is, in Yip and Page's work, a general lack of attention to the methodology of their study and its role in the limits and possibilities of the findings. The focus on attitudes, values and meanings allows for a certain type of useful analysis, but the findings do not engage deeply with the lived experience of sexuality through life events. Without an attention to reported events, there is no opportunity to examine the *processes of negotiation* that occur in everyday life. My study aims to build on Yip and Page's important work by addressing these methodological limitations and by making clear connections between the findings and sexuality education issues.

The fourth issue relates directly to the aims of this thesis. In their book, Yip and Page do note the salience of their findings for sexual health contexts, noting that “sexual health professionals and youth workers who are trained within ‘secular’ contexts may not be sufficiently empathetic to religious young adults and their religiously informed decisions, by offering advice and guidance that reflect the dominant cultural assumptions about youth sexuality” (2013, p. 165). While this is supportive of my argument about the importance of sexuality education engaging religious youth, the lack of explicit methodological engagement around sexuality education with the participants limits the usefulness of their work for this purpose.

Despite the issues highlighted here, this thesis is indebted to the work of Yip and Page in addressing an under-researched area innovatively and opening up the possibility for my study to build on their methodological approach and findings. Further reflections on how the innovative methodology and research design of my narrative study addressed these issues can be found in section 2.1.

1.3.2 Diverse religious meanings of abstinence

I now turn to the wider body of literature relevant for religion and youth sexualities. Page and Yip’s engagement with Christianity noted the importance of pre-marital sexual abstinence for many participants (2013, p. 78). Because I anticipated that this would be an important part my narrative study, consideration was given to wider research on religion-related sexual abstinence. While a significant body of literature focuses on the psychological and sociological correlates of sexual abstinence (e.g. Regnerus, 2007, p. 42), other more qualitative approaches attempt to understand the complexity of the lived ethics of sexual abstinence. For example, Donna Freitas’ qualitative research on U.S. college campuses has explored the meanings of sex and sexuality in relation to religion. She found that religious

and spiritual students shared four characteristics “1) they are highly invested in their religious and/or spiritual identities; 2) they experience sexual desire and long to act on that desire; 3) romance and experiencing a fulfilling romantic relationship are priorities; 4) they don’t know how to reconcile 1-3.” (Freitas, 2015, p. 215). Freitas work suggests a general condition of confusion and contradiction around the reconciliation of religious identities and sexual desires consistent with many of Page and Yip’s findings.

Research has also engaged the wider cultural meanings and functions of abstinence/celebrity. Heather Rachelle White argues that for young, born-again American evangelicals, the ethic of pre-marital sexual abstinence takes on the character of a public ‘coming out’, often in high-school, and should be understood as a form of queer performance (1994, p. 243) reinforcing a chaste heterosexuality against a sexually permissive culture. Similarly, feminist theologian Lisa Isherwood argues for a queer understanding of religious celibacy, noting in particular how Christian women used celibacy to subvert heteropatriarchy (2006).

The meanings of key terms in this discussion, like abstinence, sex and virginity, have been interrogated by a number of scholars. Jason Hans and Claire Kimberly’s research (2011) with 454 students explored the changing definitions of abstinence, sex and virginity, e.g. in relation to oral sex and mutual masturbation. They found significant variation in the definition of terms amongst different individuals. This accords with a general cultural movement interrogating static definitions of virginity and associated social effects (Castañeda, 2015). Research by Heyes and Stolberg (2018) with Christian young men found similar variability in these definitions and noted the role of religious sexual ethics in negotiating these meanings (see also Abbott & Dalla, 2008).

Overall, research challenges simplistic formations of religion-related and specifically Christian abstinence and celibacy. A binary understanding of religion-related abstinence as

either liberating or oppressive is problematic and there is a need for understanding how its meanings shift across time in relation to wider social contexts. In this way, my study, in its engagement with narratively shifting meanings of abstinence, has an important contribution to make to the representations of religious sexuality through youth expertise.

1.3.3 Masculinity and religious youth

Within sociological approaches to masculinity, Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity carries great currency. Connell argues that there are particular enculturated norms that construct masculinity across various cultures and that violation of these norms is overtly or covertly punished in a variety of ways. One important element of hegemonic masculinity describe by Connell is heterosexuality – particularly important as our research focuses on heterosexual young men (see below and section 2.3.5.3 for a rationale). Research has noted the importance of proper masculine behaviour avoiding any possible implication of homosexuality as 'deviant' from social norms. Research has also addressed the use of language and labelling to police the boundary between apparently heterosexual, thus masculine behaviour and apparently homosexual, thus inappropriately unmasculine behaviour (Pascoe, 2012). This forces boys to adopt certain strategies to maintain the appearance of an acceptable masculinity (Richardson, 2010). Building on Connell's work, Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman's research with English young men argue that "popular masculinity involves hardness, sporting prowess, coolness, casual treatment of schoolwork and being adept at cussing, dominance and control." (2002, p. 77). Holland, Ramanzogulu and Sharpe's (2004) seminal study *The Male in the Head* focuses on heterosexuality, noting the persistent power of men's right to pleasure and priority in intimate life, even amongst young people affirming equality between the sexes. This hegemonic form of heterosexual masculinity is further governed by wider masculine norms of ostensible confidence and desirous initiative. These standards of heterosexuality analysed as 'heteronormative' engage

sexual/romantic narratives and future expectations. Heteronormative cultural narratives of heterosexual love condition young people's imaginations of their sexual/romantic future (Haffey, 2010) whereby sexual exploration gives way to serial monogamy then eventually to marriage or a permanent arrangement of some kind.

Regarding religion, Victor Seidler has made the important observation that this hegemonic masculinity, consistently present throughout Western societies, should be seen as a secularized form of Protestant sexual morality (Seidler, 2013) that buttresses distinct gender roles. Key features of hegemonic masculinity such as heterosexuality, rationality, desire, initiative and anticipated eventual monogamous commitment can be closely related to theologically grounded gender norms that continue to carry cultural currency. The collection of essays in Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan's (2013) edited volume *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain*, for example, provide strong evidence for this. However, this research remains mostly historical and theoretical – there have been few empirical, qualitative studies that analyse the role of religion and masculinity in youth. Peter Hopkins points out this dearth, noting that one possible reason for this is that religion often becomes subsumed within race or ethnicity (2007, p. 163). He does however, note some significant studies that set agendas for future research. For example, Louise Archer's research with Muslim young men demonstrates how religious identity is used to buttress a sense of authentic masculine strength in resistance to Western cultural assimilation (2001).

Research on Christianity and gender has been historically dominated by studies of religious women, an important feminist project of giving voice to female religious voices traditionally marginalized by patriarchal religions. For example, Sonya Sharma's work engaged with Christian young women's negotiations of their sexuality within masculine hierarchies at church, finding the theological basis and religious practice of pre-marital abstinence to be detrimental to women's agency (Sharma, 2011). However, research engaging religion and

masculinity has remained largely at the theoretical level of cultural analysis, for example, work analysing the intersections of Christianity and masculinity in the ‘Promise Keepers’ movement (Bartkowski, 2004; Gallagher & Wood, 2005). There is a small body of recent empirical work on Christianity and gender, though not with young people (Aune, 2010; Nyhagen, 2018).

Addressing gender is a vital agenda for progressive sexuality education, particularly in the U.K. context where gender related violence provided strong impetus for the statutory guidance and for policy-making more widely. However, as I have shown, youth sexualities expertise currently does not have available to it work engaging religion, youth and masculinity that can readily be translated into sexuality education discourse. There is thus the danger that representations of youth masculinity reify secularist assumptions around the insignificance of religion for gendered youth sexualities and fail to grasp the important relationship between masculinity and religion noted by scholars like Hopkins. This is relevant to the previously identified concern over the absence of scholarship engaging the relationship between religion and gender-equality promoting sexuality education initiatives. There is a need for work engaging religion, masculinity and youth, following Nyhagen’s call for a lived religion methodological approach that avoids the binaries of oppression/liberation produced in many secular feminist analyses of religion (2017). I address the impact of this on my research design in section 2.2 below.

1.3.4 LGBTQ religious youth

It is not possible here to review the large body of work investigating the experiences of LGBTQ youth, but several key pieces of research should be noted. Almeida, Johnson, Corliss and Molnar’s (2009) research found a significant positive relationship between perceived discrimination and elevated risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation. Kosciw, Palmer, Kull and

Greytak (2013) found evidence for school as a particularly intense site of LGBTQ victimization and show how victimization contributes both to lower academic outcomes and lower self-esteem. Research thus supports the assumption that despite significant cultural shifts in favour of LGBTQ rights, LGBTQ youth still experience stigma, oppression and victimization in multiple contexts, having a strongly detrimental impact on their lives. However, as I have already touched upon briefly above, these assumptions of LGBTQ youth as always at risk of victimization can itself be strongly detrimental to offering appropriate and effective support (Talburt, 2004). Figures of the ‘at risk LGBTQ youth’ and the ‘secure’ LGBTQ youth both have currency within progressive sexuality education discourse and make possible the shaping of the strong LGBTQ-inclusivity agenda in policy and programming. Some research engaging narratives of LGBTQ Christians and other religious queer people claim to enable postsecular disruptions of the equation of the queer and the secular (Wilcox, 2012). Yvette Taylor’s work with queer religious youth attending inclusive churches in Scotland takes this up (Taylor, 2016), attempting to disrupt the notion of queerness and Christianity as necessarily divergent. Further, Taylor’s work sits within a broader body of research in different global contexts disrupting the notion of queerness as secular and as a secularizing force (Young, Trothen, & Shipley, 2015).

While research on queer religious youth does important work in addressing the historical marginality of LGBTQ lives in the sociology of religion, the consequences of this are a relative lack of attention to heterosexuality intersections in religious youth. While queer religious narratives have cultural currency through their carrying a sense of the exotic and transgressive, the ‘normality’ of religious heterosexuality is de-emphasized. Page and Yip point this out in their paper on religious faith and heterosexuality, noting the “disproportionate attention on the issue of homosexuality” and arguing that “heterosexuality is understood and lived out by young adults in a contested and negotiated fashion, often

characterized by ambivalence and contingency” (2005, p.79). This is one of the reasons for my focus on heterosexual participants (see section 2.3.5.3 below).

1.3.5 Sexuality and religion at school

There are a number of discrete areas of literature that sociological approaches to masculinity have addressed, but schooling is one that is most pertinent for this project. There are a number of central themes in current research on gender and schooling. For Seidler, the very structures of liberal education are infused with masculine conceptions of detached, dispassionate reason (Seidler, 2003, p. 196). Allen & Goddard argue that liberal education within England was founded on a particular vision of the ‘educated man’ who would take his place in the elite ruling class “able to cohere as a moral being in a context of fragmentation and uncertainty” (2017, p. 122). Following this, educational critics have continued to argue that education systems remain highly gendered, for example reproducing gender inequalities of various kinds through unfavourable outcomes for women and girls (Buchmann, Diprete, & McDaniel, 2008).

Another important area of literature discusses how the deep structure and practice of schooling enables for sexism and violence against women. Recent research by Heidi Gansen in the US based on observation of nine primary school classrooms addressed how primary school teachers engaged in gendered sexual socialization, communicating boys gendered power over girls’ bodies (2017). Similarly, Deborah Youdell’s ethnographic research in a South London secondary school shows how the day-to-day practices within the school help constitute the “constellation” of sex-gender-sexuality (2006). Mary Jane Kehily’s work further demonstrates how school privileges and intensifies heterosexuality (2001), while Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson’s influential work shows how schooling reifies cultural notions of the ideally asexual or nonsexual child through various refusals to engage children

and young people as sexual beings (1998). Lingard, Martino & Mills' (2009) research focuses on issues around boys in schools, interrogating the backlash that re-frames contemporary schooling as favouring girls over boys and relocating the problems around masculinity at school to issues of hierarchy, authority and discipline.

Regarding religion, there is little research directly the role of religion in the school and sexualities literature. However, Page and Yip drew on data from the *Religion Youth and Sexuality* project, focusing on religious young people's narratives of sexuality at school (2012a). They note four management strategies adopted in contexts of heightened sexual activity "(1), agony aunt/uncle role; (2) findings a like-minded cohort; (3) specifically using religious scripts as a coping mechanism for maintaining alternate values; and (4) joining in." (ibid., p. 410). Page and Yip's valuable work here indicates the need for further research investigating further what elements of school and schooling factor into the use of these different strategies.

Overall, the research on youth sexualities in schooling shows how school is vital for understanding youth sexualities and identifies the key role of the school in reproducing cultural hegemonies. I expected school to feature heavily in my narrative study and this work provided a vital theoretical orientation in presenting my findings.

1.3.6 Digital sexuality and new media

A significant body of work traces the central role of media in transmitting and transforming sexual cultures in Britain and other Western societies. There has been a rapid progression in the ownership of smartphones and other forms of digital technology in Western societies in the last ten years such that 81% of phone owners in the UK aged 12-17 now own smartphones (Temple-Smith, Moore, & Rosenthal, 2015), enabling increasing consumption of and participation in social media. One narrative within this broad picture concerns the role

of the media in making progressively more visible both normative and marginal sexual practices. Work within the paradigms of behaviouristic psychology has investigated the impact of sexual media such as pornography, music videos with sexual content and lad's magazines on the sexual behaviour of adolescents, with significant evidence showing the association of media consumption with more rapid sexual initiation (Hennessy, Bleakley, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2009).

Digital technologies have also driven the rapid expansion of the pornography industry and the accessibility of online film pornography (Attwood, 2010). As Short et al. show in their meta-analysis of internet pornography use research, studies on pornography use are highly inconsistent in their definitions, measurement of and assessment of internet pornography. Acknowledging this, a recent Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) for the UK Office of the Children's Commissioner by Horvath, Alys and Massey et al. found that despite the methodological difficulties it was still possible to conclude that a) a significant proportion of children and young people are exposed to or access pornography, b) Exposure and access to pornography appear to increase with age c) young men and boys are more likely to be exposed d) access and exposure affect children and young people's sexual beliefs and e) access and exposure to pornography are linked to children and young people's engagement in "risky behaviours" (2013, p. 7). This research provides valuable background to my study, in which I anticipated pornography would play a significant role.

Besides the consumption of sexual media, attention is being given to the role of digital technologies in youth romantic relationships. McGeeney & Hanson conducted a research project in partnership with Brook engaging young people's experiences and views of digital romance. Youth expressed a positivity about technology enabling otherwise difficult or impossible supportive/intimate relationships to develop, assisting them in "flirting, having fun, becoming closer, communicating and expressing desires, and building confidence"

(2017, p. 46). Negatives of technology included the tendency to exacerbate drama, facilitate appearance-based cyberbullying, cheating and post-breakup tensions (ibid.). The research noted the disproportionate negative effects on female and LGBTQ young people.

McGeeney & Hanson's report also notes the increasing media and research attention given to sexting as a part of youthful sexual cultures – another area which I anticipated would feature in my study. Sexting is the communication of sexually explicit content via digital means. It can include “nude or semi-nude still images or video captured of oneself, or of oneself and a sexual partner, “sexually suggestive messages’ including written texts sent via mobile or smart phone device, or through emails or instant messages in online chat programs” (Burkett, 2015, p. 855). Van Ouytsel et al.'s research with adolescents in Belgium found three reasons how sexting content might be abused “(1) they could be used to coerce or to blackmail the victim, (2) they could be distributed out of revenge after the breakup of a romantic relationship, or (3) they could be forwarded or shown to peers in order to boast about having received the digital photograph.” (2017, p. 446). All these features of new digital sexualities amongst youth are deeply implicated in the concepts of sexualization and pornification that support policy interventions like sexuality education amongst young people (Smith & Attwood, 2011, p. 334).

There is a significant body of work addressing the role of digital media amongst religious young people (e.g. Lynch, Mitchell, & Strhan, 2012) and within this, some research taking a psychological approach to the relationship between religion and pornography use. A key finding from recent research is that the association between pornography use and negative personal and intrapersonal outcomes may be more due to the shame and cognitive dissonance of moral incongruence than the influence of pornography itself (Grubbs, Perry, Wilt, & Reid, 2019; Perry & Whitehead, 2019, p. 58). Moral incongruence is defined by Grubbs et al. as the experience of “having one's behaviours be inconsistent with one's beliefs.” (2019, p. 397).

One qualitative study with Christian young men attending an anti-porn conference in the U.S. summarizes the participants' "continuing struggle to reconcile their desires [for pornography] with deeply held moral beliefs and political convictions" (Boulton, 2008, p. 247). Given the findings for the REA and the literature on religion and pornography, it is reasonable to assume that pornography will play a role in both religious and non-religious young people's narratives of sexuality.

However, there is very little research besides the pornography literature on other forms and experiences of digital intimacies for religious young people. Like gender, pornography is a significant issue mobilizing progressive sexuality education discourses. Providing young people with the opportunity to be critical about pornography and sexual media in general is one of the key aims noted in progressive sexuality education discourse in the English context. Similarly, there is a growing awareness of the need to understand young people's sexual practices and relationships on social media and in other digital platforms. While there is some psychological research available related to pornography, literature on digital intimacies more generally has not considered religion and religious young people adequately. A notable exception to this is Donna Freitas' book *The Happiness Effect*, which contains chapters partially engaging religious young people's negotiations of sexting and online dating, though without significant theoretical reflection (2017, p. 199). When sexuality education policy makers draw on youth sexualities research in order to shape pedagogy and practice around digital sexualities, it does not have available to it religious young people's experiences and particular negotiations. In this way, my study addresses an important gap in digital youth sexualities literature.

1.3.7 Summary

In section 1.3 I have made two important arguments. First, I have shown the uneven engagement of youth sexualities research regarding religion and outlined where this unevenness could be addressed by my study. Secondly, I have shown that while there is important and innovative work that does directly address the intersections between religion, sexuality and youth, this research has limitations in its design and methodology that affect its potential for making an intervention into sexuality education literature (e.g. the work of Page and Yip). Thus, I am now in a position to articulate the focus of my research project, designed to account for the issues in the literature and address the thesis' aims for a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education.

My study draws on and extends Strhan's concept of fractured religious subjectivities to consider 'fractured religious sexual subjectivities'. This fracturing of religious sexual subjectivity can be seen throughout the literature just surveyed. For example, Yip and Page's research draws attention to religious compartmentalization and management strategies, the literature on abstinence such as that of Donna Freitas shows the existential impasse faced by abstinent youth in fulfilling their desires to be sexual and to be religiously faithful, and the literature on masculinity shows that religious young people may face pressures towards masculinities from their religious communities in tension with those in the school setting. This research shows how religious young people are increasingly influenced by contradictory messages about sexuality that variously adapt to and resist the ambivalent conditions of postsecularity. Considering again the postsecular account of sexuality advanced in section 1.1, it may be the conditions of postsecularity that give rise to the fractured religious sexual subjectivities, as religious (predominantly but not exclusively Christian) young people no longer find themselves in a moral culture consistently supportive of their sexual beliefs and practices. If, for Strhan, religious ethical subjectivity fractures in unique ways amidst postsecularity, it follows that religious sexual subjectivity fractures in unique ways amidst

postsecularity. It is this idea of the *unique* manner of religious sexual subjectivity's fracturing under the conditions of postsecularity that is the focus of my study.

1.4 Conclusions

1.4.1 Research questions

I am now in a position to state my first research question:

1. How do religious young people experience romantic relationships and sexuality?

A study answering this question will thus produce the accounts of religious sexual subjectivity that I need to address the thesis aims. However, in light of the argument developed in section 1.3, a second research question is also needed to address the lack of research specifically engaging religious young people's experiences of sexuality education:

2. How do religious young people learn about romantic relationships and sexuality?

Through bringing together both these research questions in my narrative study, I engage fractured religious sexual subjectivity within postsecularity and address how these subjectivities explain experiences of and views about formal and informal sexuality education. This initial formation of the research questions was narrowed down during the process of designing the study, for both practical and theoretical reasons. Full details of the changes to the research questions can be found in section 2.2 of the next chapter.

1.4.2 Chapter summary

I began this chapter by outlining three features of postsecular social theory and a postsecular approach to the study of sexuality. Noting some key features of this postsecular orientation, I then gave an account of sexuality education literature engaging religion with a postsecular orientation, acknowledging, drawing attention to, and/or attempting to respond to, the features of postsecularity. I pointed out various tensions between this postsecularism and the

secularism of some forms of progressive sexuality education. I argued that there would be significant negative consequences should progressive sexuality education fail to take into consideration the insights provided by postsecular approaches. I set out the thesis aims to solidify the disparate nature themes through the literature and address these negative consequences through a reimagination of the postsecular sexuality education. I identified research on religion in youth sexualities as one potential area that this might be accomplished. I then showed how youth sexualities research has an uneven engagement with religion and religious young people and that where research does engage directly with these intersections it is limited in both its methodological approach and its potential for translating into sexuality education discourse, limiting the possibilities of our proposed reimagination of sexuality education and religion. I finished by introducing two research questions addressing some of these gaps in the youth sexualities literature. In the next chapter I will describe the methodology and methods of the narrative study I conducted to answer my research questions and make an original contribution to knowledge.

2 Chapter 2: Designing and Conducting the Narrative Study

Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced postsecular social theory and its implications for the study of sexuality. I then gave an account of how religion is approached in typically secularist sexuality education research, noting a small body of work with a recognizably postsecular sensibility. I highlighted the need for research with religious young people to enrich this body of work and the need to draw together and solidify its disparate concerns through a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education responsive to religious sexual subjectivity. I then proposed two research questions that could address the thesis aims by giving an account of religious sexual subjectivity through a narrative study with Christian young men, accounting for the methodological limitations of research on youth, religion and sexuality and drawing explicit connections between the accounts themselves and sexuality education.

In this chapter, I present the methodology used to answer my research questions and produce my original contribution to knowledge. I begin by engaging the theoretical underpinnings of my narrative study. Research like this, engaging a small sample in great depth and detail, requires particularly close attention to be paid to the connections between theory and methods (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015, p. 1756). For this reason, I have chosen to present both the methodology and the methods in one chapter. This allows me to highlight these connections using the ‘methodological notes’ found in light grey boxes throughout the latter parts of the chapter.

I begin by introducing the biographic narrative interpretative method (BNIM), describing some key elements of BNIM’s theoretical underpinnings to address the ontological and epistemological assumptions of my study. I describe how each of these elements makes BNIM suitable for answering my research questions. I also address the limitations and

weaknesses of the approach. I describe how I developed BNIM to more adequately address my second research question to make critical connections between the narrative accounts and the sexuality education issues identified in the previous chapter.

I then describe step-by-step the method taken in conducting the study. This is divided into four sections – sampling, recruitment, interviewing, and analysis. In the sampling section, I outline the rationale for and strengths/weakness of the sampling frame used in the study. I also address issues around sample size. In the recruitment section, I address the sampling frame of the study (heterosexual Christian young men aged 16-19) and convenience and self-selection sampling strategy taken. I also discuss the strengths and limitations of the sample obtained through the recruitment process undertaken in partnership with the Youthscape Centre for Research. In the interviewing section, I outline the data collection and transcript creation methods taken and give a rationale for my adaption of BNIM from a three sub-session structure to a six sub-session structure.

In the final section I describe the 10 stages of my data analysis method.

2.1 Outlining the narrative theoretical approach

2.1.1 Positioning BNIM

Narrative research broadly is in the family of qualitative methodologies employed in interpretive social research. Riessman calls narrative research a “family of approaches to diverse kinds of texts, which have in common a storied form” (2002, p. 1). Biographic narrative research concerns stories told by participants about their own lives. It can take the form of oral narration (as was the case with this study) but can also cover other forms of narrative representation such as writing, video recording, or multi-media. Oral narratives are distinct because of their interactive and co-constructed quality – they are told to an audience. When considering the broad range of narrative methods, one of the first features of BNIM

that drew me to consider its potential for addressing my aims and research questions was its approach to individual participants' biographic oral narratives as *cases*. BNIM cannot be considered as a traditional case study method – it does not consider participants as e.g. 'cases' of a religious identity. Rather, the use of the term 'case' indicates an approach that considers, as far as is possible, each participant's data in its own right. While BNIM does move eventually to do more conventional cross case thematizing and theorizing, relating this to wider theoretical literature, *within-case* thematizing is given priority. This is recounted in further detail in the analysis section 2.5 below.

In what follows I outline some key features of BNIM as developed by Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne, covering the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning the research design. Details of BNIM have been published in a number of different formats. Here I engage with both the scholarly publications detailing BNIM and the *Short Guide*, an online BNIM resource constantly updated by Tom Wengraf.

2.1.2 Narrative identity/subjectivity

Narrative methodologies draw heavily on narrative theory, a broad philosophical orientation with significant influence across the humanities and social sciences. One of the major tenets of narrative theory is the understanding of human identity as fundamentally narrative in character and human society as fundamentally shaped by stories. As prominent narrative theorist Roland Barthes states “there does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives” (Barthes, 1966, p. 156). The narrative character of both the self and society is given sustained philosophical attention in the post-structural and psychoanalytic work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur writes of narrative identity:

The self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly, through the detour of cultural signs of all sorts, which articulate the self in symbolic mediations that

already articulate action, among them the narratives of daily life. Narrative mediation underlines this remarkable aspect about knowledge of the self as being an interpretation. (1991, p. 80)

According to Ricoeur, any adequate account of human life in its individuality and sociality requires attention to the stories that we tell each other, about ourselves, the past, the future, about our families, friends and day-to-day lives. In my use of BNIM to answer my research questions, this narrative account of identity is extended further – both religious and sexual subjectivity are narrative in character. Thus, BNIM’s epistemology assumes that we can gain understanding and insight into personal identities/subjectivities by engaging with the stories they tell and the way that they tell them.

In section 1.3.1 I argued that one problem with the intersectional identities approach taken by Page and Yip is that it reifies sexual and religious identities and omits wider biographical factors that might prove important. This reductivity is appropriate for their own set of aims and objectives but limits the possible relevance of religious young people’s narratives for those beyond those identity categories. Centralizing *narrative* identity rather than religious or sexual identity marks this study’s originality and allows our reimagining of sexuality education to extend beyond a secularist religious inclusivity (see section 1.2.8).

2.1.3 Dated situated subjectivity

In the last chapter, I introduced religious sexual subjectivity as the theoretical object of our study. Wengraf and Chamberlayne describe the distinctive orientation of BNIM towards subjectivity using the concept of “dated situated subjectivity” (Wengraf & Chamberlayne, 2013, p. 76). In BNIM, it is not sufficient to approach subjectivity statically as many traditional non-narrative qualitative methodologies do. Rather, BNIM takes a historical approach to subjectivity. In the same way that Ricoeur argues that identity can never be

understood as fixed but as constantly emerging in time (1984, p. 2), so in BNIM subjectivity is engaged as temporal and processual. BNIM interviewing supports participants in recalling narratives of dated situated subjectivity. This is done through careful pushing for *particular* incidents at *particular* times/dates (see section 2.4.1.4) below. Narratives that are dated and situated make for richer accounts of subjectivity because when specific events are recalled the meanings, emotions and significances of that event are more vivid. Further, the historical character of subjectivity is assumed through analytic attention to what Wengraf & Chamberlayne call the *mutations* of subjectivity (2013, p. 73) through successive states rather than remaining focused on describing single states of subjectivity. This will be explained in more detail below.

Narrative research of this type, where a central task is leading participants to evoke certain dated situated subjectivities, works primarily with the participants memory. Psychological literature on memory is vast, but for now it will suffice to note two important, well-established findings. First, that the clearest memories are ones that have some sort of strong emotional significance attached to them (Smorti & Fioretti, 2016, p. 198). This is why BNIM encourages pushing for more detail and free associative questioning (see section 2.4.1.4) so that these emotions can emerge. Second, that the meaning and significance of memories can change over time – while at a particular point in time, a memory might take on a highly negative emotionality, the same memory might subsequently take on positive emotionality (ibid., p. 313). In its central analysis of successive states of subjectivity, BNIM attempts to account for the shifting meanings of memories over time.

Drawing on embodiment theory, via the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1999), influential narrative theorist Donald Polkinghorne insists on “the kinesthetic origin” of narrating subjectivity (2015, p. 153). In this way, narrative theory resists a Cartesian dualism and insists on the embodied nature of subjectivity, requiring methodological attention to

embodiment. Dated situated subjectivity is thus *situated* in its attention to embodiment. The richest accounts of subjectivity are ones where the participant in some sense is ‘reliving’ the event as they are telling it, and often the bodily aspects of the event resurface as the participant simulates a particular gesture, facial expression or tone of voice (see also Finlay, 2006).

Giving attention to the dated and situated nature of subjectivity enriches and extends the typical qualitative methodological approaches to youth sexualities using semi-structured interviews that give little attention to temporal subjective shifts within lives and within oral narration. While some of Page and Yip’s work is influenced by narrative methodologies (2012), they do not give attention to *successive* states of subjectivity, both within the chronological order of both the participants life and the interview itself, in the same way that BNIM does. Considering each participant’s set of narratives as a *case* and deferring the process of thematization allows for attention to be given to the unique texture of each case. This attention to uniqueness is necessary for our aim of reimagining the relationship between religion and sexuality education. The more textured and fine-grained our analysis can be (without neglecting to return to theorization), the more potential there is for enriching youth sexualities research with religious sexual subjectivities and extending postsecular approaches to sexuality education.

2.1.4 Defended subjectivity

BNIM’s interviewing method is given shape by its theoretical rooting in both psychoanalytical and sociological theory. The minimal, facilitative approach taken in the first interview (see section 2.4.1.1) is inspired by the active listening methods of psychoanalysis and rooted in the concept of defended subjectivity. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that this constitutes three things: they 1) may not hear the question through the same meaning

frame as that of the interviewer or other interviewees; 2) are invested in particular positions in discourses to protect vulnerable aspects of self; 3) may not know why they experience or feel things in the way that they do; 4) are motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some of their feelings and actions. (ibid., p. 26). The psychoanalytically rooted ‘free association’ method, which seeks to preserve the *gestalt* (the whole) of the subject’s unconscious associations when telling a particular kind of story, gives more visibility to those hidden and defended meaning-networks by making room for free and uninterrupted movement and association within the narratives. This distinguishes BNIM from more heavily discursive approaches that focus exclusively on language.

BNIM’s assumptions about the defended nature of subjectivity challenge the positivist assumptions of psychological approaches to youth sexualities, such as those on sexual abstinence. These methodological approaches do not take account of the defended nature of ethical ideals like abstinence. In this way our approach builds on the work of subjectivist approaches to abstinence such as Hans and Kimberly (2011) to consider not just the variability of what abstinence means, but the mutations of subjectivity through which those meanings emerge. This is important for our study’s original contribution to sexuality education research, avoiding making the meanings of abstinence for individuals secondary to public health outcomes like sexual delay and sexual knowledgeableness and connecting progressive sexuality education with religious meaning of abstinence. Further, approaching abstinence in this way also moves beyond the binary of oppression/liberation critiqued by feminist scholars of religion such as Nyhagen (2018) to consider the multiple interrelated valences of abstinence.

2.1.5 Narrative structure and emplotment

One of the fundamental concepts of narrative theory is plot and emplotment. Polkinghorne argues that emplotment unifies diverse events and establishes causal connections between them (1995, p. 8). Plot assumes that ‘one thing follows another’ and draws attention to one central task of narrative analysis – to pay attention to the recurrent or divergent values and principles that organize and connect events causally.

Building on this, Labov and Waletzky’s early approach to the analysis of narrative assumed that oral narratives follow a relatively predictable structure: orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda (1997). For example, the ‘evaluation’, which is an essential part of a coherent narration for Labov, is the point at which a moral stance is taken towards the events and can demonstrate how a particular narrative is ethically significant to the narrator. This approach relies on there being some form of meaningful structure to narrative – that a moral stance is something that works across time as an ‘organizing principle’ of narration rather than always a meaningless and transitory moment. Another structuralist approach to narratives is the analysis of turning points, events within narratives that can signify a number of key shifts in subjectivity e.g. epiphany, milestone, meeting a challenge or “the last straw” (Kupferberg, 2012, p. 232).

BNIM incorporates these structuralist elements insofar as it assumes a structure or articulable pattern of a lived life can be identified; a structure that is nonetheless open to more or less radical revision in light of new evidence about either the lived life or the told story (Wengraf, 2004). This is in tension with more avowedly post-structural methodologies such as new materialism (frequently taken up in postsecular approaches to youth sexualities and sexuality education – see section 1.2.9). Because they reject the notion of the unitary subject and the static representations of subjectivity that they produce, such approaches are suspicious of even the modest claims to predictability made by narrative methodologies like BNIM.

However, these modest claims allow me to answer the research questions and meet the thesis

aims. Some theoretical reduction is required in order for any coherent articulation of a reimagined sexuality education where rich representations of religious sexual subjectivity are not in wide circulation. In this case it is the practical and scholarly problems with sexuality education that give credence to the modestly structural account of the cases, themes and theorizations I will give.

2.1.6 Narrative morality, ethics and stance taking

Theoretical work in narrative analysis has extended Labov's idea that the structuring and emplotment of narratives supports a moral stance. Drawing on work from the anthropology of ethics and morality, Jarrett Zigon argues that narratives are "best described as embodied struggles to 'deal' with the various questions, dilemmas, and obstacles encountered in moments of moral breakdown" (2012, p. 210). For Zigon, ethics is a practice that subjects do in order to return to the unreflective 'flow' of life from a place of moral breakdown; narration is just such an ethical practice. Narratives always involve some form of moral/ethical evaluation of oneself and others in order to return from a state of 'breakdown' to the normal flow of everyday life. In agreement with this, Ochs and Capps write "the dimensions of linearity and moral stance address a central opposition that drives human beings to narrate life experience - the desire to sheath life experience with a soothing linearity and moral certainty versus the desire for deeper understanding and authenticity of experience" (2009, p. 56). Thus, in BNIM it is important to consider subjectivity as not just dated and situated, but also as ethical. This narrative approach to ethics is different from that of Yip and Page, in which ethics is a discursive cognitive negotiation from multiple ethical 'sources' displayed in the interview interaction. Instead BNIM considers ethics as enacted through events and their recollection. Prioritizing the narrativity of ethics and paying close attention to *dated and situated* moral negotiation gives greater texture to our accounts and provides greater

possibilities for addressing the absence of religious sexual subjectivity in youth sexualities research.

Further, Zigon's narrative framing of moral breakdown is a helpful reminder of the fractured nature of subjectivity I introduced through Strhan's work with conservative evangelicals. Subjectivity is not just fractured by the more or less contextually problematic identities we adopt, but also through the very struggle to perform those identities in the co-constructive interactive form of narrative storytelling. This further emphasizes the originality of this study in its aim to reimagine the relationship between sexuality education and religion. I argued in section 1.3.7 that one of the ways that progressive sexuality education remains secularist is through the reification of what kinds of incoherence and struggle that youth face in the negotiation of their sexualities and the lack of attention to the potentially unique way that religious sexual subjectivity fractures within postsecularity. Zigon and Ochs & Capps' case for the fracturing nature of narrative ethical subjectivity further enriches this study by moving the analysis of fracturing beyond religion, sexuality and postsecularity to consider how these things fracture even as they are spoken in the co-constructed interview. This further indicates the relevance of religious sexual subjectivity beyond the boundaries of sexual/religious identity categories.

2.1.7 Critical realist

The structural analysis of narratives following Labov was prevalent in the early period of narrative research, but soon other branches developed following the increasing influence of post-structuralist literary theory on qualitative researchers. According to the instigators of what might be called the post-structural turn in narrative methodology, "the 'truths' of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future." (Riessman, 2002, p. 6). Along these

lines, there is a strong current of narrative research literature that draws heavily on postmodern literary theory, effectively side-lining the notion that narratives refer to ‘actual events’, and thus bracketing the issue of whether narratives are true or not. For example, Atkinson and Delamont (2006) argue that “...‘truth’ is not a property to be treated as an issue in the quality-control of information. On the contrary, veracity and verisimilitude are to be inspected as embedded in the rhetorical properties and discursive structures of narrative accounts themselves” (p. 169). Wengraf draws on the social scientific philosophy of critical realism to defend BNIM’s approach against this, seeking to navigate a way between the modernist structuralism of Labov and “anti-realist” constructivism (2004, p. 10). While the literature expounding, critiquing and defending critical realism is vast and not possible to engage meaningfully here, it is worth noting that its relevance for my use of BNIM is that it grounds the two-track analytical method (see section 2.5.1). Epistemologically, BNIM is ‘realist’ in that it assumes that certain events really did happen and that verification of those events and their shape is possible. This grounds the biographic analysis of the chronological ‘lived life’ described in section 2.5.2. However, BNIM is also ‘critical’ in that accounts of events are subjective (dated/situated/defended) and thus open to falsification. This grounds the psychoanalytic approach to the ‘told story’ of defended subjectivity and the performative/moral functions of narration (described in section 2.5.5). BNIM’s critical realist orientation pushes back against the new materialist literature addressed in chapter one, specifically its rejection of unitary subjectivity and the accompanying rejection of bounded representations of youth sexualities. The realist elements of critical realism permit, as with its structuralism above, a modest essentialization of subjectivity for the purpose of critically addressing secularist sexuality education. At the same time, it does not allow narratives and their representative power to be hypostatized but presents them as open to future revisions.

2.1.8 Psychosocial

The psychosocial is a recently developed theoretical orientation that attempts to navigate between a narrow empiricism and a universalizing grand theorizing. Andrews, Schlater & Squire et al. describe the psychosocial as

... the realm where sociology overlaps with psychology and neither the ‘social’, the subject matter of traditional sociology, nor the ‘individual’, the subject matter of conventional psychology, is privileged. Rather both are constructed in relation to each other, not in the ‘outer’ realm of society and culture, or the ‘inner’ realm of personality, but in a distinct ‘psychosocial’ zone. (2002, p. 1).

As a psycho-societally oriented narrative methodology, BNIM attempts to balance a focus on individual subjectivities with sociological analysis. BNIM locates individuals squarely within social contexts without deferring to deterministic social constructivism, but also understands social theory as incomprehensible without adequate representation of individual lives (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2013). While BNIM insists on small sample sizes and in-depth idiographic analysis, it also insists on the importance of theorizing based on the sample size, not with a view to universal generalization but with a view to testing and refining existing theories within scholarship. For my study, BNIM’s psychosocial orientation prevents the collapse into what C. Wright Mills called “abstracted empiricism” (2000, p. 50) where there is a hesitancy to theorize from data and an enmeshment in the specificities of individual contexts. I expand on this further in the section 2.2.2 on sample size.

2.1.9 Summary

Section 2.1 of this chapter has introduced some key features of BNIM as a narrative methodology, covering ontological and epistemological assumptions made in this study. In the remaining part of the chapter I will explain the recruitment, interviewing and analysis

undertaken, showing in more detail how the methodological framework has shaped the research design.

2.2 Sampling

2.2.1 Sample frame

In social research more broadly the sampling frame refers to “the process of selecting a subset of items from a defined population for inclusion into a study.” (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 41). In qualitative approaches, sampling frames select individuals to collect data from and are usually composed of a number of social identifiers such as age, gender, class and ethnicity. In this study, the strategy guiding my sampling frame was *purposeful* insofar as I actively selected participants that would allow me to answer my research question and address the gaps in the literature (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). As noted in section 1.4.1 above, my original two research questions were refined during the sampling design of my study. Narrowing down from ‘religious young people’, I selected my participants by religion (Christian), age (16-19) and gender (male). Below I give the rationale for my sampling frame and its strengths and limitations for this study.

2.2.1.1 Religion

In the earlier stages of the study, my decision to focus on Christian young people was justified by own existing academic expertise and interest in Christianity and sexuality. However, as the research process unfolded, I also realized that a focus on Christianity had other strong rationale. First, I have already noted in section 1.3.1 how research with diverse religious and sexual identities such as Yip and Page’s limits the potential of focusing on a single religion. Second, given my intention for a much smaller sample size than Yip and Page, a religiously diverse sample frame would have weakened the strength of any cross-case analysis. I have already argued that narrative research allows for theorizing beyond the

boundaries of social identities, nevertheless focusing on a single religion does carry inherent limitations regarding what can be said about *religious* young people in general from a study of only *Christian* young people. It is my hope that future research will build on and extend this work with other religious young people following my orientation toward sexuality education issues.

2.2.1.1.1 Methodological note – religiosity

When reviewing literature on youth and religion I considered the various social scientific for measuring religiosity quantitatively. A very commonly used scale is the Francis attitudes towards Christianity scale (Francis & Stubbs, 1987) assessing religiosity through Likert scale measurement of agreement with statements such as “The church is very important to me”, “I know that Jesus helps me” and “God is very real to me” (ibid. p. 742). I realized I was naturally interested in interviewing Christians with relatively high levels of religiosity, assuming that the higher the levels of religiosity the more I would be able to critically address the secularism of sexuality education discourse. Some of my recruitment decisions, such as the choice to recruit through youth groups rather than e.g. through Christian schools, were motivated by this desire to capture greater religiosity. I acknowledge that I have my own theologically informed views on what ‘real’ Christianity is that are secondary, but certainly not unrelated to, these methodological choices. Thus, my research design remains open to critique by those who would take a different approach to theorizing this identity-boundary (perhaps even eschewing it altogether). Though my own concern may be with those I consider ‘real’ Christians, I do not essentialize the bounded nature of Christian identity - rather I try to attend reflexively and critically to the lived conditions in which the boundaries shift and mutate according to context, time and space. This is part of what makes my methodological position original and innovative.

2.2.1.2 Age

My choice of focusing on ages 16-19 was due to several factors. First, I was aware of the exacerbated ethical issues involved in interviewing participants under 16, especially given the consequences of disclosure in research with young people under the age of consent (Duncan, Drew, Hodgson, & Sawyer, 2009). Research with under-16s would also require parental informed consent, introducing another possible barrier into the recruitment of participants and taking valuable time away from recruitment, collection and analysis. Second, I considered that many of the studies on religious sexuality and youth tended towards older participants within the loose-bordered social construct of youth – for example, the average age of participants in Yvette Taylor’s work was 24 (2016, p. 20). As well as correcting this imbalance in the literature, interviewing 16-19 year-olds rather than an older age range meant a closer proximity temporally to certain experiences I was interested in, e.g. schooling, Christian youth work, etc. Interviewing age 19+ young people would mean that these young people would likely be in a very different ‘life stage’ e.g. students, in employment, etc. This would introduce another layer of complexity into the sample, and I did not think that these added complexities would add anything useful with regard to answering my research question.

The most significant effect of this sampling choice on my research was on the power-relations present in my research. These affect all research projects using interview methods, and are particularly pronounced when there is an adult/child distinction between interviewer/interviewee (see below for other power-relations present in my research).

However, BNIM is particularly suited for research with exacerbated power-relations – this is addressed in my methodological note 2.4.1.1.1

2.2.1.2.1 Methodological note – narrative competency

McLean, Pasupathi and Pals (2007) note that adolescents may be unable to produce coherent narratives. They argue that the ability to produce a coherent narrative of the self is something that develops over time and that in the case of adolescents the self-knowledge and socio-cognitive wherewithal to produce detailed accounts of self-development may be under-developed. However, I argue that in the case of Christian youth, this may be different. Particularly in the case of evangelical, charismatic Christians, story-telling is a key part of the religious upbringing of children. These sorts of narrative practices may take place in a number of contexts – perhaps from a young age through adapted children’s Bible stories, in group Bible studies, but prominently in public worship practices (noted in Smith’s 2010 ethnography of a Pentecostal worship service).

Through these practices, young people are socialized into the structures and practices of certain kinds of narrative mode and have often had many opportunities to ‘tell their story’ in both small and large group religious settings. The abundance of this opportunity and the likelihood of repeated engagement in public and private personal narrative sense-making in a more or less intensely religious setting means that it is likely that the young people interviewed may be more familiar and comfortable with the environment of personal disclosure. Further, they will also be familiar with normative styles of narration, with a propensity to conform to, and perhaps even subvert, established narrative forms. Some of these are reflected on further in methodological note 2.3.3.1.2.

2.2.1.3 Gender

Much like religion, my initial reasons for focusing on young men were pragmatic rather than theoretical. I was aware that for many of the churches I would be working with the discussion of sexual matters between an older man and a younger women would have been a pastoral concern severely limiting my potential access. Given the methodological requirement for in-

depth narrative explanation (see later), it was decided that gendered factors influencing the research process would have distracted from the focus of the study which does not centralize gender. However, besides these practical considerations, focusing on young men allowed me to address the gap in the literature of in-depth qualitative research engaging masculinity and religious youth. There is a need for further research with different samples of religious young men and for studies oriented to sexuality education issues with diverse gender identities following the example of Yip and Page's work.

In this way, my original research questions (see section 1.4.1) were narrowed during the sampling design of the study from the original broad focus on 'religious young people' to focus on Christian young men aged 16-19. There was a final stage of narrowing following the conclusion of data collection and preceding data analysis, described below in section 2.3.5.

2.2.1.3.1 Methodological note – gender in interview co-construction

The decision to interview only young men deeply affected the co-constructive process of the interview. It meant that there was a greater ease to pursue certain lines of questioning, but also that the kinds of responses given by young men would have a gendered quality to them (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2003). For examples, responses might appeal to, or be predicated on, my own ability to identify with a typically masculine feeling or experience (Byrne, 2011, p. 213). In this way, the sameness of gender identity between myself and the participant was not necessarily a wholly positive dimension. For example, the young men's own gender identity might preclude him from sharing experiences that might call his masculine identity into question, especially given the obvious power differential between us. This called for a conscious inclusion of gender into that aspect of my analysis that attended to the interactional nature of the narratives. However, it should be noted that my approach is distinct from much qualitative research in religion and sexuality that seeks to *foreground* gender as the topic or

theme of concern. My approach acknowledges the centrality of gender to these issues but remains open as to its analytic relevance in given situations.

2.2.2 Sample size

The issue of adequate sample size for qualitative PhD studies is heavily contested (noted in Clark & Thompson, 2016). Good practice for sample size depends on epistemological and methodological considerations. For my study, a large sample size was not desirable and not required given that I was not aiming for statistical generalizability. Following Smith's (2018) work on alternative framings of generalizability, the aims of my study to reimagine the relationship between sexuality education through engaging with Christian young men's experiences falls within his concept of analytical, concept and theoretical generalizations. Smith explains these as follows:

...analytical generalisation can happen when the researcher generalises a particular set of results to an established concept or theory, thereby displaying in their research concept generalizability or theoretical generalizability. Research might also produce analytical generalizability when a new concept or new theory is constructed that later makes sense and has significance in other research, even if the contexts or populations are different. Or, the researcher might re-examine established concepts and theories in a study through a different methodology and, in turn, produce new conceptual and theoretical understandings of a topic. When that occurs, and the researcher or other researchers show the value of such concepts or theories in other research, then again it can be said that the work generates a form of analytical generalisation. (p. 141).

The aim of my thesis to make an intervention into sexuality education research through representing religious sexual subjectivity clearly falls under the scope of analytical

generalizability. Having established the importance of a small sample size for this purpose, I then considered how this would function in my sampling strategy. My decision to aim for a sample size of approximately 10-15 followed Wengraf's recommendations for BNIM sample size being a maximum of 6 (2001, p. 145), based on his knowledge and experience of the volume of work required for an effective analysis of a single case. I considered that if I aimed for 10-15 this would allow some leeway given my anticipation of difficulties securing access and recruiting. Further, if I still recruited more than 6, an opportunity to choose the most successful interviews for final analysis.

2.2.3 Sampling methods

While my sampling frame followed a purposive design, my sampling methods were designed around principles of convenience and self-selection. Convenience sampling, whereby participants are identified by their "proximity and willingness to participate" (Robinson, 2013, p. 32) is common in qualitative research on sensitive issues and was effective for this study in balancing the anticipated difficulties with recruiting and securing access. The limitations of convenience samples on statistical generalizability were not relevant for this research in light of its in-depth narrative theoretical orientation. The self-selection elements of the sampling approach do include bias within the research but, as Morse argues, this bias supports the validity of the research when directly acknowledged (1990, p 138). I deal in more detail with the nature of the self-selected sample recruited in section 2.2.3. I originally planned to include another stage of purposive selection before interviewing if I had too many participants but this was not necessary in the end due to the low levels of response – all participants who self-selected, i.e. those expressed interest and did not drop out, were included in the recruited sample of 10 before I reduced this number to 6 participants to be analysed (see section 2.3.5.5). In section 2.3 I describe how I recruited participants and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, successes and failures of my sampling methods.

2.3 Recruitment

Here I outline the four stages of recruitment and finish by describing the final sample recruited as well as my rationale for reducing the 10 participants recruited to 6 for the final analysis.

2.3.1 Stage 1 – Recruiting youth groups

2.3.1.1 Collaborating with the Youthscape Centre for Research

My initial concerns about access limitations were addressed by developing a collaboration with the Youthscape Centre for Research, part of the Christian charity Youthscape delivering youth work in Luton whilst developing resources that used by churches, youth groups and schools all over the country. My collaboration with the Centre meant that I could benefit from their good relationships and reputation amongst youth groups. In return, I committed to writing an interim report of my findings following my initial data collection and analysis by December 2018, a report which could then be circulated to Youthscape’s supporters.

2.3.1.1.1 Designing ‘The Yourstory Project’

An important part of qualitative research design is creating recruitment materials that are attractive and relevant to their audience. Working with Lucie Shuker, an experienced qualitative researcher and youth worker from the Youthscape Centre for Research, I developed the recruitment materials for my study under the title ‘The Yourstory Project’. These materials included invitation letters, information sheets and a website designed to be accessed by youth leaders for more information. These materials can be found in appendix section 2.

Besides this practical assistance, the other main benefit of this collaboration for my research was access to the Centre’s database of 200 Christian youth group leaders that had expressed

interest in participating in research. Having sent out recruitment materials to all the email addresses on this list, it rather disappointingly only yielded one response. I therefore had to adapt my approach to sampling and recruitment.

2.3.1.2 Establishing contact with youth groups

Following the failure of the Youthscape database to yield any contacts, I adopted two strategies to establish contact with youth groups interested in participating.

1) Limiting myself to two major geographical areas (London and East/West Midlands) I contacted youth organizations affiliated with the major Christian denominations in England and utilized their publicly available centralized lists of churches to send out my recruitment email either directly to the youth leader (if the contact was available) or to the admin contact for dissemination to relevant staff or volunteers.

2) Where I did not receive responses, and where there were contact details available, I contacted groups I had emailed by phone to provide the recruitment information.

3) I supplemented this broad approach with my own contacts in local youth work networks. However it should be noted that I did not have any prior personal acquaintance with any youth leaders I worked with nor the young people I ended up interviewing.

As with all qualitative research on sensitive issues, decisions about sampling were made pragmatically under the constraints of time and resources. Thus, convenience was a crucial factor in my approach to recruitment.

This stage constituted a 6-week period of emailing youth leaders and awaiting full return correspondence.

2.3.1.2.1 Methodological note – My insider status

Throughout the process I made it clear to both the recipients of the recruitment materials and the participants that I was a Christian myself. My Christian identity as a researcher and its intentional visibility certainly affected the data collection profoundly. As Heaphy et al. (1998, p. 456) puts it, “the existence of perceived commonalities between respondents and researchers can have a significant role to play in determining the extent to which trust develops within the interview.” Much has been written on the relevance of ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ researchers in the study of religion (Ferber, 2017; Knott, 2005a; Pike, 1999). Two key points from this debate concerned the “double edged sword” (Berger, 2015, p. 230) of research as an insider: Firstly, the tendency to assume similarities and elide differences; secondly, the openness, ease of expression, and lessening of power disjunctions that occurs when there is a degree of identification between researcher and researched. Given this awareness, I was careful throughout the process to interrogate notions that may have sounded familiar to me, whilst maximizing the opportunities for deeper exploration that a shared identity afforded.

2.3.2 Stage 2 – Contacting youth leaders

On receiving an email response indicating interesting in participating, I responded with suggested dates and times for a telephone conversation. While speaking to interested youth leaders I had 4 aims:

- 1) To give a more detailed introduction of myself, the project and my aims.
- 2) To build rapport with the youth leaders and gain an understanding of their specific context, characteristic aspects of the group, denominational distinctions etc.
- 3) To explain and negotiate the process by which I might go about recruiting young people in their group.
- 4) To agree finally on terms of participation and a date for my attendance(s) of the group.

I took notes during this meeting so I could understand each leader's concerns, questions and queries and get a sense of their youth group dynamics and the relationship and its relationship to the church of which they are a part. My expectation was that during this meeting it would become clear to the youth leaders whether they were still willing to participate.

I spoke to 10 youth organizations and church groups in total and was invited to deliver the recruitment session at 6 of these.

2.3.2.1 Methodological note – role of the youth leader

There were many other ways that I could have approached recruitment, but my decision to access Christian young men 'indirectly', via the mediating role of youth leaders, was an intentional decision. I have some experience in both secular and religious youthwork and have some understanding of the mindset and perceptions of youth leaders. I understood that given the sense of pastoral responsibility held by youth leaders over young people, it would have been inappropriate to conduct research, especially given my own commitments, with young people without the awareness of the youth leader. Although there was no formal or legal need to acquire the written, signed consent of the youth leaders, in this case my treating the youth leaders as 'gatekeepers' functioned as a form of informal consent that I deemed necessary. Further, upon negotiation and discussion with Youthscape, and given Youthscape's principles of best practice, it was definitely appropriate to treat church youth leaders as gatekeepers for research that is very personal and sensitive.

One possible way that this may have affected the construction of the sample and other processes of research would be the youth leader's decision in deliberately excluding/including certain young people from their youth group in the sample. They might have particularly wanted one young person to attend, and particularly encouraged them while being less keen for others to participate. This might be because of the youth leader's ideas

about who might be ‘best’ for the research (e.g. their perceptions of the young people’s openness, honesty, intelligence etc). Further, the youth leader may want to avoid including young people who may not be positive about their own faith experience, or to deliberately include the ‘best’ Christians. All these possible issues were sensitively discussed during the initial meeting as part of the process of including the youth leaders.

2.3.3 Stage 3 – Recruitment sessions

To recruit participants, I ran a session for young men aged 16-19 as part of the particular youth group’s normal routine of provision. I requested that the session be presented as optional for the young men by the youth leaders, to mitigate the possibility that young people might feel coerced to be part of a discussion that might make them feel uncomfortable. The session provided an ideal environment in which to orient potential participants towards the ideas guiding my research and to gather the contact details of potential participants.

Although there was overlap between stage 2 and 3, I waited until stage 3 was completed (i.e. a complete list of all potential participants from the 6 youth groups I ran focus groups in was compiled) before I started arranging initial meetings with young people.

2.3.3.1 Recruitment session

The session was organized on my behalf by the youth workers and lasted around an hour. My schedule for the recruitment session can be found in section 2.4 of the appendix.

2.3.3.1.1 Methodological note- Perceptions of me in group

The way that my relationship with the participants was established is a crucial issue in the construction of the data. Part of this is also how the participants came to view my role as a researcher and how this is initially communicated to the young people by the youth leader. Perceptions of researchers and their agendas can range widely, from misunderstanding

through to suspicion. The way that I sought to actively position myself as researcher at the multiple stages of interaction with participants is as *someone who is genuinely interested in their experiences and thinks that hearing about their experiences can help others*. This focus can be seen throughout my recruitment materials. In this way, I hoped to help participants to gain a positive understanding of their participation in research, that it would be helping others (e.g. through the work of Youthscape in using the findings to inform practice). One of the main consequences of researcher perception can be the participants desire to give the researcher ‘what they want’. In seeking the above perception, I sought to broaden as much as possible the delimitations of what the participant might consider me to ‘want from them’. In reality this positive conception was difficult to achieve, and I still needed to maintain a sensitivity in my analysis to this dimension of the data.

Following the session, I passed round a contact sheet for them to leave their details on if they were interested (see appendix 2.5). This illustrates my self-selection approach to recruitment whereby participants chose whether or not they wanted to express interest and leave their details. Ultimately, this was not just a way of ticking ethical boxes, but also ensured that only participants who were really interested would end up being recorded as potentials.

2.3.3.1.2 Methodological note – Self-selection and having the ‘right narrative’

One of the concerns that arose about the self-selecting nature of the sample was the idea of participants’ self-selecting only where they felt they had ‘the right story’. This required me to consider what narrative features participant may have felt had to be in place in order for their story to be ‘counted’. For example, in the case of the Pentecostal practices of public testimony outlined by Smith (2010), unwritten rules strongly enforce the necessary inclusion of a divine intervention into the situation, with the action of God in the circumstances of the story constituting the resolution of the story, giving way to a cause for celebration and

thanksgiving in the 'coda'. A public testimony without the inclusion of this narrative element may be considered incomplete.

One helpful way of thinking about the likely narrative genres engaged by Christian young people is through McAdams's notion of the redemptive self (2013). Redemption for McAdams is the narrative pattern of "a deliverance from suffering to a better world" (ibid. p. 7) that can be found in American life histories. McAdams goes on to explain how the dominance of this form of storytelling has been established by intersecting forces of religion, nationalism and sociological forces. These insights are particularly pertinent for research with Christians, who are frequently socialized into a religious narratives and social practices of narration that centralize redemptive themes. There are of course many relevant genres besides the narrative of redemption, and storytellers frequently combine these sorts of narrative conventions creatively.

This gives us a theoretical frame of reference through which to approach the task of making ourselves aware of the 'rules' that young people may be playing by in their storytelling. The acts of narration in the interviews can never be considered in isolation from the personal historical formative history of which it is one moment. Although it may be difficult, even impossible to understand the formative trajectory of an individual's narrative capabilities and propensities, the notion of the narrative of redemption gives us a 'way in' to one possible way this history can be understood, and thus gives us a qualitatively better interpretative capacity.

2.3.3.2 Storage of contact details

All contact details for participants were typed up onto my password protected computer and then the original documents shredded. This was also the case with any other times that I took note of personal contact details (e.g. for youth leaders). These contact details were deleted once the research was completed.

2.3.4 Stage 4 - Confirmation and arrangement of Interview

I messaged the potential participants via text message soon after the focus groups to further gauge the interest at this stage. I made sure they understood what the research involved and that they had the opportunity to ask any questions. I made clear to them the importance of their informed consent and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

For those who had indicated their further interest I arranged a time and place for the first interview. I arranged the interviews to take place in publicly viewable rooms in church buildings or in bookable rooms in public libraries.

2.3.5 Describing the analysed sample

In social research sampling methods rarely produce an ideal final sample and my case was no exception. Below I describe four features actual sample that resulted from my process of sampling and recruitment and how this impacted the study. I also include here discussion of my choice to only analyse 6 out of the 10 participants recruited.

Fig. 1 Final sample overview and selection for analysis

This table depicts the list of 10 participants that completed the interview process. The ‘ethnicity’ and ‘class’ columns represent the self-identifications of participants. Where participants were not analysed, self-identified ethnicity and class were not recorded, as indicated.

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Class	Church	Analysed?
Mark	19	White	Middle	Hillview Catholic Retreat Centre	Y
Tim	18	White	Middle	Hillview Catholic Retreat Centre	Y
Lawrence	18	Not recorded	Not recorded	Methodist Youth Programme	N
Ethan	17	White/Asian	Middle	Trinity (Independent Evangelical)	Y
Jack	17	White	Middle	Greenwood (Independent Evangelical)	Y
Rob	18	White	Working	New Life (Independent Evangelical)	Y
Dan	17	Not recorded	Not recorded	New Life (Independent Evangelical)	N
Henry	18	White	Middle	New Life (Independent Evangelical)	Y
Sam	18	Not recorded	Not recorded	St George’s (Anglican)	N
Caleb	16	Not recorded	Not recorded	St Michael’s (Anglican)	N

2.3.5.1 Relatively high levels of religiosity

I have already discussed in a methodological note above my potential bias towards more highly religious participants. Further, my decision to recruit participants in the context of Christian youth groups and organizations resulted in a sample with relatively high levels of religiosity (following Francis, 1987), given that regular attendance at religious groups is a good indicator of strong personal faith commitment.

2.3.5.2 Evangelical and Catholic

There were four young men from evangelical churches and two Catholic young men in the final analysed sample. The bias of my sample towards evangelical young people is a result of several factors. The Youthscape Centre for Research is particularly well-known amongst evangelical, charismatic congregations. This may have led these types of churches to be more positively disposed to responding to my recruitment strategies. Secondly, these independent networks of churches tend to be more well-resourced than older church denominations, thus making them more likely to have an employed youth worker or a church secretary actively checking and responding to email and telephone correspondence. I was initially concerned that my sample was going to be entirely young people from evangelical churches as I wanted some denominational diversity. My bias towards attempting to recruit from Anglican, Pentecostal, Baptist and Methodist churches in the latter part of recruitment stage 1 unfortunately yielded few substantial results. Thus, I made a particular effort to include the Catholic young men in my analysis. It should also be noted that the recruitment of these young men from evangelical churches does not mean simply designating them as evangelical young men – none of these young men referred to themselves as evangelical, but simply as Christians. As Holmes (2015) notes, evangelical identity is complex, containing sites of both ethical clarity and contested. This has also been covered in my discussion of Strhan's work.

2.3.5.3 Heterosexual

Sexual orientation did not factor in my original sampling frame (i.e. I did not ask participants to give a sexual identity during recruitment). My final sample of 10 included one bisexual identifying participant and one gay-identifying participant. This presented me with a choice as to how to approach my analysis given this diversity of sexual identity. Given that I was unable given my time and resources to analyse all ten participants, I decided not to select the bisexual and gay participants to analyse for this study. Aware that this could easily be portrayed as silencing the ‘inconvenient’ sexualities of these participants, I wanted to make sure I had a very good reason for doing so. First, I wanted the analysis to be homogenous, allowing for as fine-grained analysis as possible. Further, I have already noted that reflected that current trends in research on sexuality and religion frequently focus on minority sexualities and leave heterosexuality unaddressed. This gives my research a strength in being focused rather than comparative in this regard, but a weakness in not capturing the unique and contrasting characteristics of marginal sexual identities. Again, this is an opportunity for future research to take forward.

2.3.5.4 Class/ethnicity homogeneity

Although class and ethnicity were not part of my sampling strategy, analysis methods or interpretative approach, I recognised the significant body of literature examining intersections between sexuality and race and between sexuality and class, so thought it important to ask participants to self-identify their class and ethnicity. The class and ethnicity of the sample were rather homogenous, predominantly white and middle class, though there were notable exceptions (Rob identified as working class and Ethan as mixed heritage White/Asian) that add a measure of diversity to the sample. I acknowledge the limitations of my study in the

lack of attention to race and class in my analysis and suggest this as an avenue for future work to correct.

2.3.5.5 Reducing the final sample to be analysed from 10 to 6

My decision to only analyse heterosexual participants excluded Lawrence and Sam, but I still had to exclude two more to reach my goal of analysing 6 cases. I chose to exclude Dan because I found out during the course of the study that Dan was Rob's cousin. Dan also discussed some of Rob's difficult experiences in some detail during the interviews. I decided that it would be inappropriate to include both participants in the study given the intertwined nature of their narratives. Faced with the choice between Rob and Dan, I decided to exclude Dan because his interview data was consistently argumentative rather than narrative, making analysis difficult. I chose to exclude Caleb for similar reasons – it was difficult to build rapport with Caleb such that the interview content remained rather superficial. Deciding to exclude Caleb from the analysis highlighted to me one important methodological limitation of BNIM – it is demanding on the participant in its constant asking for sometimes-difficult memory work. On reflection, I do not think that Caleb managed to engage comfortably with the demands of the interview, though he still stated by the end that he had enjoyed and got something out of it. It is worth noting that in BNIM interviewing, participants like Caleb may be unwilling or unable to do this difficult work and the rapport developed might be insufficient to sustain the style of questioning.

The final, narrowed form of the research questions following the recruitment and data collection process was thus:

1. How do heterosexual Christian young men experience romantic relationships and sexuality?

2. How do heterosexual Christian young men learn about romantic relationships and sexuality?

2.4 Interviewing

2.4.1 Stage 1 – Conducting BNIM interviews

2.4.1.1 Sub-session one

The BNIM interviewing method has a multiple sub-session structure typically with two separate interviews conducted on different days. The first interview contains SS1 and 2, and the second interview SS3 – however I extended the second interview further with sub-sessions 4, 5 and 6 (my reasons for this are addressed in 2.4.1.4).

Before beginning the interview, I ensured the participant was comfortable and that they fully understood the research. I asked them to read the consent form thoroughly and I answered any final questions they had about the interview or how their data was going to be used before they signed the form.

I then started the audio recorder and began the interview. BNIM interviews are different to most qualitative approaches due to the unstructured design of the first sub-session. SS1 begins with a ‘Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative’, or SQUIN, which I read out verbatim at the start of each SS1. The SQUIN used was:

“As you know, my research is about romantic relationships and sexuality, particularly what those things mean to you personally.

So, can you please tell me your story of your romantic relationships and sexuality, starting from when you first began thinking about those things, up until now - all the events and experiences that stand out as important for you personally.

Begin wherever you like. Please take all the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your story"

The aim of the SQUIN is to facilitate the interviewee talking for as long as they are comfortable without interruption. When the interviewee indicated that they had finished speaking, I replied, 'take some time, see if anything else comes to mind', non-directionally encouraging the interviewee to continue in the improvised narrative mode for as long as they were able (Wengraf, 2001, p. 119). During SS1, I took note of 5-10 important 'cue phrases', verbatim fragments of speech that may be indicative of a particular dated subjectivity (see section 2.1.3) – an event, experience, or particular emotion that carries within it potential for further narrative explication (ibid. p. 135). I selected cue-phrases (or indeed ignored them) on the basis of topic relevance, e.g. I was more likely to select and note a cue-phrase that referred to an educationally-relevant experience (e.g. a lesson or school-context experience).

2.4.1.1.1 Methodological note – BNIM and research with young people

BNIM is an approach uniquely suited to research with significant power-inequalities combined with sensitive and personal topics. The emphasis laid by Wengraf on "active listening" (2001, p. 128) and "pushing pausefully and gracefully" assists in the development of rapport. Hollway & Jefferson describe how, in interviews like this, "interviewees warmed to the whole event, and to the interviewer, because they had an experience of being paid attention to and taken seriously through their own, self-styled account" (2000, p. 44).

Following Wengraf's guidance to follow the *gestalt* of the interviewee even where they are talking about something that has emotional resonance for them but little relevance to the topic, empowers the participant and creates a different kind of relationship than that developed through the question and answer approach. This style of relationship accords with the received wisdom of research with young people, e.g. the need to hold agendas lightly and

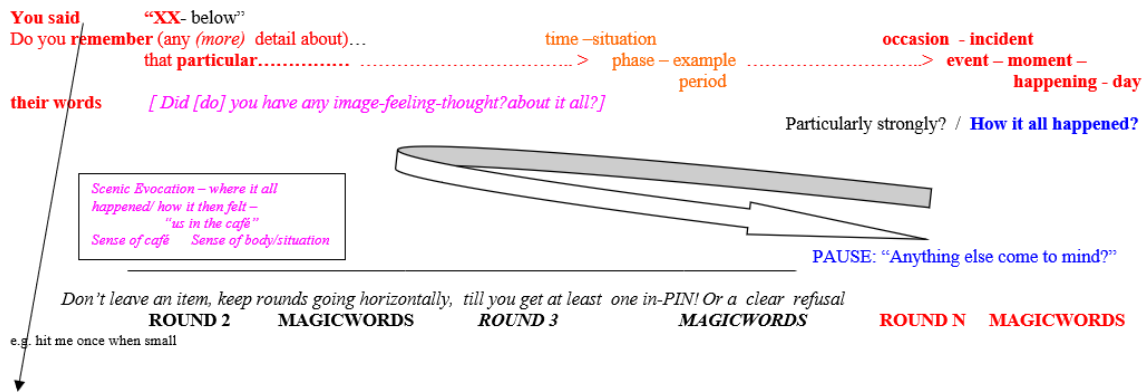
balance power relations, such that the young participant may feel more listened to than used (Heath, Brooks & Cleaver et al., 2009).

Another relevant point concerning the age of our participants concerns the research noting the importance of process and developmental stage in the development of a narrative identity. McClean, Pasupathi and Pals (2007) argue that narrative identity begins to emerge through adolescence, but that in adolescence some narratives remain incomplete, not integrated into the sense of self. In interviewing older adolescents, I expected to encounter a narrative identity in a particularly intense period of formation and change. Together with my emphasis on sexuality and the awareness that the development of a sexual identity is often in flux during adolescence, I expected ambiguity and hesitancy to be a defining feature of the narrated ethics of my participants and I actively resisted the temptation to assume a somewhere-buried, soon-to-be-uncovered coherent narrative identity.

2.4.1.1.2 Break between SS1 and SS2 – noting cue phrases

Once SS1 concluded I took a short break. During this time, I went through the noted cue phrases and ‘starred’ both the first (earliest) and last cue phrase noted, along with any other cue-phrases that (1) had potential for rich narratives (vivid, idiosyncratic, etc), and (2) were the most topic-relevant (as above, e.g. related to learning and education). I then assigned what Wengraf calls “magic words” (2019, p. 191) to each phrase noted, choosing from three clusters, 1) ‘image/feeling/thought’ 2) ‘time/situation/phase/example/period’ 3) ‘occasion/incident/event/moment/happening/day’. The matrix for magic-word assignment is illustrated below:

Fig. 2 BNIM Notepad for the BNIM subsessions (Wengraf, 2019, p. 2)



In the diagram these clusters are positioned from left to right. The right-most cluster are of magic words eliciting narratives that are closest to dated situated subjectivity (occasion, incident, event, etc.). Since the aim of BNIM interviewing is to work towards eliciting Particular Incident Narratives (PINs), these right-most magic words are preferable, but often the left-most magic words are necessary initially to allow the participant time to begin placing himself back in that dated situation. According to Wengraf's narrative epistemology, PINs offer the best opportunity for accessing the participants dated situated subjectivity, whereby the participant does the work of evoking a particular scene in their minds, 'reliving' the experience in the context of the telling. PINs are distinct, for example, from General Incident Narratives (GINs) which take the form of 'we would always go to the gym' or 'you would go into the classroom and the teacher would be there'. A PIN would take the form of '(on that day) we were going to the gym and...' or 'I went into the classroom and the teacher was there'.

An example of the selection of cue phrases can be seen in this extract of my typed-up notes (extracts indicated both here and in future by dotted-line boxes) from the day of my first interview with him.

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- 9) I decided to stay in my own room HAPPENING
 - a) They made a point MOMENT
 - i) Whatsapp conversation
 - ii) We were caught
 - iii) He had a word afterwards MOMENT
 - b) Jodie and Lara
 - c) Really worried about being caught
- 10) Management strict, worried but didn't care
- 11) Relationship turned more physical
 - a) Last weekend
 - b) Tess said the team was ticked off
- 12) People on team that have wavered TIME
 - a) Remember who you're representing TIME PIN follows
 - i) People turned and looked at him
 - ii) I hope he doesn't feel cornered
- 13) We're all shunted into a category

2.4.1.2 Sub-session two

I SS2 I proceeded through each selected cue-phrase, asking only narrative directed questions (as in the BNIM notepad above, 'You said x, do you remember any more detail about that particular y, how that all happened?'), or questions asking for more detail, or questions asking if 'anything else comes to mind'. In all cases the idea is to gently push for PINs, attentive and responsive to the resistance/accommodation of the participant, encouraging the interviewee to provide more detail from particular recalled incidents. I continued to note down relevant cue phrase and ask questions utilizing the magic word list, again aiming to move from the more general 'left-most' magic words to the more specific 'right-most' magic words. The interview proceeded strictly in this manner following the chronology of the SS1 cue-phrase order.

An example of this can be demonstrated using the above set of notes on Mark. The first list level shows cue phrases and magic words selected during the break between SS1 and SS2. For example, 'I decided to stay in my own room' was assigned the magic word 'happening'. When I asked Mark in SS2 about this 'happening' of deciding to stay in his own room, I made notes on his response following the second list level. I then selected from this set of

three cue-phrases ‘they made a point’ and used the magic word ‘moment’ to elicit further detail. From the next set of three cue phrases on the third list level I selected ‘he had a word afterwards’ using the magic word ‘moment’. Once Mark had responded to this I moved on to the next cue-phrase selected in the break ‘people on team that have wavered’. From this it can be seen how the process of cue-phrase and magic word selection oriented towards pushing for narrative unfolded through SS2. SS2 finishes when all the cue phrases from the list noted during the break are covered, or when the participant indicates they would like to stop. In my study the first interview containing SS1 and SS2 lasted for an average of 90 minutes.

2.4.1.3 Second Interview – sub-session three

In normal BNIM practice, the second interview contains only SS3. However, I re-designed the second interview to have a four sub-session structure (SS3, 4, 5 and 6). Further reflections on my development of BNIM for the purpose of my research questions can be found below.

SS3 was designed following the typical BNIM approach – questions were asked for more narrative material about those areas that were of marked significance for the interviewee and those that were most topic relevant. SS3 also allowed for a more meaning-oriented questioning style without the restrictions of only focusing on narrative material (see methodological note for more on this) An extract from a SS3 schedule for Mark can be seen below.

Key episodes ask for more detail about negotiations

- Effect of early years of seeking relationships on self. Especially as Catholic?
- Decision to 'give up'. Justification? Looking back?
- Sending nudes. Justification at time? Looking back?
- Pornography – what meant by 'what am I seeking'. Views? Justification?
- God's action. What does it mean when you say God's involved in your relationships?
- Period of negotiation over calling to celibacy / vocation? More detail? Inner challenges?
- Turning point of coming to Hillview. Significance looking back?
- Importance of shared faith in current relationship. Ways it affects. Rel. with non-Catholic?
- More about period of mental health in Feb and role of distance relationship in that?
- Decision to have sex before marriage (or not). Justification? Esp. role of love. What do you mean by love? Faith?
- Same sex marriage? Justifications, significance for identity as Catholic?
- Supported/not supported in relationship by various people. What does that mean to you?

The aim of this session is to gather more reflective and less narrative-directed commentary from the interviewee about some of the key parts of their stories as indicated by them and of most concern to the interviewer.

Material from SS3 was not systematically analysed, rather I organized it topically and drew on it in during the full write-up of the individual case. These footnotes are intended to refer the reader to the SS3 material as adding richness and depth to the interviewees on self-understandings and self-explanations regarding certain aspects of their story.

2.4.1.3.1 Methodological note – theoretical considerations for the second interview

The theoretical and methodological considerations outlined above relate to the parts of BNIM explicitly using narrative interviewing and analysis. However, Wengraf also recommends the use of a second interview using a semi-structured interviewing style to address any important topics not covered by the first interview (2001, p. 144). This interview, in its division into SS3, 4, 5 and 6, follows the conventions of phenomenological interviewing as outlined by Kvale (2015), using the schedule to investigate both experiences and the meaning of those experiences. Unlike the tightly narrative-oriented questioning of the first interview, the

second interview permits questions like ‘What did you mean by x?’ or ‘How do you feel about x experience now?’. Although the theoretical and methodological foundations of the first narrative and second phenomenological interviews are different, the second interview is intended to support and enrich the analysis developed from the first.

2.4.1.4 Sub-session four

As outlined in section 1.4.1, I wanted my study to be designed to allow me to make connections between the participants’ narratives of religious sexual subjectivity and participants’ views on and experiences of sexuality education. For this reason, I expanded the second interview to also include a further semi-structured interview schedule (SS4) aiming to collect (1) experiences of sexuality education (2) evaluations of sexuality education and (3) recommendations for how their sexuality education could have been better. I asked these questions regarding 5 sources of learning, (1) parents (2) peers (3) church (4) school (5) internet. These 5 sources were adapted from Shipley and Young’s research project on religious youth’s views on what influences their sexual values and attitudes (2014, p. 287). While the first chapter focused on school-based sexuality education, the main focus of this thesis, I wanted to examine other sources of learning about sexuality in light of the need to understand the relationship between formal and informal sexuality education e.g. as argued by Byron and Hunt (2017). In this way, SS4 utilised a structured schedule designed explicitly to answer my second research question (How do heterosexual Christian young men learn about romantic relationships and sexuality?). Below is the SS4 schedule utilized for all ten interviews:

2. Learning about sex and relationships

Can you say something about how you learned about sex and relationships, including your parents, your church, your friends, the internet and from your school sex education?

Asking for more detail for each specific learning source addressed. Ask for specific narratives of learning times.

Do you think the education you have received about sex and relationships has been adequate for you?

Drawing out why? Justification for response

How could the education you have received have been better?

In this way, SS4 aimed to capture three sets of data about learning relationships and sexuality: experiences, evaluations, and recommendations. Sub-session four material was crucial to the research design, connecting the first central research questions ‘What are Christian young men’s experiences of relationships and sexuality?’ (SS1-3) with the second, ‘How do heterosexual Christian young men learn about romantic relationships and sexuality?’ (SS4). The ‘integrated account’ combining these two analytic summaries allowed for the development of the final cross-case themes of the study. More detail on this can be found in the steps below.

2.4.1.5 Sub-session five

SS5 was a two-question structured sub-session oriented towards future narratives, addressing future aspirations and ideas about what barriers there are to those aspirations. This data was not analysed in the final write up, though it will be used in future research. The schedule for this sub-session can be found in appendix 3.2.

2.4.1.6 Sub-session six

Sub-session six comprised a debrief, with a number of questions intended to be summative of the whole interviewing process. Some of this material was included in the final write up. The SS6 schedule was as follows:

5. Debrief

I want to ask you just a few questions about the whole story you have told. Looking back now, can you tell me about a particular moment in your life where – looking back --- you now wish you had done something differently?

What do you think about it all now, looking back on it?

Have you learnt anything about yourself by telling this story?

Have you ever told this story or done something like this before?

Was doing the interviews what you expected? How was it different?

Was there anything you felt uncomfortable with, or unhappy about the way you spoke about it?

I want to invite you to make any general comments about the whole process of being interviewed.

Anything at all that comes to mind.

In most cases the debrief was for the benefit of the interviewee, to make a satisfying and summative/evaluative end point to their participation. However, in a few cases comments made during the debrief proved decisive in supporting a particular interpretation. Following the interview I also checked whether or not participants felt that anything had come up during the process of interviewing that they felt they needed more support with and had a list of organizations that I could signpost them to should this be the case.

2.4.1.6.1 Methodological note – emotions and reflexivity

Although it is not closely focused on the interactional elements of the interview, attention to the emotional dynamics of interviews is important in BNIM insofar as it is a psychoanalytically oriented method. Hollway and Jefferson write of free association methods that they consider “both researcher and researched as anxious, defended subjects, whose mental boundaries are porous where unconscious material is concerned. This means that both will be subject to projections of ideas and feelings coming from the other person.” (2000, p. 45).

These BNIM-related writings led me to reflexively consider the implications of my own commitments in the interviews and be aware of the emotional dynamics of these very personal stories. In my own interviews, one of the key emotions that I felt was the feeling of nurture towards the young person, perhaps conditioned by my years as a youth worker with pastoral responsibility for young Christian men of all ages. Where they talked about their struggles and difficulties, I was drawn to want to comfort them and assure them that they were not alone (since that was my primary feeling growing up with relationships - the feeling of not being able to tell anyone about the things I was facing). In that sense I wanted to make sure that they were getting what I did not have. In terms of the impact on the interviews themselves, my non-verbal listening indicators often spilled over into actual identifications like ‘I know what you mean’ or ‘yeah same’. On the side of the participant, I imagine that in some cases this led to them feeling encourage to talk more and perhaps more in-depth about those subjects on which they had received a conscious identification from me.

2.4.2 Stage 2 – Creation of transcript

Next, I created a verbatim transcript from the audio recordings. I recognized that there is no such thing as ‘objective’ transcription and that transcription itself is an interpretative process (Green, Franquiz & Dixon, 1997). Therefore, I tried to make my practices of transcription

consonant with the methodological approach more broadly. Transcripts were written including bracketed points regarding important variations in tone or emotionality and ‘*’ is used to note emphasis placed on specific words. This helped support analytic attention to tone changes detailed in section 2.5.4.5 below. While my transcripts do not contain significant details about tone, inflection, rhythm or pace, taking further fieldnotes during transcription helped capture some of these details and the overall sense of the ‘mood’ of the interview which assisted my analysis.

2.4.3 Stage 3 – Anonymization of transcript

Following the British Educational Research Association Guidelines (BERA, 2018), transcripts were anonymized by assigning pseudonyms for any names or locations which might allow for participants to be identified. Other key details that might give away participants identities were changed where this did not have a potential impact on analysis.

2.5 Analysis

2.5.1 Two-Track Analysis Introduction

The question guiding BNIM interpretation is “How did a person who lived their life for a period of their life like this come, in the BNIM interview, to tell the story of this life, or of this period of their life, like that?” (Wengraf, 2019, p. 228). Wengraf states that providing a response to this question requires two analytic tasks: 1) a description of the objective chronology of the living of that life over the life-period (‘like this’) 2) a description of the sequence of the subjective telling of the story of the life at the point of interview during the interview (‘like that’). In this way BNIM interpretation is two-track, requiring first an analysis of the ‘lived life’ and secondly ‘the told story’, to be brought together in the final write up.

2.5.2 Stage 1 – Creating the BDC

The first ‘track’ of BNIM analytical writing involves the creation of a biographical data chronology (or BDC). I read through the manuscript, carefully noting events and incidences that had the possibility of being externally verified – ‘public’ data points rather than ‘private’ descriptions of internal states. For example, despite being apparently ‘private’, interactions on social media are in theory publicly verifiable with those who participated, and thus were eligible for inclusion in the BDC. The participants fearful thoughts about how to reply to a certain series of messages were not eligible in this same way. This verificationist approach to the ‘lived life’ track is grounded in the realist orientation of BNIM described in section 2.1.7.

In this case, I also designed the interview process to include the unrecorded creation of a visual chronology of events in partnership with the interviewee immediately preceding the second interview based on my own brief sketch of major BDC events. I drew on this visual timeline to assist in the creation of the dated BDC. Below is an extract from the beginning of Mark’s BDC:

Mark’s Biographical Data Chronology

09/10 Y6

Has first holy communion and begins altar service

Begins dating Cara, a girl in his primary school

Breaks up with Cara

10/11 Y7

Sept. 10 Begins attending secondary school

Asks Cara out again and is rejected. Continues to ask her out periodically over the next two years.

2.5.3 Stage 2 – Writing of Biographical Data Analysis and Summaries

The BDC is then analysed in a chunk-by-chunk, future blind analytic process. I proceeded through each biographical point, or ‘chunk’, making a minimum of three hypotheses (intuitive, contrary, and tangential) concerning the range of possibilities of *how that particular event may have been experienced by the participant*. I then gave some possible ‘following hypotheses’, i.e., what might happen next in their life if the event was indeed experienced in the way we have hypothesized? A fragment of such hypothesizing can be seen below:

Asks out a number of people at school in a short period of time and is rejected by all

EXPERIENTIAL AND FOLLOWING

1. Merely procedural, no real emotional import
 - a. Will lose interest in having a relationship
2. As necessary for protection at school
 - a. Will experience more bullying
 - b. Will develop a reputation that will damage him
3. As a ‘last resort’, feeling of if I don’t do this I will die
 - a. Will go into despair and depression, maybe self harm
4. Inevitability, if I do this I will definitely get somewhere, sense of hope through process
 - a. Disappointment
 - b. Will continue to ask out even if pace slows a little
5. Through process growing sense of despair
 - a. Will give up on all practices related to attempting to appear attractive in future

SH 1 Supported

SH4 Will develop a sense of self and a reputation as ‘desperate’ or ‘needy’ that will confound him.

The goal of this future-blind process of analysis is to turn the experiential and following hypotheses into structural hypotheses concerning possible patterns of the lived life. This can be seen above as this particular biographical point offers support for a previous structural hypothesis (which is: ‘SH1 Attempts at romantic relationships will continue to be

unsuccessful for most of his life’) and advances a new one. As the BDA progresses support and evidence is provided or removed for the various structural hypotheses being advanced. It is important to note that this is not intended to be a mechanical process of conclusively disproving or proving, but rather a process facilitating deep engagement with the data in a rigorous manner in which the progression to necessary abstraction and theorization in the later analytical process is kept grounded in the base material of the transcripts.

I then wrote up the BDA into an initial, provisional summary of the lived life with extra analysis provided from wider literature (for an example of this from mark see appendix 4.1.2). One of the goals of this process is to suggest a range of possible ways the story could be told. Wengraf refers to this as “getting armed against the seductions of the telling” (2019, p. 246) and recognizes that the participants make choices to present their lived experiences and their memories in certain ways. This initial BDA is subject to radical revision following the later stages of analysis – below you can see a chunk of my initial BDA of Mark’s BDC, followed by the final BDA summary to be presented as part of the final write up. The grey box is the ‘unenriched’ BDA (prose extension of the BDC) followed by an ‘enriched’ BDA containing insights and suggestions gleaned from the process of analysis, followed by some initial grounded suggestions concerning ‘how Mark’s story might be told’:

Mark has his first holy communion at age 10 and begins serving as an altar boy. He has a romantic relationship with a girl from his Primary school, Cara, but they break up before he starts secondary school. Mark attends a Catholic mixed sex secondary school, in which he receives some sex education classes. Cara attends the same school as Mark, he asks her out again and is rejected. In year eight, Mark receives a nude picture of a girl from his school, Marsha. In year nine Mark begins viewing pornography. He asks out a number of girls in a short period of time but is rejected by them all. At the end of year nine Mark is confirmed in the Catholic church and receives instruction from his catechist, some of which concerns Catholic teaching about sexuality.

Mark's participation in first Holy Communion is often experienced as a significant point in maturation for Catholic young people and marks a progression into a measure of maturity and social acceptance. His roughly simultaneous relationship with a girl in his year six (aged 11-12) represents an early exploration of dating relationships which are typically short-lived without any physical sexual or intimate involvement. Mark's early viewing of sexual media through an explicit picture of a classmate is typical for young men growing up in contemporary English schools, particularly given the great acceleration of smartphone access and media technology development such as Snapchat and Instagram over the last five years. Also typical is his early exposure to and deliberate accessing of pornography. His practice of asking out a number of girls in quick succession during his young secondary school days could have a number of explanations, and is likely to be due to the commonly felt social pressures to engage in heterosexual dating and sexual practices as part of a system of adolescent and masculine social hierarchy. Mark's failure to secure this position may support his ongoing involvement in church (confirmation and later, intentional attendance and service) as a way of distracting and evading from this disappointing and troubling aspect of his every day school life.

This completes the first 'track' of BNIM case interpretation. As with all subsequent stages, the full internal documents used can be found in the relevant sections of appendix 4.

2.5.4 Stage 3 – Creation of Text Structure Sequentialization

The second, more demanding track analysis begins with a similar 'chunking' process of the SS1 transcript. I worked through the transcript and introduced divisions into the text to create chunks. A new chunk starts every time there is a) change of speaker b) change of topic c) change of textsort d) significant change of tone. The second-track method of chunking is thus

organized around tracking the through-time changes traceable in the audio recordings and transcript.

Two important categories of sequentialization require more explanation – the notion of ‘topic’ and the notion of ‘textsort’ change.

2.5.4.1 Methodological note – focus on ‘flow’

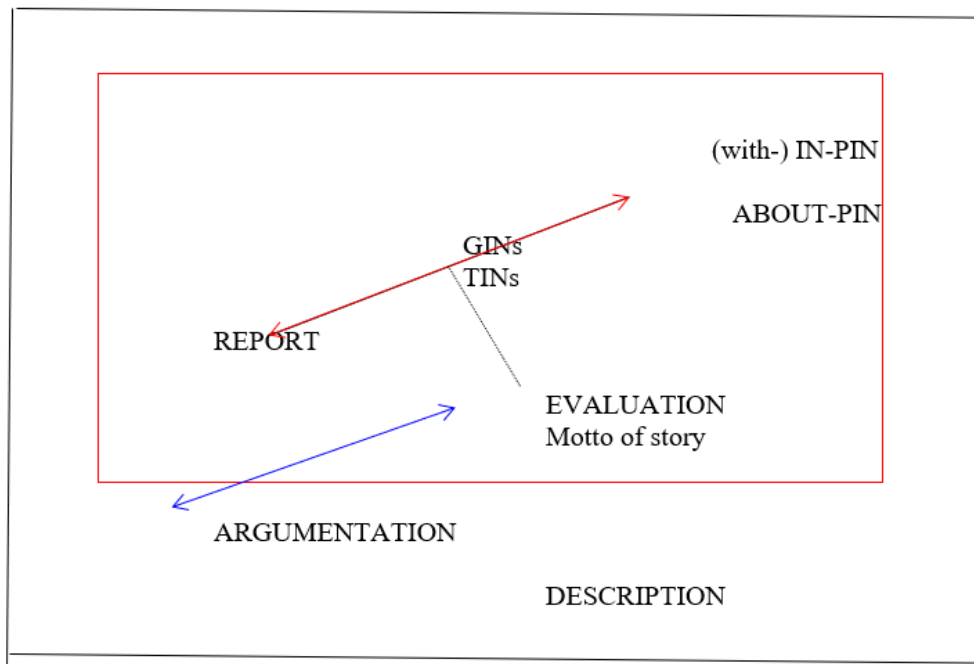
In section 2.1, I noted the importance of BNIM’s framing of subjectivity as processual rather than static. The distinctive way that BNIM approaches the organization of the transcript illustrate the psychoanalytic theoretical foundations of the methodological approach. As has already been described, BNIM is heavily influenced by the psychanalytically grounded ‘free association’ interview method, where the analytic interest lies in the *movement* between distinct topics or modes of speech as representative of some sort of *meaningful decision* by the participant reflecting some sort of articulable subjectivity. It is this series of meaningful decisions, the flow of the telling from one moment to the next and the holistic viewing of these micro-flows that further levels of abstraction permit, that constitute the fundamental orientation of this form of narrative analysis.

2.5.4.2 Textsort

Wengraf’s typology of textsort draws on linguistic theoretical notions of types of speech:

Description, Argumentation, Report, Evaluation, Particular Incident Narrative (PIN), General Incident Narrative. A useful diagram can be seen below illustrating the relationships between the textsorts.

Fig. 3 Textsorts inside and outside the N-box – inner box in red (Wengraf, 2019, p. 230)



The best way to explain these textsorts is through understanding the subtle differences between some of them. Description differs from report in that it concerns ‘the way things are’ rather than ‘the way things went’. Evaluation differs from argumentation in that it is summative and often reflects the ‘motto of the story(ies)’. Above, textsorts in the red box are narrative textsorts (description and argumentation are not explicitly narrative modes of speech). The blue arrow represents the desired movement from non-narrative to narrative speech and the red arrow represents the desired movement towards more dated and situated narratives. An ‘about PIN’ differs from an ‘in-PIN’ in that it is less evocative of the scene; it is a commentary on the PIN rather than a conscious ‘re-entering’ of the particular memory. Sometimes two textsorts can be combined where a particular chunk of speech tangles together both argumentation and report and to tease out the detailed movements would result in an impractically detailed series of chunks.

It is worth noting at this stage that the push towards in-PINs through the interviewing process and the analytic valuing of them is not to denigrate other forms of speech. An interview with

few PINs is not a poor interview; the important thing is the *process* of pushing for PINs and for more detail, this is what makes an interview a properly *narrative* interview and not a (e.g.) hermeneutic phenomenological one, which would include requests by the interviewer for justification or further meaning.

2.5.4.3 Topic

A topic change is one where the subject has changed significantly and is usually easy to detect.

2.5.4.4 Tone change

Detecting tone change relies on careful notes taken during and after the interview, as well as attentiveness to the tonalities of the audio recordings. For example, a tone change might be the shift mid-sentence from animated/fast moving speech to slow/quiet.

2.5.4.5 Thematic field/thematic flow

The final task to complete the Text Structure Sequentialization (TSS) is to add two further levels of structure on the transcript. The first is a topic heading, which summarizes a particular set of chunks. For example, ‘relationships at Hillview’ below summarizes two chunks, one begun through a change of topic from considerations for attendance to relationships and one begun through a change of textsort from description/report to argumentation/evaluation.

The second is a thematic field which groups together topic headings. For example, below ‘coming to Hillview’ captures the main sub-topic headings that constitute it. Wengraf uses the term ‘thematic field’ rather than just ‘theme’ because the purpose of these different levels of abstraction are not ‘horizontal’ themes that are arranged of decontextualized chunks cut out from various points through the interview, but ‘vertical’ themes that acknowledge the

historical nature of the interview as a period of time rather than a single expressive moment (Wengraf, 2019, p. 255).

Thematic Field 1 – Relationships at School		
LINE	SPEAKER/TEXTSORT	GIST
1/10	Global Report/evaluation	Own experience with relationships at school “always quite odd” Wanted to be in a relationship at Catholic secondary school Many others were in relationships “tried a few times... never worked out”
Thematic Field 2 – Coming to Hillview		
1/17	Argumentation	Considering why he wanted to go to Hillview ... because he knew they discouraged relationships But he wanted to explore a vocation
1/20	Description/report	Relationships at Hillview Team members say the same thing Rationale of no relationships – team fractured on breakup
1/26	Evaluation/argumentation	Own position – wasn’t interested apart from people he liked on team
1/29	Description	Hillview’s expectation they represent the diocese/bishop Had to consider this in all areas e.g. sex, social media, events
1/38	Report/evaluation	Sex a risk for management Past experiences of people getting together Catholic doctrine Don’t really care though
1/45	Evaluation	Didn’t bother me because I wasn’t in a relationship

2.5.5 Stage 4 – Writing of Teller Flow Analysis and Summaries

The teller flow analysis is the most intensive stage of the BNIM interpretation process. Like the BDA, the TFA proceeds chunk by chunk, future-blind, creating hypotheses. However, this time hypothesizing is undertaken in a ‘double’ manner, first about how the participant is experiencing that particular moment as they are telling the story interactively (e.g. seeking to anxiously justify actions; seeking to distance self from the topic), secondly about how the ‘then’-event is being drawn upon. An example of such ‘double hypothesizing’ from Mark’s TFA can be seen below.

1/20	Description/report	Relationships at Hillview Team members say the same thing Rationale of no relationships – team fractured on breakup
------	--------------------	--

EH 1 Enjoyed the fact that he was coming to a non-relationships place, a relief from the typical environment of school

FH 1.1 Will talk positively about Hillview

FH 1.2 Will talk negatively because it went wrong and it was not the sexuality free zone he expected

FH 1.3

EH 2 Using word ‘obviously’ repeated, somehow proud of the fact that it’s such a restrictive environment, enjoying talking about the restrictiveness to me

FH 2.1 Will go on to talk about how that pride was shattered and now disillusioned

FH 2.2 Will go on to defend Hillview’s policies further

FH 2.3 Will go on to describe how he deliberately sabotaged the rules and created havoc

EH 3 Presenting it to me as laughable and ridiculous, e.g. use of ‘no relationships MIND’ (like adopting the voice of an overly strict parent)

FH 2.1 Will continue to mock, intensifying

FH 2.2 Will start to moderate his mockery and offer balance of good things

FH 2.3 Will go from mockery into ad hominem intense character critiques of leadership

Here I show how I created in EH2 and 3 double experiencing hypotheses of ‘enjoyable restrictions’ (EH2) and ‘laughable restrictions’ (EH3) offering two different ways that the ‘then’ restrictiveness might be being experienced now in the context of the interview interaction.

The following hypotheses, similar to track one, concern what will happen next *in the telling*, e.g. will the participant change from argumentation to narrative (and why)? Crucially it is important that these hypotheses are *linked* following hypotheses – they connect directly with the experiential hypotheses. In the above example my following hypotheses from EH2 propose both changes in topic (FH 2.1; reporting/describing how the enjoyable restrictiveness fell apart) and textsort (FH2.2; from report/description to argumentation concerning

Hillview's policies) that clearly link to the experiential hypotheses. As before, I intended this process of confirmation and disconfirmation to generate higher level structural hypotheses concerning the structure of the *telling* 'now' rather than the *living* 'then' (as in track one).

The creation and deletion of these structural hypotheses allowed me to begin to develop a structural model of the evolving subjectivity through the temporal space of the interview, what Wengraf calls the 'emotional shape' of the interview. For example, with Mark's interview, the emotional shape changed from the more 'pre-thought-out' argumentative mood of SS1, whereby Mark seeks to 'unload' very 'live' emotions concerning recent events, to SS2 in which more emotional ambiguities emerge as Mark moves rapidly from assured convicted self-justification to more open, sympathetic self-questioning. This is an example of 'emotional shape' and makes BNIM distinct from typical qualitative coding approaches in its acknowledgement of the interview as a dynamic interaction that changes over time and making this dynamism a central analytic concern.

The TFA summary write-up is thus a model of the 'subjectivity doing the telling' as it evolved over the time of the interview interaction, grounded in the process of hypothesizing, dis/confirmation, and emergent structural hypotheses. For an example of Mark's TFA summary see appendix 4.1.3.

2.5.6 Stage 5 – Creation of Three Column Table (Successive States of Subjectivity)

To sum up, what has been achieved by this stage of the analysis of a single case is two separate grounded models 1) the subjectivity as it has evolved through the lived life ('then') and 2) the subjectivity as it has evolved through the told story ('now').

The method of BNIM analysis and interpretation outlined thus far operates on the assumption that (to some extent artificially) separating the kinds of analytic thinking and thinking rigorously in terms of first the lived life *then* the told story leads to a more rigorous final

analysis as the two modes of thinking come together. The three-column table facilitates the reintegration of these two analytical modes of thinking.

The creation of the three-column table begins with a process of condensing the summary write ups of both track one and track two into bullet point format. The middle column is then created, outlining successive states of subjectivity (SSS) (see section 2.1 above for more detail on the theory behind this). It is created through a ‘weaving’ process across column one and two. It is structured chronologically according to the track one ‘lived life’ but contains the subjectively lived/recalled narratives within it. The chronological third column is written in an abstracted way, using the subjective language of the TFA to periodize the lived life by reference to certain subjectivities recalled during that period. This bare-bones structure can then be fleshed out by the write up. An illustrative example:

Biographical Data Analysis from all sessions	Successive States of Subjectivity	Teller Flow Analysis of SS1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born wealthy middle class Catholic family • Y6 First Holy Communion and altar boy • Y6 Receives some sex education classes • Y7-9 Asks out a <u>number of</u> girls • Y8 Receives nude picture of a girl he knows • Y9 Gives up on asking out girls 	<p>At school</p> <p>Feeling of bottom of hierarchy, Low point of worthlessness Picking up somewhat after ‘giving up’ on getting in a relationship ‘just being nice’ and getting in with ‘lads’</p>	<p>I Beginning at Hillview</p> <p>Coming from relational failure at school Acknowledged restrictions but didn’t care</p> <p>II Getting together with Bella</p> <p>Met via a friend, she had seen a picture of him Relationship within two weeks</p>

This can be used to demonstrate the weaving process – ‘at school’ is the first phase of the SSS column, and underneath this heading a number of elements of both subjectivity, drawn from the TFA analysis of ‘relational failure’ (‘worthlessness’), and objectivity drawn from the BDA (‘gives up on asking out girls’). The SSS is intended to prompt and inform the writing of the HCE.

2.5.7 Stage 6 – Writing up of history of the case evolution

The history of the case evolution (HCE) is the detailed write-up of the third column SSS. At this stage, the BNIM method becomes far less prescriptive and it is up to the researcher to decide how best to present the process of analysis in a coherent fashion that addresses the

research question (Wengraf, 2019, p. 273). In some BNIM studies the HCE write up is the final presented ‘external’ documentation of the whole research process findings. However, for this study the HCE remained an ‘internal’ document to the analytical process requiring further enrichment with the SS4 data concerning learning from specific sources.

2.5.8 Stage 7 – Creation of sub-session four analytical table

The inclusion of SS4, focusing on learning from specific sources, required me to extend the BNIM analytical method. In order to adequately answer my two central research questions, my final interpretative write up needed to integrate an analysis of the SS1-3 HCE with analysis of the SS4 material on learning about relationships and sexuality.

To do this, I analysed the SS4 data by organizing the content thematically across the three major areas of questioning regarding their learning about sexuality and relationships – describing, evaluating and recommending, in line with the five sources of learning (parents, church, peers, school, internet), to create a table for each participants SS4 in which each cell contained a ‘gist’ of the content (e.g. describing their learning from parents, recommending concerning their learning from church). An extract from Mark’s SS4 analytical table can be seen below.

	Description	Evaluation
Parents	1/9 Nothing, not even talk 1/10 Dad condoms ‘took as the talk’ 1/11 Good dynamic with parents, but sex ‘not one of those things’	3/27 You can’t change the dynamic that you have with your parents
Church	1/20 Confirmation workshop 1/21 ‘Catechist mentioned a few times’ 1/22 Gave the ‘rules that the church had’ 1/30 Nothing in mass	1/14 Not memorable at all 1/23 Too young to take on board

2.5.9 Stage 8 – Integrated account write-up including SS4 data analysis

The integrated account is so named because it integrates the SS4 material captured in the table into the HCE as already completed. The creation of the integrated account was guided by the interpretative question, following the pattern of the BNIM interpretative question in section 2.5.1, ‘how did a person who experienced sexuality and relationships like *this* come to talk about their learning about sexuality and relationships like *that*?’ To do this, I took the structural model for the HCE for the participant and considered whether the new content from SS4 confirmed or disproved certain aspects of the model, then proceeded to write reflectively about that. For example, Mark’s recommendations about the importance of educators taking care to not induce guilt is explained by the model of his subjectivity during the interviewing process as performatively working out his own complex feelings of guilt and frustration over recent events. The underlying assumption here is that the holistic HCE provides an explanatory framework for the SS4 analysis and interpretation. Taking this approach allows us to provide an enriched account of the learning by situating the learning experiences within the HCE.

2.5.9.1.1 Methodological note – theoretical considerations for the integrated account

One methodological problem with the interpretations offered in the integrated accounts concerns the validity of the explanation offered. It might be countered that any apparent connection may be incidental. However, it is important to note that even without successful integration, the design has already provided an answer to both central research questions. As such, the explanations offered by the integrated account can remain tentative and subject to revision or re-interpretation by other readers of the texts (like all aspects of this research), yet the depth and detail of the account of subjectivity generated by the HCE analysis has an explanatory force that should lead to persuasive and insightful connections between learning

and subjectivity. The integrated account also critically addresses the complexity of a ‘needs-led’ model of learning that our review of the literature examined, questioning the context during which knowledge about young people’s needs is generated. This way of answering the question illustrates how needs are hard to pin down, require ethical positioning, and often require contextualization and holistic understanding of the individual.

2.5.10 Stage 9 – Writing up other cases

The process just recounted was repeated for each participant until there were 6 full integrated accounts.

2.5.11 Stage 10 – Case comparison thematising from integrated accounts, local theorizing

Once all the case analyses were completed, the main themes from each integrated account were placed alongside each other. The interrelations between these themes were then examined to develop cross-case themes. I completed a table showing all the themes for each case. I then considered the within-case themes as a whole by noting connections and resonances between themes. Themes that had resonances were grouped together and reworded to create a new theme heading. This was repeated until all the within-case themes had been incorporated into one of the four cross-case themes that emerged from this process. For each cross-case overarching theme, a number of sub-themes were developed that ensured that the case-specific themes were not lost through the necessary abstraction and reduction. In this way, although the cross-case themes are not explicitly narrative in character they are rooted in and only graspable through the underlying narrative analysis developed through the within-case themes.

The four final themes from across the six integrated accounts were 1) the pain and power of sexual knowledge, 2) being masculine and being abstinent at school 3) the absence and

presence of meaningful pedagogical relationships 4) desiring regulation and desiring freedom. These overarching themes, along with their subordinate themes, functioned as ‘local’ theorizations about the sample which were then related to the literature and in critical dialogue with its ‘global’ theorizations. The relating back to the ‘global’ theorizations of the relevant bodies of literature is what makes this methodology sociological as well as psychological (and thus psycho-societal – see section 2.1.8). Although the historical aspirations of BNIM methodology are not entirely pertinent to this case, given the relatively short time period under examination and the focus on a rather private dimension of experience, this connection still needs to account for the historicity of subjectivity, not just through the temporal space of the interview interaction but the social and economic changes conditioning individual experiences of sexuality, changes that suitably historical sociologies of sexuality tend to address.

The set of four theoretical cross-case themes, presented in critical dialogue with the wider literature, constitutes an effective answer to the central research questions and addresses directly the aims and objectives of the thesis. To summarize, what the four cross-case themes provide in their full, written-up form is a rich, fine-grained interpretative picture of the experience of relationships and sexuality of 6 Christian young men, and a rich, explorative account of the place of their learning within the shifting and changing subjectivities captured by the HCEs.

2.6 Chapter summary

I have now completed my description of the methodology and methods of my narrative study, showing how I answered my research questions and produced my original contribution to knowledge. On the next page is a table summarizing this process.

Fig. 4 Overview of study

Stage	Sub-stage	Sub-stage description	Approx. time taken
Recruitment	Stage 1 – Recruiting youth groups	<i>Use of formal and informal databases of contacts</i>	6 weeks
	Stage 2 – Contacting youth leaders	<i>Gathering information on groups; negotiating access dates with youth leaders</i>	6 weeks
	Stage 3 – Recruitment sessions	<i>Group discussions with youth and providing of contact details for those interested</i>	2 months
	Stage 4 – Confirmation and arrangement of interview	<i>Contacting youth to check consent and arrange first interview</i>	2 weeks
Interviewing	Stage 1 – Conducting first interview	<i>Two sub-sessions</i>	6 weeks
	Stage 2 – Creation of second interview schedule	<i>Writing sub-session three schedule</i>	N/A
	Stage 3 – Conducting second interview	<i>Sub-sessions 3-6</i>	6 weeks
	Stage 4 – Creation of transcript	<i>Verbatim transcription</i>	2 months
Analysis	Stage 1 – Creating biographical data chronology	<i>Extracting publicly verifiable data points, bracketing subjectivity</i>	1 week per part.
	Stage 2 – Writing the biographical data analysis	<i>Future-blind chunk by chunk hypothesizing to develop structure of lived life</i>	1 week p.p.
	Stage 3 – Creation of text sequentialization	<i>Creating 'chunks', assigning tone and textsort</i>	1 week p.p.
	Stage 4 – Writing of teller flow analysis	<i>Future-blind chunk by chunk hypothesizing to develop structure of told story</i>	2 weeks p.p.
	Stage 5 – Creation of three column table	<i>Condensing biographical data and teller flow analysis</i>	3 days p.p.
	Stage 6 – Writing up of history of the case evolution	<i>Creation of middle column successive states of subjectivity, weaving lived life/told story</i>	3 days p.p.
	Stage 7 – Creation of sub-session four account	<i>Tabulation of description, evaluation, recommendation, summary write up</i>	1 day p.p.
	Stage 8 – Integrative write-up	<i>Integrating history of the case evolution and sub-session four account.</i>	1 week p.p.
	Stage 9 – Writing up other cases	<i>Choosing the order of analysis</i>	N/A
	Stage 10 – Case comparison thematizing	<i>Moving from case themes to cross case themes</i>	1 week p.p.
	Stage 11 – Presenting findings	<i>Order of presentation</i>	1 month p.p.

In this chapter we outlined the theoretical underpinnings of narrative methodology. We described how BNIM as developed by Tom Wengraf is positioned within the broad field of narrative methodology and how its critical realist and psycho-societal orientations resist both binary and totalizing tendencies within qualitative methodologies. BNIM research does not aim for universal theoretical generalizability but is able to provide rich accounts of mutating subjectivities and local sample theorizations that can challenge assumptions of dominant narratives developed from aggregated statistical methods and ‘grand’ theorizing. BNIM was this eminently suitable for give the rich accounts of religious sexual subjectivity that we are aiming for. We also showed how our research design builds on BNIM by analysing cases in integration with a separate semi-structured interview schedule (SS4) focusing exclusively on learning about sexuality and relationships from parents, peers, school, internet and church. By developing the method in this way, we can see how a narrative approach adds a level of sophistication to the way that youth sexualities research can be related to sexuality education; rather than seeking simply to represent and implement young people’s expressed desires for sexuality education, a narrative approach places these experiences and desires within a broader context, allowing us to examine the implicit dynamics of young peoples’ discourse about sexuality education as part of a defended subjectivity. In the next chapter we present the six cases and the four cross-case themes developed from them, engaging the relevant literature where appropriate.

3 Chapter 3 – Presentation of Study Findings

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an answer to my research questions by presenting the findings from my narrative study. I present the six cases I analysed with separate HCEs and integrated accounts, organized according to the narrative themes developed within each case. I then present the four cross-case themes developed from the six cases, engaging the literature on Christianity, masculinity and youth introduced in chapter two as well as addressing new areas of relevant literature emerging from the analysis. The four cross case themes frame set up the task of my final chapter, which is to outline four features of a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education developed from the four themes.

I have deliberately presented each case separately from the higher-level analysis because the reimagination I outline in the final chapter does not *necessarily* follow from the cases presented, but is rather a reflection of my own reading and interpretation of the narratives in dialogue with the wider literature on sexuality education and educational philosophy.

Presenting the findings in this way permits my readers to consider alternative arguments regarding the educational salience (or perhaps the non-salience) of these highly personal narratives. Issues around the ‘use’ of narratives are addressed in section 4.6.1.

There are two final issues to be addressed concerning the presentation of findings – the order of presentation and the unequal amounts of attention given to each case. The order of presentation is not particularly important as each case can be considered in its own right, and the findings do not build on one another even as they are presented linearly. Practically speaking, I present each case in the order in which I analysed them, which also follows the order in which I interviewed them. The cases are given somewhat unequal attention because

some cases contained narratives that were richer and more directly pertinent to the research questions, wider literature and overall thesis aims and objectives.

I refer closely to the transcripts as presented in the appendices throughout this chapter using brackets (appendix page number, transcript line number).

3.1 Ethan

Introduction

Ethan (18 years old) was recruited from a small independent evangelical church in a suburban area of the Midlands. He has two younger sisters and a younger brother. He lives with his married parents – both are Christians and he has been attending church with them all his life. His father is a surgeon and his mother owns a bakery. He identifies his ethnicity as mixed heritage Asian/White. Although he grew up in a middle-class family in an affluent area, he attended a secondary school in an urban area with high socio-economic deprivation.

When recruiting at the church, I noted that Ethan carried himself very confidently within the group and was a prominent and outspoken member of the eldest group of young men I spoke to. Partly for this reason, I was surprised that he signed up. Ethan was similarly confident and relaxed when he arrived for the first interview, which took place in a side room in his church building. We had a good rapport from the outset. I noted that Ethan was particularly quick to summarize and reflect in general terms throughout the interview. Ethan used humour frequently throughout the interview, particularly at the start to offset his discomfort as we settled into the flow of the interview.

3.1.1 Ethan's HCE

Fig. 5 Overview of Ethan

Biographical data analysis	Successive states of subjectivity	Teller flow analysis
<p>Pre-puberty Y7 Begins attending secondary school and church youth group, receives talks about sex Y9 Asks out a girl but is rejected Engages in conversations about sexual accomplishments and rating girls</p> <p>Change through puberty Dec Goes through puberty, experiences bodily changes, Cuts hair and wears contacts Jan Receives compliments from girls and teachers Y10 First kiss playing spin the bottle Y11 Jun Invited to a party, first sexual activity Number of subsequent similar occurrences Aug Attends Christian camp</p> <p>College Y1 Begins attending college Pursues committed relationship with girl, she stops speaking to him Y1 Begins friendship with Laura Y2 Begins relationship with Laura</p>	<p>Sexuality at school before puberty Awareness of unattractive appearance 'like Mowgli' Uncomfortable participation in rating girls</p> <p>Becoming sexual through puberty Enjoying first compliments by peers and teachers First kiss in park 'like a kid in a sweet shop' First sexual experiences at house parties 'not that great'</p> <p>After the 'instantaneous change' Talks at youth, critiquing 'hype' Attends youth camp, 'needed to change'</p> <p>College and first attempts at commitment Rejection from girl 'gutted' Feeling different within the atmosphere of college</p> <p>Laura Friendship develops over two years 'deep chats' Conversations about sexual boundaries</p>	<p>SS1 1) How my approach to sexuality has changed</p> <p>SS2 2) Describing/critiquing sex at school 3) Sexuality before and after puberty 4) My faith and my sexuality 5) Learning and formation about sex 6) Starting college with a new perspective 7) Relationship with Laura 8) General reflections on 'moving on'</p>

3.1.1.1 Sexuality at school before puberty

At the end of year eight, Ethan began to participate in conversations in which his male peers recount their apparent sexual achievements (“oh do you know how many girls I shagged last night?” (476/118)), along with the sexual surveying and evaluation of female peers through social media platforms. In the telling, Ethan frequently performs the speech of his friends (“what a lad!” (479/239)) in a mockery of exaggerated masculinity, while in other instances more directly denouncing them (“like being in a pack of animals if I’m honest, everyone just *screaming*” (474/48)). It is left ambiguous as to what Ethan’s participation in these conversations were. In the context of the interview, Ethan’s critical distance from his peers aids in achieving a moral stance against this excessive masculinity within the interview interaction. Indeed, this critical descriptive distance and minimal representation of his own agency in these recalled interactions dominates the early stages of SS1 and 2. He frames sexuality throughout his school life as excessively “hyped” amongst his peers, a word that he uses decisively in the very first textsort of the interview (471/9). A narrative critique of sexual hype is built up as the interview unfolds.

3.1.1.2 Becoming sexual through puberty

Puberty is a prominent feature of Ethan’s rather short SS1 and is presented as a significant turning point. It is the first point in his story that has significant tonality (i.e. humour) – “I hit puberty *ridiculously hard* (laughing)” (471/14). He elaborates in SS2 that these changes took place over the Christmas holidays in year nine. Whereas before he had “looked like Mowgli from the jungle book” (476/173) and had “shoulder length hair, little red glasses...” (477/190), he grew taller, got his hair cut and started wearing contact lenses. He immediately started receiving compliments from both female teachers and his female peers. When asked about his feelings at that particular time, Ethan reports:

It was basically like 'right this is my time to shine' (laughing). Everyone else has had their stuff, they've had all their stuff, doing stuff with girls, and I think, I'm Christian but let's not let that get in the way, because look I've hit puberty and I've got all this going for me (J yeah). It was odd, yknow but it did just cause a burst of arrogance I feel. Definitely a lot of arrogance, sort of, big-headed-ness. Yeah I felt *invincible*. I felt like I've got all this attention now, girls calling me good-looking left right and centre. Right let's go, get with them all, and stuff like that. (478/206)

At this point the telling switches to a greater frequency of PINs related to his own agency rather than passive, critical distance. Ethan's 'first kiss' narrative, taking place during year ten amongst a gathering of peers in a local park, supplies metaphors of being "like a kid in a sweet shop" and "like a peacock" (478/225), signifying the possibilities for pleasurable experiences (the sweet shop) and the power and confidence to take them (the peacock).

During the summer following year 11, after his GCSEs, Ethan continued to socialize more frequently with girls, particularly at various house parties. One PIN is recounted of an early sexual encounter, ambiguously described: "we did stuff... spare you the details" (479/237). It is important to bear in mind that Ethan already refers to this instance early on in his improvised SS1, doing "stuff" (ibid.) with girls, wherein he emphasizes first that he understood the Christian view to be permissive, "as long as you don't actually have sex" (471/21), implying penetrative intercourse. This was immediately followed by an evaluation that it was "the least gratifying thing" (471/23). Here, importantly, he describes with more interest and engagement the praise he received the day after, which he reports as being "as good as the stuff itself"; the recalled speech of his male friends being "what a lad... you're a legend now" (479/244). Interestingly, Ethan does briefly voice his own response in this past

recalled interaction, weakly and hesitantly stuttering “oh... yeah”. This is an important point in the telling:

They were like 'oh you're a legend now' I was like 'oh... yeah' (weakly). 'Get in there' like... I was happy with myself I... there was a twang of guilt because I still did, I would've *always* said I was a Christian throughout all this, that is the odd thing like (J yeah). Cos like yeah, I could quite comfortably do this but then still come up to like, come to youth or go to church on a Sunday (J right yeah). Sort of erm. Reason it out, that I wasn't actually having sex, so it was all fine. (479/244)

This PIN demonstrates an ambiguity both of Ethan’s feelings then and his feelings now. Ethan feels empowerment within the masculine hierarchy of his peers through the achievement of a desired status rather than any real sense of ongoing satisfaction at the sexual intimacy itself. This is accompanied by a “twang” of guilt; he could “quite comfortably do this” but still come to church (479/245). This suggests that he was able to reason the tensions out with only limited success – the fact that he wasn’t having (penetrative) sex was only able to provide an incomplete moral justification. In this way Ethan’s determined avoidance of intercourse allows him to maintain a level of inner coherence. It is important to note that Ethan’s tonal evocation of his own then-speech, the weak, faltering statement “oh, yeah” achieves a purpose within the interview interaction. The tonality emphasizes his sense of dissatisfaction and moral compromise, working to balance the undesirable presentation of an excessively desiring past self.

At some point between the summer of year eleven and Ethan’s first attempt at pursuing a serious relationship post-puberty, he experiences what he calls an “instantaneous change” (471/31) – this will be addressed after consideration of Ethan’s participation in his church youth group during his school life.

3.1.1.3 Learning about sex from church youth group

Ethan does not give specific instances of specific youth group-related memories; rather they are dispersed throughout the case history, beginning in year seven. This is a weakness of Ethan's case analysis – it is difficult to position these key youth group messages within the 'lived life' structure. Ethan's learning and formation in received in youth group revolves around three distinct styles of engagement by his youth leaders.

The first is a youth group meeting led by Dave, a sixty-year-old farmer, in a small group style setting, typical of small independent Christian churches with large youth groups, divided into smaller groups of boys/girls. Ethan attributes the awkwardness of the discussion Dave led on sexuality and marriage to his age.

It was just so weird, getting religious sex talks from a man who is (humorously) *sixty* years old and is a farmer? You just don't expect it to happen. Not that I think he did a bad job, he's just... it's weird the words coming out of his mouth!... Dave was like (adopts quiet, low Midlands accent) 'so you guys, yknow, get a girlfriend, might be your wife, you could have a sexual relationship, sort of play around', and this guy is sixty years old, so we're all like laughing. And this is something the older guys at the time also found funny. I think the thing is, it is just because of who he was to us, he was like the grandad, like the wise grandad of the group... (482/355)

Ethan expresses discomfort with the idea of Dave as sexual, interested in sexual matters, and desiring to positively form his peers around sexuality and relationships. The importance of ageism will be returned to in the integrated account.

The second memorable learning experience was provided by Eric, a heart surgeon who was part of the youth team. He gives, again in a small group context, what Ethan refers to

humorously as 'the ski talk': "I'm gonna be honest with you guys, sex is not that great... *skiing* is better than sex' (both laughing)" (2/10/17). Described briefly, this is then directly contrasted with the third message presented by Carl.

The one we had when you were like er there, Carl was doing, sex is something great that you should look forward to. But... I feel like... yeah, having done like, sexual, haven't had sex but like, erm... *it is fun* but I, don't think it should be hyped up as much cos like, the first time I did anything with a girl I was massively disappointed? (482/365)

Eric's humorously subversive message regarding the enjoyability of sex is preferred by Ethan to Carl's approach, one that seems collusive with the wider cultural 'hype' around sex – the notion that you *should* look forward to having sex (later on Ethan refers to his post-sexual-activity feelings – “you might as well have played tennis” (472/68)). This indicates a desire for his youth group to provide him with messages that would allow him to build on and make sense of his own narrative of disappointment – instead he found youth group to be repeating, albeit differently, the 'hype' around sexuality that he was, and still is to some extent, in the process of distancing himself from with his school peer group.

Ethan's discussion of the youth group is concluded with a feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity regarding Christian sexual ethics, feeling “between a rock and a hard place”, of “needing experience”, but not wanting to “bandy it around” (483/388). Different reasons lie alongside each other with little attempt or success at final synthesis. For example, Ethan says “That is the appeal of... waiting till marriage, it is with someone that you do love, and I think I appreciate that, that is why it makes sense. That being said like... if you hype it up too much I think you will be sorely disappointed.” (483/401) This final section evidences the narrative purpose behind his thematic field, of exhibiting a preference for 'de-hyping' learning and

formation, which accords more accurately with Ethan's feelings of disappointment following his sexual encounters.

3.1.1.4 After the "instantaneous change"

Ethan attended a Christian camp during the summer of year 11 in the midst of his sexually active (and feeling morally compromised) stage. He describes this in SS3:

But yeah I went to camp that year and camp always has a (with humour) profound effect on kids doesn't it. I think I still did end up doing stuff with girls after camp, but I think I felt a lot worse about it. The fact that I, yeah, I felt guilt about it, so I knew I was caring about what I was doing, despite the fact that I wasn't sleeping with them, but the fact that I felt bad said otherwise. (499/386)

Camp represents a distinctive event in Ethan's story causing an intensification of feelings of guilt leading subsequently to the 'instantaneous change'. Ethan's change should thus be understood as working towards a greater sense of coherence with his religious identity alongside these other factors. It is significant to note Ethan's words from SS3 after being asked "what made that time at camp so profound?":

Yeah I wouldn't say anything specific about camp, just I was old enough to appreciate, yknow intellectually challenge myself, and others, at the time. Yknow not just intellectually but emotionally as well. I think, yknow when you're like forty or fifty yknow if you're sort of, messing around... you're not a bad person if you're forty or fifty, everyone does stupid stuff, but you're much more conscious of your behaviour, yknow how it affects yourself and your future. I think it was the first proper mature decision I've made. The first time i was accountable for my own emotional wellbeing. Yknow when you're younger your parents have to

tell you not to do stuff but this was something that I had to tell myself to do, to stop it. (499/399)

Thus Ethan views his decision as a decision related to his “emotional well-being” and the growing sense of “needing to change”. Notably, Ethan never mentions God or engages in anything that might be explicitly referred to as a theological discourse. However, the sense of moral accountability he feels should be understood as an accountability to God as well as to his community. Adherence is not just valued as part of group conformity, but in order to maintain a felt sense of relationship with God.

3.1.1.5 College and first attempts at commitment

Following his GCSE results, Ethan started attending a college associated with his old school. He describes how he began to feel a sense of difference, and a sense that others perceived him as “weird” or “boring” (485/461) because of his new commitment. In this way, Ethan’s change to a sexual subjectivity that feels more congruent with his religious identity and his sexual desires was also a transformation into a new self that is alien within this new social world.

At college, Ethan began a friendship with a girl which he felt was progressing towards a committed relationship. However, the friendship ended after a conversation in which he communicated to her his preference for delaying sex (not necessarily until marriage), after which she stopped speaking to him. Ethan describes how he felt “mugged off... this was something I deliberately tried to do and it backfired” (484/447). One way to understand this is that in a climate of pressure, Ethan felt like the moral effort of resistance to the wider sexual culture should give him some sort of payoff. Theological notions may play into Ethan’s negotiations here – perhaps he considered that a decision in obedience to God would produce some sort of divine reward. For Ethan, at the time it did not appear that ‘doing things right’

would ever lead to the ideal scenario of a committed, sexually boundaried romantic relationship, creating a sense of despair and despondency.

3.1.1.6 Laura

Ethan began a friendship with Laura, a girl in his youth group, in year eleven. This friendship developed slowly over two years. Through a series of conversations with her along with hearsay and observation of her moral character and physical development, he eventually realized his attraction to her. They began dating in March of Ethan's year 13 (the year in which he is interviewed); he has been dating her 'officially' for four months at the time of the interview.

His main description of their current practice is that they want to "maintain the idea of holiness... not push... but not boring" (487/458). Ethan's presentation of their relationship is marked by the clear and shared intention to abstain from sexual intercourse, at least for the time being. Here the theological notion of holiness is drawn upon to present Ethan's practice of not "pushing it", in light of her previous "stressed" (486/537) responses to potential or actual felt pressure to be sexually intimate. It is also in tension with the idea of not being "boring" (487/560). Ethan recounts the case of a Christian couple he knows that would only give each other "a peck on the cheek... I want a proper kiss!" (488/587). 'Holy but not boring' represents a vision of sexual subjectivity where authentic desire and intimacy is not compromised, yet proper boundaries are maintained. In the final moments of the interview Ethan presents their relationship as exemplary in this sense of both authenticity and ethical acceptability as others within their religious community view them as moral exemplars of a healthy and appropriate Christian relationship (488/598). The presentation of their unfolding relationship as relatively slow and boundaried makes the relationship function within the narrative as a marker of an increasingly successful navigation of religious and sexual

moralties. Tension remains however, as Ethan struggles to comes to terms with the path he has taken to arrive at this present moment – this will be addressed below.

3.1.2 Integrated account

3.1.2.1 Surviving school by learning to speak about sexuality

Given the significance of the early stages of Ethan's sexual subjectivity amongst his male peers within school, it is no surprise that Ethan ascribes greatest significance to his learning from older male peers and humorously describes this as "consulting the wise ones, the elders" (502/66) Ethan recounts a number of "typical conversations" with these boys, such as "I did this with a girl... what's that... what's a blowjob?" (501/17), stating that these sorts of conversations were "jokey" but that "at the same time you're taking in information" (502/46). In more general terms Ethan describes his learning from older boys as concerning "what goes on with girls, how to get a girlfriend" (501/25) and later, "how to speak about it, how to act towards it" (502/54). The acknowledged inaccuracy of the sorts of knowledge being exchanged is overcome by an increased confidence in performing masculine sexuality resulting from these forms of knowledge. What is valuable for Ethan in these cases is learning ways of speaking and acting, signalling sexual knowledgeableness for survival within masculine hierarchies. At the same time, the compromised engagement in hegemonic masculinity exacerbated the difference that grew following his pubertal changes, particularly the sense of incoherence with his religious identity.

Ethan also feels he has been strongly influenced by the media in his attitudes to sex. He says "I think media in general I guess, yknow sort of... guys talking about sex in a film, sort of a joking about it, feeling really cool, I think that's sort of how you thought you had to act." (502/85). In his description here Ethan's emphasises once again the *manner of speaking* (joking) about sexuality and the *feeling* ('really cool') of that speech-environment rather than sexual acts themselves. The ability to *joke* about sex as demonstrates a higher level of experience and mastery (as in Barnes, 2012). Overall, Ethan values his learning from older

peers and from media not as knowledge or propositional information (though this is also present), but primarily as a learning-how to ‘be sexual’ within that particular group, including the display and appropriate use of knowledge about sexuality. Following Seidler’s approach to understanding how normative masculinity negatively affects men as well as women (2003), our framing of Ethan’s case as demonstrative of humour as a *survival* technique, challenges and extends Barnes’ account of defensive masculinity in schools.

3.1.2.2 Authentic vs inauthentic sources of influence

Ethan continues to evaluate the learning and formation he received from his church youth group about sexuality in SS4, describing how “there was a right answer for church” (504/138). Within his youth group, Ethan experienced a sense that he was precluded from questioning teaching about abstinence:

Someone would ask me 'so how you doing with sex and all that', I'd say 'yeah I'm waiting 'til I'm married', that was something they talked about it, yknow 'sex is something to do in marriage, don't do it, don't have fun', and it's like 'but you're meant to say that, it's your job right now to tell me that'. So I always struggled to take advice from church... (504/147).

Honest sharing about sexuality was precluded in his church youth group because of the apparent non-negotiability of pre-marital abstinence. This also conditioned Ethan’s sense of the leaders’ giving a certain answer as part of their job. Ethan then generalizes his own assumption that “a fifteen-year-old lad is not going to listen to those people about sex” (504/178). If teen boys are unlikely to listen to or apply the messages, the best that leaders can hope for is to make sure that young people “stay open minded” to their teaching (504/180). This general feeling of inauthenticity is what leads to Ethan’s recommendations regarding teaching:

Er... just be more down to earth about it. I think with school, and at church saying that sex before marriage, it's really hard through the teenage years it's gonna be hard to you, but just sort of stick in there, do what you can. I know that sounds like an excuse, sort of do what you can because then if you want to go and sleep with someone you could just say 'oh I couldn't' (laughing), but erm, just, be realistic about things? If my parents had erm, told me, in a down to earth fashion, actually it's going to be hard for you this sort of stuff. But yeah it's not that my parents were inadequate in teaching me about stuff, it's that I was inadequate in being unwilling to objectively listen I guess. Y'know, angsty teenagers don't respond well to people telling them that stuff. (505/190)

Here a tension is highlighted between the need for more honest/authentic acknowledgement of difficulty and the possibility that this might make excuses to violate what are still important moral standards for Ethan.

Authenticity was also important in other major adult relationships. Ethan learned about sexuality from his parents through a formalized 'birds and bees' talk with his Dad. Ethan says "it's hard because your parents are always going to be like these, old fogeys to you? Like, you could never, think of them being young and free and while, how you're wanting to be. I never took my parents seriously, being given the sex talk." (503/199). Despite Ethan's parental learning exhibiting these markers of quality and consistency, his ability to absorb their messages was precluded by his view of his parents as illegitimate and inauthentic sources of sexual knowledge and formation on account of their aged status. While critiquing his learning from his parents, Ethan imagines an alternative scenario in which they were more 'down to earth': "erm, just, be realistic about things? If my parents had erm, told me, in a down to earth fashion, actually it's going to be hard for you this sort of stuff..." (505/194). This imagined scenario displays a real desire for an adult awareness and understanding of the sorts of

challenges Ethan faced alongside the absence of someone who was indeed genuinely able to understand what he was going through.

Ethan's description and evaluation of his school sex education accords closely with the wider literature concerning the excessive focus on the biology of reproduction, taking place solely within the science curriculum. This is felt keenly by Ethan, although: "there's something important about learning the biological, and yeah you're gonna have to learn about how to put about condoms on, because it's better to have guys who do know how to put condoms on. I think that's important but when it's the only basis of the lesson, it sort of takes the actual experience out of it." (504/172) The image of the 'dusty biology teacher' awkwardly teaching about sex also repeats constructions of age and sexuality present in Ethan's discussion of his parents. Research on ageism has demonstrated the significance of the perceptions of sexuality in older men and women and noted the strong cultural association of sexuality with youth and health (Bouman, Arcelus, & Benbow, 2006). Ethan's case supports this area of scholarship and raises questions about the intersections of ageism and sexuality education to be addressed in chapter 4.

Neither Ethan's past nor his present self have available to them an acceptable and authentic source of learning and formation around sexuality. There is a clear division between authentic (peers, reinforced by media) sources and inauthentic (church, parents, school) sources. A major source of tension driving Ethan's telling is the feeling that the authentic sources (i.e. older male peers) are associated with a past self that is now undesirable, while the inauthentic sources (i.e. youth leaders) are associated with the more coherent current self but critiqued as inauthentic. The mutations of Ethan's sexual subjectivity go some way towards explaining the distance from these inauthentic sources. Ethan feels that his sexual knowledgeableness has come through a morally compromised process of formation. That knowledgeableness and its history cannot be erased despite his current state in a bounded, morally coherent

romantic relationship with Laura. His own narrative of disillusionment from sexual hype is not reflected in those who are supposed to be his religious role models. They represent for the most part a 'boring holiness', or else are not valued as valid authorities because of their age or sexual authoritativeness.

Ethan values sources of learning across the history of the case based on the question 'can I imagine this person to be the sort of person that I want to be now'? This accords with research on how young people select sources of authoritative learning that accord mostly with their ideal image of themselves (for Ethan, his aspiration to the confident, experienced, masculine heterosexuality of the 'older boys', the 'elders'). Ethan attributes his disengagement from learning and formation that he *only now* sees as important, to both the sources themselves (inauthentic, detached) and to his own teenage self as inherently and expectantly disrespectful of authority.

3.2 Mark

Introduction

Mark (19 years old) was recruited from a session run at a Catholic youth retreat centre called Hillview in a rural area of the Midlands. Hillview works both as a retreat centre for local Catholic youth groups and as a general residential centre for use by Catholic schools in the region. Hillview runs an internship programme where young people (both male and female) spend a year as live-in youth workers as part of a close knit team helping run retreats and residential. I recruited another participant from Hillview, Tim, who is referred to occasionally by Mark in his account and they are part of the same youth team.

Before coming to Hillview Mark lived with his parents for his whole life in their family home in a rural part of the Midlands. His Dad is a bank manager and his Mum is a retired teacher. He identifies himself as White and as middle class. He went to a large mixed sex Catholic school in an urban Midlands town.

I interviewed Mark in the dining room of the Hillview conference centre. Mark presented as extremely polite and courteous and I noted that he may have still been in his 'professional' stance preceding the beginning of the interview. We were interrupted twice in the course of the interview, once for Mark to collect something his Dad was dropping off for him and another time to take a phonecall. I noted afterwards a strong sense in the interview of Mark feeling that he had something to 'get off his chest' and this was confirmed as I approached the analysis.

3.2.1 Mark's HCE

Fig. 6 Overview of Mark

Biographical Data Analysis	Successive States of Subjectivity	Teller Flow Analysis
<p>School and romantic rejection Y6 First Holy Communion, becomes altar boy Receives some sex education classes Y7-9 Asks out a number of girls Y8 Receives nude picture of a girl he knows</p> <p>Focus on religion Y9 Gives up on asking out girls Y10 begins attending church without parents Y11 Final rejection by Cara Y13 Considers priesthood but decides on Hillview</p> <p>Hillview Sep Begins attending Hillview Jan Meets Bella and asks her out straightaway Two weeks later Bella accepts Feb Bella visits Mark at Hillview Apr Mark visits Bella in Newcastle and they have sexual intercourse for the first time Jun Bella visits Mark at Hillview again and they sleep together this time</p>	<p>Secondary school Feeling of bottom of 'the list' Low point of worthlessness Picking up somewhat after 'giving up' on getting in a relationship</p> <p>Transition period Strengthening faith, going to church for self Unsure future, asking God 'what do you want me to do'</p> <p>Hillview and Bella 'Odd' moment of being desired 'Indescribable' moment in chapel 'Gladness' of first intercourse Importance of shared faith</p>	<p>SS1 1) Relationships at School 2) Coming to Hillview 3) Bella at Hillview 4) Views on sexuality 5) Past considerations of future relationships 6) Opinions on what should happen at Hillview</p> <p>SS2 7) Sexuality and relationships at school 8) Leaving a sheltered life 9) Cara and the period of desperation 10) Developing faith 11) Bella and experience of love 12) Bella visiting and restrictions 13) More problems with Catholic sexual ethics</p>

3.2.1.1 Secondary school

In the earliest stages of his secondary school life, Mark spent most of his break times in the library with his friends. Mark presents this as indicative of his low position in the school social hierarchy – being inside in the library talking about books rather than outside playing football “with the lads” (348/97). Mark also narrates his position in the social hierarchy through commentary on other incidents happening around him. Many of his school friends would begin and end relationships quickly and frequently. This happened particularly with the “popular boys and girls”, who are “all only interested in one thing... being in a relationship really” (348/100). Once that happened you were ‘on the list’ – once you had secured a romantic relationship you were accorded some level of social significance. This idea of the ‘list’ is revisited a number of times in the narrative and has ambiguous emotional significance, explored further below. When talking about his time at school in SS2, Mark returns periodically to compare his then-feelings about the pressure to be in a relationship in light of his now actually being in a relationship. Mark frequently moves from then-narration to now-description, emphasizing the vast preference for and relief of where he is now.

Beginning in year seven and ending in year nine, Mark asked out a number of girls (he cannot remember or specify the amount), none of which amounted to a serious relationship; Mark was rejected every time. This escalated in year nine to a period of ‘desperation’ where he asked out many girls over the period of a week. This culminated in him consciously ‘giving up’ on having a relationship, a time he describes as being very difficult with feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness:

I got to a low in year 9, I just tried it too many times, I just tried it with anyone.

And... it wasn't good for me, I thought that was what I wanted, to be in a relationships but... it wasn't good. And it *badly* affected me (J right). But erm,

as soon as I realized, I didn't really, *need* a relationship necessarily at that time, I kind of just (deep sigh)... I kind of just ignored what was happening, and er let everyone else go down the relationships side of things, and I, slowly kind of crept back. (351/267)

The emotive nature of this telling moment is distinctive, and this period functions as a turning point in Mark's telling. Giving up on the pursuit of a relationship changed Mark's orientation within school life, as can be seen below. Mark then connects this directly to his current state of relational fulfilment, saying how "God made it this way" (352/292). Thus both here and throughout the telling, Mark reinterprets his early suffering as redemptively meaningful in light of his current situation. The suffering is seen as 'worth it' and part of a larger divine plan to lead him to his current situation of apparent romantic fulfilment.

In year eight, Mark sees his first sexual images, pictures of a girl he knew that had been sent round the school by his friend, a narrative of sexting gone wrong. Mark's description of this focuses on the fact that this was his first time seeing anything sexual of that nature and begins a series of other about-PINs illustrating the dangers of social media regarding sexuality – e.g. his friend Kelly who accidentally posted an explicit photo on her snapchat story leading to its circulation throughout school (348/130). He comments that "when you have something like that happen to you, it just makes the world a little bit different for you each time" (349/150), namely, a growing awareness of his and others sexuality felt like a change in his view of the world itself. When asked for more examples of this, Mark mentions his upbringing, that he had "lived a life that was quite innocent" (349/171). Mark then free-associates to a time he found out his school-friend Rob's second phone contained images of various girls from schools in the area. He finishes this thematic field with an evaluative comment:

And I think, along with the Marsha thing that made me kind of, see the world's not as innocent as I'd like it to be. But I can't change that, if that's how people want to do things, then they can... be themselves... Be my guest! (350/196)

In this moment Mark reflects on a sense of loss of a desirable, innocent world, balancing this with a stance of tolerance and acceptance of those who act in contravention to this desirable innocence. Present here are ambiguous and contradictory feelings about the changes in his sexual worldview – it is a loss that he feels he must tolerate and in some sense, welcome (“be my guest!” (390/198)). The change in Mark’s view of the world via the emergence of the sexual dimensions of sociality leads to his eventual realization that he has no place within the hierarchy, leading to his presentation of his ‘retirement’ from the struggle to be ‘on the list’ as a significant turning point which would later be redeemed. This narrative sensibility achieves for Mark a sense of security in his comfortable position, now distantly sheltered from that world in an apparently successful romantic relationship with Bella.

3.2.1.2 Transition period

The development of Mark’s religious identity follows a familiar pattern of English Catholicism, taking his first Holy Communion in year six and confirmation in year nine. Although he began to take initiative in going to Mass of his own accord starting in year ten it was not until year twelve that he felt his faith was at a high point.

The next significant period of subjective challenges concerns negotiations over his next steps in life after his tertiary education. In year 12, a time that Mark considers to be a high point of his faith (suggesting a developed sense of self-awareness as to the quality of his religious expression qualified by a sense of closeness to God), Mark was in Mass serving at the altar, praying with his head down facing the congregation and asking God “what do you want me to do?” (354/373). He says that “it was at that moment I think, erm, that I first considered

working here at Hillview” (ibid.). Mark describes how he considered priesthood on the basis of encouragement from adults that he would make a “good priest” (372/365) and on the basis that he “saw my love life as pretty much non-existent” (344/140). One way of seeing this period of transition, beginning with his social ascent in school and ending with his decision to attend Hillview, is that Mark was holding on to a deliberately ‘retired’ (my term, not his) romantic and sexual aspiration in the face of a possible complete end (celibate priesthood). He states that his decision not to consider priesthood any more was partially based on a lingering sense of a distantly felt but still possible romantic future. However, subsequently he describes his decision to take a year out at Hillview as in order to explore a vocation, and that he had no aspirations to find a relationship while at Hillview.

3.2.1.3 Hillview and Bella

Until his meeting Bella, Mark’s time at Hillview was uneventful, or at least with few events warranting recollection. Mark describes how he went to Hillview aware of the management’s discouragement of romantic relationships and restriction of sexual interactions on site and that this did not bother him at the time. Things changed significantly when Mark was introduced to Bella at a retreat she was on at Hillview. The context of their introduction was through Mark’s friend who knew Bella, and who had told Mark that Bella had seen him on some advertising material for Hillview and been ‘interested’. Mark describes this moment as being “odd, because I’d never been through anything like this before” (342/51) – the feeling of being desired. Mark asked her out straight away, but she asked for time to think about it.

After two weeks, Bella returned on another retreat. After a chapel service Bella approached him in the darkness and whispered ‘yes’ in his ear. This is a detailed and emotively narrated PIN, and this particular moment is one he describes as being “like the movies” (356/465).

The emotional intensity of the moment comes through powerfully in both the language Mark

uses and the tone in which he describes the moment, emphasizing in particular the novelty of this moment and the unexpectedness of the intensity of his happiness (356/469). Mark also ascribes significance to their being “in front of Jesus” (355/433). The romantic power that this moment has come to hold for Mark is due to its then-surprising emergence within a time of feeling when his romantic aspirations had been ‘retired’, and its intensity is constructed by the sense of a tragic sexual past of desperation and continued rejection. Further, Mark draws on their shared religion to give significance to their relationship, to justify the decisions they have made and to explain their future aspirations - the overall sense of divine plan as just described, the chapel and position “in front of Jesus” as the place where they started their relationship, and the similarity of their preferred religious expression and devotion. All these things lend a legitimating force to their relationship that plays into Mark’s evaluations of their sexual intimacy at Hillview and their future aspirations tending (in the latter parts of SS1 and SS2) towards vindication and justifiability rather than confession or regret.

Several weeks later Bella came to stay at Hillview and Mark finds himself in a dilemma over whether Bella should sleep in his room with him or in a separate room following the rules of Hillview. Despite the other team saying they will turn a blind eye if he does, he decided not to as it felt too uncomfortable and too much of a risk. After this, Mark visited Bella in Newcastle at her university where they had sexual intercourse for the first time (this material from SS3). Mark’s description of this positions it in direct relation and contrast to the “stuff online” he had seen, and that it was “eye-opening”, along with a “pleasure you can’t derive from stuff online”, and a “gladness” to have done it with “someone I liked” (271/282).

Mark’s difficulty over his and Bella’s sexual relationship does not involve (a perhaps expected) vacillation over the moral validity of the doctrine of sex before marriage but rather a frustration about the space of Hillview and the rules that govern it.

This is illustrated further by events that follow. Recently, Bella stayed for a second time overnight at Hillview, which, on the basis of their increased recent intimacy, he decided to allow her to sleep with him. However, Mark does not present this as a particularly enjoyable event as he was constantly feeling very uncomfortable and scared of getting caught. The rapid movement between the ‘now’ and ‘then’ subjectivities association with this event serve as the point of departure for Mark’s account and sets a structural precedent for the entire of the telling of SS1 and 2. At the end of SS1 there is a contested section of ‘inner debate’ with imagined debate partners over his feelings of marriage aspiration with Bella, especially whether their relationship is moving too fast, concluding with a similar moment of resolved self-vindication (358/575). This pattern of a constant recourse to the interrogation of Hillview’s relational and sexual restrictions indicates strongly Mark’s current state of inner moral breakdown involving (amongst other things), recognising the legitimacy of Hillview’s restrictions while simultaneously rejecting them as outdated.

3.2.2 Integrated Account

3.2.2.1 Avoid guilt, affirm choice

In the interview telling, Mark's sexual subjectivity is presented as individualized, morally justified, positive and enriching. This is achieved partly by Mark's narratively positioning himself as having a left behind past of rejection moving towards a divinely ordained romantic present and future. His current relationship is all the more 'colourful' in its appearance because of the 'greyness' of the narrative background of rejection and abjection (my language, not his). Mark's ability to form this coherent narrative functions as a form of logic and reasoning allowing him to make sense of and justify his current decisions and feelings of resistance and difference to traditional Catholic sexual ethics. Mark's sexually intimate relationship with Bella makes narrative sense even if it diverges from the expectations of his religious community.

This narrative context is important in understanding how Mark talks about his learning, in relation to possible religious formation in the context of both church and school. Mark's description of his church education is cursory, with the early mentioning of "rule the church had" in confirmation not memorable at all and he considers himself to have been "too young to take it on board" (374/20). As such, he is initially hesitant in his suggestions for how the church should proceed to facilitate learning about sexuality, but does insist strongly that they "shouldn't teach that they shouldn't have sex before marriage" as it "could really damage them" (376/129). The scenarios Mark imagines are a year eight boy who has already had sex at this young age and is made to feel damagingly guilty on hearing of these prohibitions. This is reflective of Mark's own ethics of non-marital sexuality which is permissive, yet in this section he suggests the practice of confessing and receiving forgiveness for it would be possible. In this way avoiding anti-pre-marital sex is a way to ensure the avoidance of

destructive guilt and shame. As discussed above, a major feature of the telling is the negotiation of a lingering yet contested sense of guilt around his recent decision to sleep with Bella at Hillview. Mark's case enriches the theoretical understanding of religious young people's place within a broad process of social change liberalizing and individualizing sexual ethics. Taking up Yip and Page's model of "construction of an ethics for life" (2013, p. 166), with the young person as a *bricoleur* weaving together different sources of morality, a narrative approach allows us to understand the narrative emergence of these ethics in Mark's case, both within the awareness of the individual and within the co-construction of knowledge through interviews. Further, following Page and Yip (2012b), Mark's case shows the importance of a spatial approach in understanding religious sexuality. The religious space of Hillview continues to play a part in Mark's sexual subjectivity despite his strong occupation of an individualized, authority-resistant decision to be sexually active.

3.2.2.2 Desiring a mediating figure

In SS4 Mark describes that although he had a good relationship with his parents, there was very little discussion about sex. This is perhaps best captured by Mark's recounting of a time his Dad came to Hillview to give him some condoms – "that's what I took as 'the talk' basically, him just handing them to me" (374/7). In the flow the interview, Mark associates his learning from his parents with a particular kind of atmosphere desirable in school and church approach more widely:

For the school I think it has to be a continuation of the sexual education, I think creating that atmosphere, same thing as the church creating that atmosphere, creating that atmosphere where, young people can come to a representative from either and talk to them about it? (377/147)

This idea of atmosphere is relevant for understanding Mark's discussion of his school learning. Mark's description of his school sex education extends from year six until year eight. He gives a rich and detailed PIN of a particularly humorous and memorable sex education lesson in year six where a classmate fainted at the 'rising motion' of a cartoon penis (375/50). The otherwise sparse details about school sex education are reflective of the broader narrative of 'low quality' and 'awkward' recounted in much other research (Measor, Tiffin and Miller, 2000). They also indicate a received sense of the controversy and affective power of sexuality in otherwise (formally) desexualized spaces like school. After mentioning this atmosphere Mark then gives highly developed, evidently not improvised and definitely previously considered, recommendation which is worth quoting at length:

But I think that's [the priest] the wrong person for a young person to have contact with. I think it there were someone else in the middle ground, I don't know say, a youth worker who worked with the church, unless it was in inner city areas, you could have a line of communication from young person to youth worker, youth worker taking that information anonymizing it, erm, and sussing out what needs to be done, whether there's any changes to what the priest says in mass, whether the priest, whether it would be better for the priest to have a word whether there's anything worrying, then that youth worker then passes on to the priest who's the head of the parish to help them understand what could they be doing better what should they be doing better. (377/170)

This developed idea of the mediating role of a youth worker is driven by Mark's perception of the distance from possible figures of learning at school. In Mark's imagination a school or church youth worker could provide a more sympathetic and understanding relationship regarding sexuality. Along with Mark's evaluation of the absence of parental and school sex ed, Mark's feelings about ideal forms of sex education concern various kinds of new and

existing pedagogical adult relationship beyond his peers, rather than propositional sources of learning.

The desirability of an atmosphere achievable through more accessible and less distant sources of authority, is explained by the absence in Mark's story of any particular time where there has been an honest, open and personal atmosphere of learning and discussion around sexuality. In the absence of any parental discussion, and the emergence of sexuality wholly within the public hierarchies of school and the private spaces of pornography and film, his relationship with Bella is the first place where open honest discussion about sex has taken place on the basis of some sort of trust and intimacy. This is why it functions as a narrative turning point, a structuring of the whole case, and why it is presented so dramatically. Bella is a mediating figure, but she mediates between Mark and the previously longed for but abandoned desirability and status rather than the moral approval of the authoritative institution. Alongside the mechanics of sexual intimacy and appropriate romantic conduct of mutual care and support, Mark learns what it feels like to be desired, and this helps form the structuring and meaning of his story.

3.2.2.3 Ambiguity of digital sexuality

Mark states openly that the internet was the place that he learned the most about sexuality (375/75). For Mark, access to pornography comes through his male peers recommending sites. The embarrassment of asking about sexual terms or practices in the peer environment can be dealt with through private exploration and discovery possible on the internet. Porn allowed him to keep up with his peers growing sexual knowledge. Pornography itself, he says, showed him what sex was "in an ideal world" and also "what needed to happen" (375/77). It completed the picture of what was otherwise a "cartoonish" knowledge derived from school lessons (376/92). Further, Mark argues that his use of pornography was as a

substitute for the satisfaction that he wasn't gaining from being in a relationship or having sex. Pornography thus serves a double function in Mark's case – as well as 'fleshing out' the sex education he received, it also works to address his feeling of lack.

Mark's feeling about the prominence of pornography in his learning is ambiguous. He feels that, for the young people he is considering, "I wouldn't want to see them having to turn to the internet" to learn about sexuality (376/99). Further, he mentions that he has "gone too far sometimes" while also expressing an empowerment discourse of 'it's my body' consistent with other research on young people's use of pornography as a means of self-discovery (369/230). For Mark the means of his leaving that sheltered, innocent life, of becoming sexual knowledgeable, has been less than ideal (i.e. seeing an explicit picture of his classmate), and pornography functions as a sign or symbol of this. On the other hand, he seems to acknowledge that pornography was in some sense successful and valuable information about sexuality that he wasn't getting anywhere else. Within this ambiguity Mark is faced with a double-bind - the need to signal sexual knowledge within the peer group alongside an awareness of the less-than-ideal context of learning from the internet. This is further intensified by the sense of progression from mere curiosity to pleasure and desire. Pornography as a form of visual sexual knowledge provides Mark with non-emotional 'information' alongside the danger of inappropriate or unwanted arousal. In this way, Mark's case opens up new questions and challenges for research on religion and pornography beyond the notion of moral incongruence developed by Samuel Perry (2019), addressed in section 1.3.6 above. The narrative approach here provides a richer understanding of pornography use as both a means of replacing a socially required relationship and as symbolic of the subjective loss of innocence.

Pornography is not the only locus of ambiguity over digital sexuality. The dangers of sexuality in the context of social media, particularly sexting, are revisited repeatedly

throughout Mark's case, from the unfortunate fate of Kelly's mistake on Snapchat, to his friend's second phone containing sexual images of female peers in the area, to his own mistake at Hillview sending a sext intended for Bella to his youth team friends. Sexting in these contexts is clearly felt as risky, yet for Mark it is a risk worth taking to sustain relationships using socially approved forms of communication. Mark's case builds on research Freitas' research on religious young people's negotiation of digital sexuality (2017 p. 192) by showing narratively the mutating and constantly contested processes of moral negotiation over sexting.

3.3 Rob

Introduction

Rob (18) was recruited from a large independent evangelical church in a Midlands city centre. He grew up in a moderately deprived suburban area of the city to working class parents, who are not Christians. He started attending church with his cousin Dan and his Christian family when he was thirteen. His parents were divorced when he was sixteen. He identifies his ethnicity as White British.

It was a very hot day; Rob arrived on time for the interview, which took place in a side room of a public library. He was rather quiet and did not respond readily to small talk, but he did have a definite sense of readiness to talk rather than a nervousness or hesitancy. The mood that I noted immediately after the interview was one of catharsis, getting something off his chest. At several points in the interview I found myself becoming quite emotionally affected by some of Rob's narrating – his struggles had real resonance with me and some of my own experiences. Rob used a lot of body language and gesture throughout the interview, some of which I captured but much of which is inevitably missed in my textual focus.

3.3.1 Rob's HCE

Fig. 7 Overview of Rob

Biographical Data Analysis	Successive States of Subjectivity	Teller Flow Analysis
<p>Puberty – emerging struggles Y8 Jun ‘Acting out’ masturbation incident Y9 ‘Unsuccessful’ masturbation ‘Average amount’ conversation Y10 Sep Significant bodily growth</p> <p>Period of dissolution Y11 Stops attending youth group Mar Begins relationship with Jenny Begins scratching self Aug Parents get divorced, he moves out with Mum Sep Hears talk about masturbation being wrong Apprenticeship Y1 Oct Begins college but drops out to start apprenticeship Nov Ends relationship with Jenny</p> <p>From isolated to shared struggles Y1 Jul Attends Christian festival Y2 Sep Stops scratching Feb Conversation with Dan May Begins relationship with Sophie</p>	<p>Tragic foundations Acting out incident, isolating Unsuccessful attempt, insecurity Body insecurities amongst peers Conversations leading to increasing sense of pressure and obligation</p> <p>Low points Jenny ‘toxic’ GCSEs, begins self-harm Divorce, moves out, Hears talk from youth group, guilty College – forms influential friendship group Ends relationship with Jenny, fallout</p> <p>Ascent Period of doubting Attends Christian festival, laughing Stops scratching, ‘I can’t go on like this’ Tells Dan about issues, ‘crying’ Sophie relationship begins Incidents with Sophie</p>	<p>SS1 1) Masturbation as cause of internal pain 2) Comparing myself to others 3) Self in relation to girls</p> <p>SS2 4) Where it all started 5) Early experiences of masturbation 6) Telling others about body struggles 7) Pressure of masturbation and emotions 8) Self harm: causes and others’ perceptions 9) Comparison of girlfriends on communication 10) Getting to know Sophie 11) Angry moments 12) Getting the words out 13) Evaluating talks and responses 14) Hearing about others struggles</p>

3.3.1.1 Tragic foundations

In year eight, Rob witnessed one of his male peers in an unsupervised setting at school ‘acting out’ masturbation onto a female peer (705/18). Rob makes a number of judgements as to his feelings about this event both ‘then’ and ‘now’ including an awareness of and his own recollection of feeling disgusted by this incident, jealous of the boy and the power of display, and feeling like the boy’s authoritative performance of masturbation communicated something about his own, at that time, not-masturbating. Another important aspect of subjectivity is implied in the association Rob immediately makes in the SS1 flow between this event and his sense of being “born in the wrong year”. In this excursus Rob describes how:

Other people that are in the youth group, they're all in the year below me? And, they're all Christian, and most of them are in the same school as I am but they're in the year below, so obviously like I had a different friendship group, and them. And so, I found it through school very difficult because I found like I was very separated. (708/14)

The ‘acting out’ incident captures in some sense, symbolically, Rob’s sense of being alone and isolated amongst people, such as the pair in the story, who he cannot identify with. After witnessing the event Rob tried masturbating, describing his then-thought processes as “should I be doing this?”. When “nothing happened” (I assumed that it was probably the case that Rob was not able to bring himself to orgasm), “...I thought I was very different I was very strange, made me very insecure about my entire body, very insecure about anything I do” (708/23). In SS2 when asked for more detail on this, he expands “I felt like I just gave up on myself, like... (pause) I wouldn't say suicidal at all, but I would say... angry with myself,

frustrated, I didn't have any one to talk to" (716/64). This further establishes in Rob's case the connection between sexuality and isolation.

The initiation of masturbation is a crucial turning point in the case. Rob establishes a clear connection between this initial sense of his being different/strange and his sense of bodily insecurity which develops into a recurring theme in his story. Indeed, in the SS1 flow Rob immediately goes on to discuss his other bodily insecurities – his problematic voice, lisping and stuttering (neither of which are evident in the interview). The shifts of tense through this process indicate that Rob is working between a sense of now-distance from this feeling and an ongoing or lingering sense of this struggle, moments where the 'presentness' of these past struggles are keenly felt.

Soon after, Rob participated in a conversation in a school science lesson with his male peers regarding the average amount that he 'should' be masturbating. In the telling this begins an extensive SS2 revisiting of the topic of masturbation. This conversation affected Rob to the extent that he felt he had to meet the average, and that he should force himself to masturbate in the same way that he would train for football, and that he was in some way letting his friends down if he did not (718/177).

Rob's feelings around masturbation profoundly affected his attendance at his church youth group. During this time, Rob attended a worship night at youth, with a talk that mentioned masturbation. Rob describes how this brought back many negative emotions. He physically acts out the change in his posture in the interview interaction, showing a worshipful posture of 'receiving' during sung worship – arms out hands up, eyes closed, – to arms by his side and eyes open. Rob says he felt that he:

Didn't deserve to be there almost?' I felt like a good person, then this and then... almost like my life is a lie, I shouldn't be here, almost like this isn't me... I don't deserve these amazing people, or prayer. (719/217)

Hearing about masturbation at this point thus brought about a dramatic affective shift; in the telling this supports Rob's representation of his anxious and insecure past self.

3.3.1.2 Low points

Following the period of pubertal changes, around the middle of year eleven, Rob began a relationship with Jenny, a girl in his youth group. Rob immediately and emphatically describes this relationship as "toxic", and in his SS1 narration he recounts a particular (PIN) sexual interaction they engaged in involving mutual masturbation. In the telling Rob is less concerned with the guilt following their sexual activity and more concerned with [REDACTED] refusal to discuss what happened with him afterwards – her awkwardness and shyness (723/373). There is some significant ambiguity in Rob's narrative as he evaluates and makes sense of his relationship with Jenny, which comes down to both a generalized feeling of "hatred" for the whole affair, and a more "logical" perception that this has had some long-term benefit for him (722/353). The relationship with Jenny, which is initially introduced by Rob as a purely negative, toxic affair, thus emerges in SS2 as something with multiple subjective aspects and signifies a particular trajectory of maturity for Rob regarding his ability to relate effectively to young women as well as to know how to act within moral limits.

Shortly after he began his relationship, during his GCSE exams in year eleven, he began to self-harm. Rob associates this closely with feelings of guilt over masturbation and the accompanying fantasies.

So I thought, 'I am such a bad person for doing anything like this'. Like is it just I think it is? Thinking of people? Which gave me the idea of 'I shouldn't be doing this, I shouldn't be harming myself'. So, what I'd do, is, I'd get sharpened nails and I'd just start scratching myself until I started bleeding. And I now have twelve marks on my hand, especially that one, that's the most recent one. It felt like a way for me to... be embarrassed about myself. (720/263)

At this stage, little detail is given regarding the development of his self-harming practices. Instead he makes a free association to a memory of particular emotionality. There was one particular week where a youth leader reached out to Rob and physically touched him on his shoulder, asking "are you OK?"; Rob responded aggressively "I'm fine" and ran into the toilets (722/324). This narrative is told with a heavy sigh. The memory of how he would conceal his behaviour brings the emotional difficulties of this period and his practices into sharp focus, perhaps due to regretting his concealment, or that his work of concealment is a reminder of just how bad it was.

3.3.1.3 Ascent

After his GCSEs, Rob left school and attended a new college for a term. He then quit college to start an apprenticeship. During this period of transition through college Rob met and befriended a group of 19-20-year-old young men. This process of befriending is described (during a coda of SS1) as somewhat torturous. The first week or two Rob says, "were even worse than at school" (712/207), with regard to his insecurities – he would often choose to isolate himself at lunchtime rather than sit with people. However, he soon began to "force himself" to get into the group; "almost changing myself? To fit in with them" (712/215). After two weeks he was spending time with them at break every day, so his attempt at self-change was successful. Rob describes this:

But they were... at break and lunch they always talk about sex etc, they were nineteen and twenty, whereas I had literally just left school, sixteen years old talking to these people, who were great people! But... they encouraged a lot of, sexual activity, which, made me insecure about myself like 'I should have already had sex now, I should have already done this, what am I doing?' It made me very insecure about the way I was living my life. (712/193)

Rob goes on to say how he became aware of a 'spectrum', with two different poles – you should've had sex, done drugs; and you shouldn't have sex, or do drugs. Rob describes this repeatedly as inducing "confusion... about how I should be living my life... where to place myself" (712/196). This presentation of a 'pressurized self' is an important part of the aforementioned 'tragic self'. Rob felt that he must portray a certain kind of normative sexuality as part of his inauthentic performance to enter the group.

However, Rob's overall evaluation of this period is ambiguous. Although a negative evaluation might be expected, Rob does acknowledge that this group were "quite big" (712/219) in his life. The otherwise negative time at college belongs in the 'ascent' phase because Rob experienced success in this group. Rob's forcing himself into the group marks the beginning of a strong drive to no longer isolate himself but in some sense enter the 'public' world and its sexual demands, however confusing and morally ambiguous they might feel. This relates to one of the key features of Rob's case – the movement from isolation to intimacy.

During the year he started college and began his apprenticeship, Rob stopped attending youth regularly and felt himself more in doubt over his faith. In the summer of that first year, he attended a Christian conference with his church youth group. Rob describes a mystical

experience during sung worship, following which he felt his doubts had been allayed and his connection with God re-established (739/209).

In November of the second year of his apprenticeship, Rob stopped self-harming. This could have been due to a change effected and narratively claimed by Rob, following the conference but no such claim is made – rather, Rob says, he was saying to himself, “this is the last time, I cannot let myself go on like this” (712/306). When asked directly what he thinks led him to stop in SS3, Rob attributes his stopping to concern for how his mum might react and the prospect of being taken to the doctors (738/179).

In the February, four months prior to the interview, Rob had a significant and emotionally charged conversation with his cousin Dan. Dan, who is a Christian and goes to the same youth group as Rob, has been a close friend of Rob’s since childhood. Rob describes him in SS1 as “a mentor almost, like a guide” (709/65). The conversation signifies a structural shift in both the pattern of the lived life and the told story as Rob moves from isolation to greater intimacy.

And... just being, me being, just sobbing with tears, and him being always like so accepting of me. Crying so much and just talking to him, he just wanted to pray for me, being so supportive. Its, I remember sat on the stairs near the entrance. It was maybe a minute of me, trying to get words out but eventually not being able to, but eventually calming down, to tell him. And Dan, had just given me so much supportive feedback, like 'you're not the only one struggling', kind of thing, praying for me as well (yeah). And just, making what would usually turn out to ruin my night to, make me look at it so much more positively. Like I have got support here, these people are my friends they, love me, like I love them.
(728/623)

This emotive moment was so difficult, yet so cathartic for Rob because it was the first time he had disclosed his struggles. This is explored further in the integrated account below.

In April, Rob's friendship with Sophie progressed once he admitted his feelings for her and received the surprising response that she had feelings for him too. Their 'official' romantic relationship developed through a series of conventional dates and ongoing text conversations. The ability to speak freely and without judgement is one of the things Rob values most highly about his relationship with Sophie. Rob compares his two relationships; with Jenny, discussion of sexual and other intimate things was shrouded in shame and awkwardness, while with Sophie there is a greater level of openness and acceptance. The way his relationship is presented as valuable again demonstrates the case movement from isolation to intimacy. In the final 'ascent' phase this occurs in relation to both the human and the divine. The re-connection to God, his youth group, Dan, and meeting his girlfriend, structurally come together both in the lived life and the told story. In beginning a relationship of freer emotional disclosure to Dan and, by implication, by telling me this story, he exercises his new-found ability to speak out loud his failures and feelings around his sexuality. However, Rob's story is by no means triumphalist or decisive – significant ambiguity and lingering struggles remain – these are explored further below.

3.3.2 Integrated account

3.3.2.1 Sexuality from heaviness to lightness

The case movement from isolation to intimacy occurs as Rob's feelings about his own body wax and wane through both the living and the telling. In new romantic relationships his negative sexual emotions receive greater affirmation, both with his first girlfriend (which he says decreased his stuttering and general discomfort around girls) and his second girlfriend, who directly speaks to his insecurity and affirms his body. As Rob is increasingly able to accept his own body, his ability to engage in and experience intimacy and the accompanying level of communication increases along with a greater sense of reward. The recent turning point of his conversation with Dan and the accompanying realisations about others' moral imperfections mark a progression from a primarily internalized sexual subjectivity to one that can be shared and spoken about.

This movement from internal to external is accompanied by an awareness of the need for a more light-hearted attitude to sexuality. This is discussed predominantly in relation to his learning from youth group, this time in SS2:

They had a night, they did a few nights around sexuality and relationships, and made masturbation seem so wrong. Almost like if you were doing it, there was something wrong with you. Like they need to look at it more light heartedly.

Although maybe I looked at it myself wrong, and it actually was quite a supportive night. I think it may have been memories brewing up and me thinking they think I'm a bad, they think I'm an awful person, they think I shouldn't be coming here. But I that might just be me, that might just be how I remember it myself. But there probably was 'oh yeah we're only here to support you' but I can't remember that part personally. (729/659)

There is an opposition here between the imagined ‘lightness’ of teaching about masturbation and the ‘heaviness’ of his memories of past failures. The need for a ‘lighter’ approach is imagined to counter this ‘heaviness’. At the same time, Rob is aware that his negative self-image may have distorted the way that he heard the messages being given. I have already noted how the mentioning of masturbation felt intrusive to Rob within the context of an otherwise enjoyable night at youth. Now, within the youth group, Rob positions himself in relation to the group and the messages, not as reminding him of his failures, but increasingly feeling the enjoyment of meeting moral standards. In this way, while the case itself works as an account of learning to feel ‘lighter’ about sexual matters, Rob’s desires for learning and formation draw on the power of this narrative.

Literature on masturbation amongst young people most frequently takes a quantitative approach establishing the connection of masturbation with other desirable or non-desirable behaviours (Gerressu, Mercer, Graham, Wellings, & Johnson, 2008, p. 267). A smaller body of research examines in-depth the changing cultural and subjective meanings of masturbation (Laquer, 2003). However, few studies have approached masturbation narratively. Sexuality education literature emphasizes the former behaviouristic, biological approach – because undesirable relationships are hard to prove, masturbation is framed as ‘normal’ behaviour that one should not feel guilt over (Hirst, 2013, p. 431). However, Rob’s case opens up the richness of the possible range of meanings of masturbation within the development of sexual subjectivity. Chapter 4 will discuss further what Rob’s case might mean for sexuality education discourse on masturbation.

3.3.2.2 Mature communication

Rob remembers very little from his school-based sex education aside from the “jokes being cracked throughout” (753/276). Within Rob’s story the ability to tell sexual jokes is a

signifier of masculine power and is actively resisted in favour of a greater maturity.

Acknowledging these limitations, Rob develops some recommendations around sex education:

With the people that are in school, and the personality that you have to build up, I think it would just make any attempt fail, incredibly, because of the immaturity. There's not a mature age within school that you can do it apart from in year seven when everyone's a bit... off. Most like I say is year seven but that doesn't really stick with anyone throughout the year. But if they were to do school sex ed it would... obviously... take up quite a bit of time, it would have to be small groups, maybe three or four, five max really, to get any mature conversations, rather than like, twenty thirty people, lets watch this video, then you can go on... that's what I'm saying. (752/248)

Central to this passage is Rob's desire to have a mature conversation. He acknowledges that whole-class content delivery is limited in this regard. In contrast to a power struggle, mature conversation is one in which power-plays are absent, indicating more assured and secure sexual identities that do not need to be so vigorously defended. Maturity for Rob thus means the absence of competitive power play, honesty/vulnerability, and non-judgementality. This is in stark contrast with the lack of/absence of appropriate interpersonal conversation in earlier phases of the case. Small groups are imagined to be a way of diffusing these power-plays in classroom settings.

Rob has similar desires concerning his learning from his parents. Earlier in his life this involved mainly "breezy conversations about sex and whatnot, with parents" and "sexual jokes" (745/13). However, he also states that over time, and especially recently, a much

greater freedom of communication has emerged with his mum, particularly as he says, after his Dad left (746/32).

While his parents' involvement in the development of sexual subjectivity is only just becoming valued by the time of the interview, a critical moment in Rob's HCE is his conversation with Dan. This begins a progression to greater intimacy and honesty (e.g. subsequently with his girlfriend and mum) and within the narrative it marks a change from reports of internalized negative states to more externalized agential accounts. Speaking about his sexuality, its heaviness, its shame and the pain it has led him to inflict on himself, putting it into externalized language for the first time, is a transformative experience for Rob. Other elements from the HCE noted are the relationship with the boys at college and the quality of his relationship with Sophie. With the college boys, Rob acquired a sense of ability to speak confidently about sexuality, however morally compromised this seems in retrospect, while with Sophie Rob finds an openness and non-judgementality. Rob gives value to sexual communication in his story wherever this maturity occurs (with his mum, with Dan, with his girlfriend) and it is a significant factor in the movement from isolation to intimacy.

Whether or not it is possible to articulate a universally agreeable narrative of healthy sexual development is a key debate highlighted in section 1.2.6 of chapter 1. Rob's case opens up consideration of how the subjective elements of sexual development factor in to his experience of and desire for, valid sources of sexual information and formation. In Rob's case, subjective sexual development takes on relevance not just for understanding behavioural cognates, but for narrative framing (a lack of sexual maturity as part of what structures the internal/bad-external/good structure of the case. Through this, Rob's past self in the earlier phases of the case, is positioned as in need of mature communication.

3.3.2.3 Desire for regulation

A major feature of Rob's case is the movement from 'observable behaviour of others' to 'creation of a personal standard'. A paradigm example of this is Rob's feeling that he needed to meet the average frequency of masturbation or he was "letting the team down" (718/177). Throughout the case Rob presents himself as particularly susceptible to peer pressure, both overt from others, and covert in his own self-discipline. The self-imposed and other-imposed standards feel crushing and lead in his own perception, to self-harming punishment. The draw towards an anchoring standard is vital in producing both the 'highs' and 'lows' of his narrative. Research tells us that the desire for membership in a coherent group is common through adolescence and so is by no means unique for Rob; rather, it presents strongly in Rob's narrative and his own self-presentation. Desire for regulation draws him towards standards that feel both constructive and destructive standards. Additionally, the presentation of a self-desiring regulation allows Rob to give a coherent defence of his moral integrity in the context of the interview. Where and how these desires inhere outside the interview interactions is hard to predict.

The value and desire for these anchoring standards continues in Rob's learning account. Rob describes his youth group as at pains to address matters of sexuality and relationships, doing four or five sessions a year of teaching and discussion. In some places Rob is positive about the learning he received from his youth group; "it impacted me and made me think a lot, as to my actions and whatnot" (752/241) and "Church has never been a good... source of learning. But the youth group that I go to are, I would say is very good" (748/122). Rob's interpretation of the teaching he received focuses on the importance of avoiding of painful or embarrassing situations through the practice of abstinence:

Them saying how pornography is... it's not reality, it's fake really, and that it's... it shouldn't be what your expectations build up on. And that... and how having sex outside of marriage can be... scar, it can scar you quite heavily, because it could

be someone that, you may think you trust but they, obviously there isn't any trust, and how if anything did go wrong, like premature ejaculation or anything like that, when that happens, how badly scar you, how they wouldn't be supportive, and if anything they would broadcast out to other people, and embarrass you.

(749/138)

On the other hand, in some of the sessions Rob was led to feel guilty and to “put on a fake face” (752/240). Similarly, Rob describes the concealing and defensive posture he took within youth group at difficult times. Rob’s learning from youth is both an apparently positive and negative force. What is vital to note however, is that the matter under discussion is not the veracity of the sexual ethics but the manner in which they are delivered and the way they are related to his own life. There is an unspoken but very powerful background presence of the messages about sexual abstinence, conveyed frequently and (for Rob) powerfully through the youth group context. Rob accepts and even values this regulative ethics of sexuality given by his youth group. It is striking that the internalized debate over standards is a minimal feature of the case, which in both my own and previous research has been prominent (Heyes & Stolberg, 2018). For Rob, ethical debates over how to/whether to adhere to or reject Christian sexual ethics are left implicit, only made explicit once (i.e. his confusion over the ‘spectrum’ during the period with his college friends). Rob’s case confirms and extends Yip and Page’s (2013) analysis of the range of religious young people’s relationships to authority. Yip and Page’s work highlights inconsistencies in the prevailing narrative of religious young people’s movement away from traditional moral authority. Rob’s case further problematizes the clear division between those who reject religious moral authority and those who accept it. The correctness of the ethics is not questioned elsewhere, only the method of delivery (i.e. too ‘heavy’, or guilt inducing, see above). In the case of religious standards, the case shows a process of movement away from the sense of pressure that the religious

standards colluded with. These standards are now meetable in the context of a supportive community and a renewed sense of relationship with God.

Rob has ambiguous feelings about the internet as a source of learning. On the one hand it was a source of easy access, on the other hand the thought of unlimited access to sexual content of various kinds is fear-inducing. There is also ambiguity as to the appropriateness of the age that he learnt about things, that accords with the sense of compromise in his early and non-supervised introduction to sexual matters. This can be seen in Rob's recommendations are around internet safety.

Then, I'd say... if, if you're comfortable, it can be extremely helpful to learn, and so can the internet, but it's quite risky looking at the internet because... you can find almost anything on there, so, you just need to be really careful when you search. I think in school if they were to do internet safety, or sex ed, explaining how important it is that the internet can be quite a dangerous place, and how... what you search will probably come up, so you just got to be careful with what you search really, to search anything sexual, just to be careful, and if they want to realize what they're searching then... (754/298)

The sense of discomfort with the internet felt by Rob lies in its unlimited and unregulated nature, the idea that you can find “anything” – elsewhere he refers to the internet as “a dark place” (752/232). The underlying anxiety here is addressed by Rob by the imagination of standards that would help regulate internet access.

Rob's different experiences of and desires for regulating moral standards emphasizes the ongoing appeal of sexual moral boundaries within a liberalizing sexual culture; for Rob Christianity is one significant resource for these orienting boundaries. On the other hand, Rob's experience of the sexual culture is not primarily one of permissiveness but of other

kinds of non-religious, punishing sexual standards around hegemonic masculinity, such as those noted by Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) and how he feels about it in different contexts. This resists the binary noted in chapter 1 between religion as restrictive/unhealthy and non-religious sexual morality as permissive/healthy.

3.4 Jack

Introduction

Jack was recruited from Greenwood, a large independent evangelical church in a Midlands city centre. He has one older brother. His parents are Christians and he currently lives with his Mum, who works as a audiologist. He parents divorced when he was sixteen. He attends a large, ethnically diverse Church of England secondary academy. He identifies himself as middle class, and as White British.

I noted during the recruitment that Jack was one of the only ones who engaged in the discussion, which he did so extensively. I noted that he was particularly keen to talk about sexual diversity and how he felt that very few people understood these topics well (this makes sense given the case as it is developed below). The interview took place in a pastor's office on the Greenwood church site. Jack was animated and effusive in his engagement throughout the interview, with frequent digressions, humorous asides and idiosyncratic language. The free flowing and digressive manner of speaking, with little need for prompting from me, was quite disorienting such that I felt my application of the BNIM method was perhaps weakest in this interview.

3.4.1 Jack's HCE

Fig. 8 Overview of Jack

Biographic data analysis	Successive states of subjectivity	Teller flow analysis
<p>Pre history Y5-6 Experiences physical bullying</p> <p>Others sexual developments around him Y8 David's awkward relationship Y9 Hears story about sexual activity Y9 Begins asking Shona out repeatedly Y9 Andrew's sexual relationship Y10 Charli text message, relationships end</p> <p>Post-dissolution strategies for intimacy Jun Internet gaming, chat with Pete Jul Relationship with Sarah Aug Relationship with Polly – Quotev Aug Hears parents are going to divorce</p> <p>Recovery Y11 Oct Goes to St Giles services for short period Jan Starts talking to Dana, relationship Apr Moves in with Mum Apr New friends on Counterstrike server July Physically excluded in park</p>	<p>From outgoing to inward through social changes Experiencing bullying</p> <p>Early fragments of feelings about others relationships Judging others relationships Strangeness of others becoming sexual</p> <p>Trying to find my place Relief of having a best friend Charli text message fiasco</p> <p>Navigated destroyed relationships Finding online intimacy Experiencing exclusion consequences</p> <p>Becoming 'sane' Experiencing forgiveness, singing Ongoing awareness of/tolerance of exclusion Divorce and family dynamic changes New online friends Developments with Dana</p>	<p>SS1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Perceptions and judgements of others early relationships/sex 2) Trying to find my place in the scene 3) The word incident, causation and effect 4) Injustice and punishment 5) Relationship with Dana as end of a 'long fight' 6) My known focus 7) Friends throughout life changes <p>SS2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8) Fragments of early school memories 9) Perceptions and judgments of other relationships 10) Online relationships and sex 11) Becoming 'sane' – recovering faith at St. Giles 12) Comedic story of Dana 13) Struggles proving their relationship 14) Jack's life lessons

3.4.1.1 From outgoing to inward facing through social changes

Between school years five to eight, Jack experienced verbal and occasionally physical bullying. In SS3, Jack does not attribute great significance to this (saying “people have worse lives” (910/15)). However, he goes on to talk about how being bullied drew attention to the fact that he was both physically and emotionally weak. This perception of himself as ‘not strong’ is relevant for later phases explored below. In SS3 Jack recounts the way in which he felt he changed significantly from confident to socially anxious, through the transition from primary to secondary:

To be fair I wasn't a socially anxious child in any way. I maybe perceived myself, maybe as a result of bullying a bit, I don't know it could've been part of it, in the back of my head, that I don't know about. But... I think, just... I kind of slowly changed my image in secondary school a little bit. Cos I started off... I kissed apples in class, I wasn't the most subtle man alive, I was somewhat energetic and outgoing. but then I stopped playing sport, I stopped going to clubs, I didn't really do much didn't talk to many people, I became a shy awkward kid. I kind of became that person. So in my head that's what I was. Which... kind of still am but, more validly now because crowds are still scary as anything but, yes.

(917/260)

When asked why he thinks he changed, Jack cites the influence of his brother as a PC gamer and his own initiation into PC gaming (917/276). As Jack took this influence from his brother, it transpired that no-one in his year shared this valued identity of being a specifically PC gamer, in contrast to his brother who had a group of close PC gaming friends who would come to his house, play together, have parties together, etc. Jack had no such group, so found himself alone in his identity. There is a sense then, although being a gamer is a valued

identity, that Jack is aware that the exclusion this produced factored into his drop in social confidence that occurred during the transition from primary to secondary school. This self-image of exclusion plays into both the pattern of the lived life and the told story, elaborated below.

3.4.1.2 Early fragments of perceptions of other's relationships

The first trace of subjectivity exhibited in SS1 emerges here, as Jack develops a picture of the bad boys/girls as the ones who were becoming relationally and sexually involved, and that “people like me and my friends were never going to be relevant in that” (882/31). In this way Jack establishes a somewhat ‘then’ perspective of a feeling of exclusion and difference from ‘that’ sexual world. It is significant that through Jack’s narration here there is a punctuation of small laughs. This could be attributed to the discomfort of the difficulty of recalling these feelings or could signal a playfulness and irony around the social stereotypes he is using. The laughter emphasizes the ridiculousness of his close friends possibly being sexually active at that stage, conveying a sense of both humorousness and bitterness.

Despite this, in year eight, one of Jack’s best friends, David entered a romantic relationship with Shona. In SS1 Jack briefly refers to this (“it didn’t really count to be fair (small laugh) at that sort of level, it wasn’t a thing” (882/25)). However, in SS2 Jack recounts particularly awkward incident from this relationship in more detail. The incident is described quite vividly – a group of students crowd round David and Shona “in a predatory way” (889/177), who have obviously been found out to be dating or observed doing something that has revealed or made obvious their relationship status. David is laughing awkwardly, while Jack has the sense that Shona is feeling a lot more uncomfortable.

This moment is significant because Shona is “the one he asked out six times” (890/185) (see below). However, Jack strongly moderates the natural conclusion that this was a painful

scene for him by conveying his unresponsiveness, and emphasizing that in general that he doesn't have "the biggest emotional responses" (890/196). He summarizes this with the epithet "meh" and notes that "meh was my catchphrase" (890/186); he was potentially more interested in playing football. Through the telling here Jack presents a picture of his subjectivity as somewhat careless, detached and negatively judgemental of the relational/sexual advancements of his peers. This early detachment from relationships also serves to balance an impression of himself as not overly bothered about being in a relationship which moderates my possible judgement of him as overly interested in romantic relationships.

During year nine, one of his close friends since primary school, Andrew, also enters a romantic relationship. Over the course of their relationship, Jack finds himself imagining their sexual activity together in the context of Andrew's bedroom. In this SS2 section, the significance of Andrew's bedroom is the perceived childishness of the space – a Lego man on a zipwire, a collection of cuddly toys – prominent in Jack's setting of the scene (892/291). To imagine Andrew being sexual in this environment felt particularly disconcerting for Jack, combined with the fact that he has known Andrew since primary school and describes his body and mannerisms in appositely 'un-sexy' terms ("A bit messy, looked like he would've had his hand in the paint and the playdough still, messing around that sort of thing" (913/130). The evoking of the scene 'now' also means that Jack clearly experiences this past discomfort live in the moment via this sense of the shock of the sexualization of the previously non-sexual.

Without prompting Jack then moves to a familiar pattern of establishing reasons for their actions based on their character, in this case their religious beliefs. Although his friend is a Christian, the fact that she is an atheist explains the reasons why they ended up sexually active. In this way Jack has clear images of religious commitment's association with sexual

tendencies that sit alongside his sense of bad girls/boys and his own externality. Jack's need to know why they are doing it allows him to make sense of sexual behaviour and position himself against that. If he can attribute their behaviour to essential characteristics, he can make sense of his not-being-sexual by recognizing the difference in these essential characteristics. Implicated in this is the then/now task of accounting for/giving reasons for his own non-sexuality against a background of heterosexual expectations.

3.4.1.3 Trying to find my place

During year nine, Jack asked out Shona, was rejected, and then went on to ask her out a number of times. When talking about this Jack draws repeatedly on an idea he had that he needed to get in a relationship by the end of school or he never would (885/135). However, this became "a known focus of mine" which "scared people". This designates a change in subjectivity from a previous careless phase to one where the social pressure to enter a relationship began to be felt more keenly. At the same time, the public awareness of Jack's intentions began to affect his interactions at school.

Around the beginning of year ten, Jack began a 'best friend' relationship with a girl called Charli. The development of this relationship precedes a major turning point in Jack's case. While texting Charli late at night, Jack told her about something that he did in primary school "can't be sure to this day that it happened" (893/350). He used a word to describe this action which "has two meanings, one good, one illegal" (ibid.). Charli spread that Jack had said this word and he ended up "getting branded" (893/355). The resulting process meant that the event "kind of destroyed my friendships at that point" (883/70). Jack begins his telling of this incident with an evaluation rather than an immediate report. The story is prefaced with a description of a particular dynamic of their relationship – that she "didn't agree" with things Jack did because of his apparent untruthfulness, saying weird things, and miswording

sentences, and that this was, “quite common for me” (883/60). The fact that she “misinterpreted one of them quite badly” (ibid.) is established as the primary meaningfulness of the friendship and its narrative significance. The telling conveys a sense that this incident was typical of Jack; the confusion, misunderstanding and tactless use of the wrong words without thinking things through. There is thus an attribution of responsibility to himself but also to Charli for her part in both misunderstanding and then spreading what happened getting him ‘branded’.

Importantly, the word that Jack said that sparked off the subsequent chain of events is never actually recounted throughout all the sub-sessions. I made a thought-through decision to ask him directly if he felt able to tell me what the word was ‘off-record’ and, despite the significant rapport I felt we had developed, he refused. The unspeakableness of this word, despite Jack’s presenting of it as something with two meanings that can be misunderstood, supports the assumption that this event really did haunt Jack throughout much of his school year ten, which he describes as “quite an emotional time” (883/64) as he tried to survive amidst the constant reminder of his mistake.

Overall in this phase, in distinction from the previous, Jack begins to try and get in relationships of various kinds. This can be considered both romantically, in terms of his persistent asking out and sense of the clock running out on his window to get in a relationship, and non-romantically in his sense of loneliness and absence of an intimate best friend. He tries to find his place in the relational order by pursuing a romantic relationship doggedly. Both of his initial pursuits of these goals are however annihilated by the ‘word incident’ a turning point which begins the following period of ‘destroyed relationships’.

3.4.1.4 Navigating destroyed relationships

In the period that followed the ‘word incident’, Jack found himself in situations that communicated clearly to him his exclusion. For example, during football matches, Jack would be the “living goalpost” (897/514). Presumably the boys did not want him to play and “the girls didn’t want to be near me, unsurprisingly” (ibid.). On another day, with some friends in the park Jack is clearly excluded from the social circle but allowed to remain in the vicinity (897/533). Jack also mentions how in general, incidents of conversation with people would lead to them turning the conversation back to ‘the word’ in order to humiliate him.

During the summer following year ten, Jack started talking to some friends that he met while online gaming; Pete, and a group of his friends that would group chat together. Through this Jack had online dating relationships with two American girls from the group. Jack soon ended his relationship with the first girl Sarah (which is not given much significance) and began dating her friend Polly. Through his online relationship with Polly, which is introduced from the earliest stages as more sexual (“she was flirty” (900/660)), Jack began to participate in sexual roleplays on an online chatroom called Quotev. As with the level of sharing with Sarah, Jack also shares a number of details about Polly, specifically the fact that she had “been raped by her cousin... she had enjoyed it” (900/671). This setting of Polly as sexually problematic in various different sense is made explicit – e.g. she was “overly sexually focused” (899/614). However, Polly’s sexual nature gave him access to a new online world of sexual exploration. The sexual roleplays involved different scenarios “Victorian gentleman and slave... security guard and prisoner...” (901/712) are reflective of typical heterosexual fantasies playing on male/female power dynamics. Jack does point out that these were enjoyable, but now takes a critical stance to them on the basis that most of them “ended up with the same outcome” (901/717). An important question to ask concerns Jack’s implicit and explicit stance on the morality of these roleplays that I asked him about in SS3:

To me I had no initial qualms, because it was like I'm talking to people, it's a way of communicating at the end of the day, the same way any communication works. But at the same time... sexual aspects, did worry me? in the own sense. But I don't think my brain really cared, to be honest? At that time I was in the state of 'hey Jack do you know what you need? A little bit of escapism. This provides quite a lot of escapism!' It was nice in that way... I role played different Jacks at the end of the day, I could be any Jack I wanted, I could be the confident Jack, which was quite a few of them. Or have, general traits I just don't have. Which was kind of interesting to me. (921/434)

From the moment Jack mentions this (which he does without an expected level of shame or discomfort), he emphasizes confidently that he had a lot of fun doing this. For example, they allowed him to explore “different Jacks” (921/439), a feature of online sexuality frequently touched upon in the literature, to feel good about himself at a time when he was rather socially isolated and to realise that he could be sexually attractive. However at a more narrative-structural level, the sexual roleplays serve as a kind of explicit example of the loss of mental clarity “sanity” (902/762), during this time, as well as an illustration of how he was, up until and at this point, not ‘really’ Christian and that the subsequent development away from this behaviour was part of becoming an “actual Christian” (ibid.). Overall, it is clear that Jack’s strategies for surviving this period of destroyed friendships led him into places that he was increasingly morally uncomfortable with, but this moral discomfort is sidelined in light of the distraction and, to some extent, the healing, that this online activity provided him with.

3.4.1.5 Becoming sane

Shortly after Jack began the roleplays with Polly, around the beginning of year eleven, he heard that his parents were getting a divorce. The initial news has seemingly little subjective impact. However, Jack does give extensive narration of the changes in family structure once his Mum moved out, which occurred several months later around April of year eleven. After his Mum moved out Jack and his brother would go and see his Mum on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. When asked for more detail, Jack goes on to describe this mundane routine “walk to Carwell... do some shopping... come back... probably watch something...” (904/835). Further, because he or his brother didn’t have their computers “we were almost forced into doing it which was quite nice in a way” (904/838). In the same SS2 passage Jack describes this he relates it the reason he stopped going on Quotev, “you need to stop doing it when you have other things in your time, almost” (903/804). In retrospect, the balance of being placed in a regular situation without access to his computer games was feels like a healthy development for Jack. The change in his online friendship group is also narrated as a healthy change – he develops close friendships with a group of young men on a new Counter Strike server.

During October/November of year eleven, Jack started going with some of his friends to St Giles, a church that runs an energetic youth ministry with live music and team activities. The experiences during times of worship were particularly important for Jack and he recounts a particular time singing a song called ‘This is Real Love’, screaming those words and jumping up and down. Jack describes this:

Was a moment of quite good connection with God, in a way. To be honest. Cos... like, just, knowing going from a state of hey, I know I've done a lot of bad things, let's be fair, because, quoting the story itself I can say I've not done the greatest things in my life, I know that for a fact, I don't do the greatest things now, but screaming out ‘this is real love’, with people next to me who I also know I think

probably have done less, whether they have or have not, which doesn't matter at the end of the day, it was quite, sort of, exhilarating in a way. So it was that, putting all the energy into that line, killing your throat, was quite, dramatic and quite... emotional in a way for that reason. (905/896).

Narratively, the fact that Jack was able to experience forgiveness at this time is connected with the overall sense of a period of upward recovery in his own mental state if not the external circumstances.

One of the expected 'tellings' developed from the BDA concerned the redemptive nature of the relationship – that a dramatic romantic turn of fortunes might provide a sudden moment of realization of value from a state of abjection. However, both the events and the telling of Jack's relationship with Dana, beginning at the start of year 12, belie these expectations, characterizable as awkward, halting and humorous rather than profound, romantic and spiritual. On the first date with Dana, Jack describes how it was so awkward that he talked continuously (anxiously) for three hours while she remained silent (908/1006). Also presented humorously is their first kiss at the ironically unromantic national transport museum (907/1002).

This more detailed material is primarily SS2 and it is important to note the distinctive function of the relationship narrative with Dana in SS1. Its function there is to signal the end of Jack's narrative and runs alongside a sense of the painful but steady diffusion of 'the word'-induced social exclusion, working in tandem with Jack's perception of significant maturing during year eleven. As a result of this happening, Jack presents other parts of the story that need tying up as simply working themselves out. The relationship seems to work decisively and transformatively in drawing attention away from the protracted social exclusion such that over time it simply works itself out, despite what Jack notes as the

occasional bringing up of the incident, but replaced by a poignant “they now like me for me” (908/1034). As well as his relationship with Dana, the movement towards ‘becoming sane’ in this phase of the case is produced by three major sources of change – his religious community, changes in his family system and changes in his status within his social circle.

3.4.2 Integrated account

3.4.2.1 The consequences of failed sexual tact redeemed

Jack says regarding his earlier persistence in asking out girls that it “was quite... unknowledgeable of me to do so” (882/37). The knowledge that Jack feels was missing is that of when to stop pursuing a relationship after rejections. Further, one of the most important parts of Jack’s story is the exclusion and ongoing humiliation he felt as result of the ‘word’ incident, something he explicitly attributes to his general lack of tactfulness and care in using the right words or saying the right thing. Additionally, Jack indicates in the SS1 coda evaluations of his whole story that desiring a relationship was a contributing factor in many of the problems that occurred in his life. This trying hard was a “known focus of mine” which “scared people” (885/137). Jack feels a sense of shame and disappointment at having been this sort of ‘scary’ individual; too ‘desperate’, such that others were put off. It is hard to come to terms with this past self authentically in the context of the interview dynamics and this is evident in the tone of this passage, featuring frequent stuttering and filler words. Jack’s case can thus be understood as a process of halting and stuttering repair following the failure of a certain kind of sexual knowledge – tactfulness, the ability to speak and comport himself appropriately within the social rules governing sexuality and romantic relationships at school.

As recounted above, the sexual roleplays work as the turning point beginning the reparative processes of peer group change, divine forgiveness and entering a relationship with Dana. They are indicative of both a lack of sanity and moral integrity, but also foreshadow the recovery of confidence and agency. The absence of a social system that provided him with non-humiliating interactions led him to find these things online. Research on digital sexualities frequently focuses on the possible correlations of cybersex of various kinds with other negative behaviours contributing to a general climate of fearfulness around youth,

technology and sexuality. Jack's case challenges the focus of this body of literature and, along with other critical research on youth and digital sexualities (e.g. Gill, 2009) opens up questions concerning the constructive as well as the destructive role of cybersex in the development of narrative sexual subjectivity and the role of religion therein.

Indeed, Jack's religion is vital in the redemption of these failures. Experiences at the more charismatic worship service of St Giles facilitate a sense of divine forgiveness and reconciliation. It is his sense of religious commitment that leads to him stopping the online roleplaying, and the healthy feeling of consonance with his also-a-Christian girlfriend and their shared moral standards. The importance of the experience of divine forgiveness draws attention to the importance of the felt sense of closeness to God. While literature on religion and sexuality approach sexual attitudes and values as a matter of moral socialization, guided by the need for psychological coherence or community expectations rather than affecting and affected by divine connection (e.g. Cooksey & Dooms, 2010, p. 109), Jack's case draws attention to the importance of the divine in understanding religious sexual subjectivity as well as measurable moral attitudes.

3.4.2.2 Lost sexual innocence

Jack's recommendations concerning school sex education are worth quoting in full:

Cos they think it's the age of, cos in the age they're getting the idea that it's the age where its relevant to them, when it isn't and it shouldn't be. So it's like the (inaudible) it only ever occurred because they knew about things like this, it only ever occurred where... don't give knowledge that you shouldn't have yet. Like there's no point telling someone the answer to a question when they question's not been said. It's a silly idea. (935/305)

This passage combines a number of discourses of interest to sexuality education scholars.

Jack seems to reproduce the idea that knowing about sexuality plays a part in the incitement to act on that knowledge, and that this may arise through a misplaced sense of the ‘relevance’ of sexuality for younger children and adolescents. He combines this with a strong evaluation regarding the ‘age appropriateness’ of sexual knowledge; questions that aren’t being asked should not be answered. Jack’s concerns about ‘age appropriateness’ runs counter to much sexuality education discourse arguing for earlier intervention and that young people’s views support this need (e.g. Pound et al., 2017, p. 5).

Indeed, Jack’s discussion around why he thinks sex education is a waste of time regarding the supplying of irrelevant knowledge can be related to a wider sense of ‘too much too soon’ in his case. Jack presents the accuracy of the information he learnt from his peers as rather surprising (931/151), and against a generic context of comedically incorrect rumour-based misinformation. The primary value of learning from peers for Jack is the prompting of conversations towards further research. However, this is not unproblematic; as he states, this “can cause you to search for things you shouldn’t on the Internet” (937/387). Once again, peer discussion about sex led to private exploration and the subjective recognition of this process of provocation and exploration as morally suspect. A similar ambiguity is exhibited in Jack’s recommendations concerning the internet. He imagines himself in a parent’s shoes, facing the conundrum of whether to restrict access in this and argues with himself back and forth between restrictiveness and permissiveness touching on different ethical perspectives.

This relationship to innocence is also present in other parts of the case, for example Jack’s imagination of his apparently immature friend’s sexual activity and the initial shock or surprise at the emergence of sexuality through the early rumours about someone giving “fellatio” in an alley (890/215). Overall this theme shows how the loss of innocence is lived and narrated through subjectively shifting life contexts, challenging the tendency within

progressive sexuality education scholarship to consider innocence as an adult construct projected onto children (Jones, 2011b, p. 381).

3.4.2.3 Desire for knowledgeable sources

In place of his parents, for Jack school “technically is the one that did the birds and the bees talk” (921/72). His presentation of sexuality education at school is ambiguous. It does provide new and genuine knowledge “until sex education I probably didn't know what a woman's downstairs looked like to be fair” (ibid.), but is mostly forgettable and providing of knowledge he already knew (“It doesn't actually tell you anything it was just a bit weird” (929/86)). Other descriptions of his SBSE touch on familiar critiques: “it's like 'ooh don't have sex kids you'll get all the STDs, instantaneously (J laughing) It's like oh, oh (tone of frustrated despair) please can you just stop”. (934/277). However Jack does have a number of recommendations regarding school based sex education:

I'd almost say don't do it, but it's so generalized, every school knows they have to do it, they have to spend a set amount of time on it, they're forced to each year or whatever, in an act of worship. The problem is people aren't going to care about it, to be honest. The best thing you can do, you know what you can do, talk to your friends. You need to encourage parents more I think to be fair, than teachers on that front. Cos i doubt... miss... Susie is gonna know exactly what Jessica is worried about in her sex life. It's not her priority is it? Her priority is teaching psychology (laughing). That's what her job is, teachers are overworked anyway, kind of... (934/283)

Jack wrestles here to express his positive feelings about how sexuality education might proceed while holding this against the pragmatic acceptance that school lessons are simply not/never going to be regarded as a source of legitimate authority in this matter.

Jack takes similar issue with his church as a source of learning. This emerges through an extensive discussion of LGBTQ issues. Jack takes a progressive stance on issues surrounding same-sex marriage and transgender. He describes the approach to sexual and gender diversity taken by his church as reflective of its demographic (white, middle class, 20-30) and that this means they have been shielded from the complexities introduced through the growing social visibility of diverse sexualities (930/135). Jack has developed a keen sense of the inauthenticity of some of the ‘up front’ responses to questions about sexual ethics, that speakers are failing to be sufficiently critically questioning (“that's the Greenwood opinion that we have to technically put forward, we're not allowed to go against it right here right now, sorry about that” (930/126)).

In a following section he performs a back-and-forth debate concerning the theological status of Biblical texts concerning homosexuality, particularly the contestations over the translation of terms, reflecting some acquaintance with the debate about homosexuality and same-sex marriage. It is also important to make an observation about performativity here. In this section Jack is clearly seeking to demonstrate his comparative knowledgeableness over sexual diversity proving the lack of knowledge or depth of engagement exhibited in his church/youth group. Demonstrating this knowledge is achieved by pointing out its various laughable shortcomings. Displaying knowledgeableness has a reparative function for Jack given his narrative and the central role of the lack/eventual acquisition of sexual and relational tact. For Jack, presenting himself as knowledgeable allows him to reinforce a distance from the disdainful actions of his past self and its foolishness. This should lead us to ask questions about the methodological context of research on young people’s views of various sources of learning in terms of the performative demands of displaying knowledgeableness in interview contexts.

Jack is not saying that the church should by default take his own liberal stance. Rather, he desires greater acknowledgement of the contested nature of the issues. A lack of this awareness induces negativity in him about the overall validity of his church's engagement with sexual issues. Jack's desire is to receive from his church input that comes from a demonstrable knowledgeableness. Currently, this is not present and there is a discomfoting sense of being identified with something that is hopelessly out of touch. It is this discomfort that gives the emotional energy to the extensive performative argumentations of SS4. The desire for his church leaders to acquire and display greater awareness of sexual/gender diversity would allow him to continue to adhere to his church's moral guidance without this discomfoting cognitive dissonance.

Thus there appears to be a contradiction between the themes. Sexual knowledge is both the problem and the solution for Jack. Although the lack of sexual knowledge of a certain kind caused many of his problems, Jack is worried about young people knowing things before they need to. At the same time, developing sexual knowledge works reparatively within the case. These contradictions draw attention to the varieties of forms and functions of sexual knowledge and how they work across contexts and in the development and presentation of shifting sexual subjectivities.

3.5 Henry

Introduction

Henry was recruited from a large evangelical church in a Midlands city centre – the same one as Jack. He was raised in a Christian family with four siblings and has been going to church all his life. He describes himself as white and middle class. During the recruitment I noted the seemingly close relationships between Henry, Rob and the other boys – it seemed a very tight knit group. Henry participated in the discussion and played the part of ‘the joker’ in the group, so I reflected.

On the day of the interview I felt Henry had left behind his ‘joker’ personality. We met and conducted the interview in a public library side room. The interview was delivered quite seriously and with little variation in tone or expression. Henry’s interview was characterized by a sense that he was ‘providing information’ rather than telling a story, aside from a few moments where subjectivity came through more strongly. Throughout there were a lot of refusals of more detail and it was quite difficult to move the interview towards greater subjective discussion. Nevertheless, the method did seem to work effectively as a reasonably long SS2 unfolded from a very short SS1. Further there was a definite sense that towards the end of the interview Henry got quite tired and seemed to ‘close down’ somewhat in his responses.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

3.5.1 Henry's HCE

Fig. 9 Overview of Henry

Biographical data analysis	Successive states of subjectivity	Teller flow analysis
<p>Early relationship with Rachel Y7 Camping trip, Rachel breaks her wrists Y8 May Begins relationship with Rachel Oct Ends relationship with Rachel Dec Begins friendship with Tara April Grandad dies</p> <p>Different actions post-Rachel Jul: Sleepover with six girls Y10 Dec: begins friendship with Cora Feb Goes to Cora's house Jun Ends with Cora, Tara for one day Jul Seminar at ReCharge</p> <p>Growing relationship with Tara Y11 Sep: Pushed against Tara in lesson Apr Sits with Tara at a party Jul Finishes GCSEs, party, relationship Jul Talk about sexuality with his Dad</p> <p>Beginning relationship with Tara Y12 Aug Meets Tara's parents May Tara starts attending youth Jun Stays over at Tara's</p>	<p>Friendship and dating with Rachel Ordinariness of friendship, everyday connectivity Boasting post-relationship (feeling high) Awkwardness post – relationship</p> <p>Confusing time Death of grandad, sadness Questioning sexuality, confusion Sleepover feels good, awkwardness of first kiss Cora friendship becomes 'lust', not good Stops with Cora, tries with Tara, fear of it not working, exams</p> <p>Transitioning to Tara Pushed together at school 'Moment' of sofa, realization and exposing attraction Enjoying supportive/encouraging conversations Excitement, exposure of getting together post GCSE</p> <p>Building with Tara Meets Tara's parents, performs social competence well Tara at church, feeling of achievement/coherence Tara comes round his house, nervous/tempted = understand</p>	<p>SS1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) My girlfriends and their religion 2) My sexual history judged 3) What does the period I felt I might be gay mean for me? <p>SS2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Background to the relationship with Rachel 5) End of the relationship 6) Position in the popularity scale 7) The things I did to 'boost my gayness' 8) Helping his accused friend 9) The pressure to date Tara, their decisions 10) Negotiating sexuality with Tara 11) Supporting Tara and integrating her into church 12) Various components of the 'rebound period' 13) Meeting each others parents, becoming serious

3.5.1.1 Friendship and dating with Rachel

In year six, Henry went on holiday with some family friends to a festival. During the holiday, Rachel, one of the children of the other family they were away with, had an accident and broke both her wrists. In the aftermath of this Henry acted as a close support for Rachel, whose injuries were quite serious, reporting how he would text her to see how she was doing in the months following the incident. Henry's friendship with Rachel continued, conducted mainly via text message, involved mundane conversations sharing how their days had been. In May of year eight Henry began an 'official' romantic relationship with Rachel which lasted 6 months (until October year nine). In the interview he presents this as "more of a friendship really" (1076/18), explicitly drawing attention to this both at the very beginning of SS1 narration and in SS2 ("It was a friendship, then took a tiny little step, then apparently it's now a relationship. but there was very little in between." (1103/13). In the initial section of the SS2 telling, Henry explicitly connects the primarily supportive nature of his relationship with Rachel with his current romantic relationship with Tara (1078/34). The evidence suggests strongly that the positive feeling of giving support affected his own sense of worth; at the same time Henry utilizes the image of himself as a supportive boyfriend to develop a representation of his sexual subjectivity with elements in which sexual desire is not present. Henry also recalls, later in SS2 during the section on through a GIN rather than a PIN, times he would be boasting about having a relationship at school and that having a relationship gave him a "social boost" (1083/196). These passages of narrative indicate that Henry enjoyed a favourable position in the social hierarchy throughout his school career, partly because of his unusually (for his age) successful romantic relationships. Henry seeks to moderate and minimize this aspect of his subjectivity, passing judgement on his desires for a boost as morally problematic and emphasizing that he was only "in the middle of the

popularity thing” (1083/209) and emphatically not desiring to be in the social ‘tier’ of popularity above him.

In September of year nine, Rachel broke up with Henry over text. In the telling Henry suggests that this was as a result of their relationship becoming too “awkward” (1103/20) every time they were with each other. Overall, this initial phase with Rachel sets up a pattern of both Henry’s lived sexual subjectivity that allows him to summarily characterize his dating behaviour in the final coda of SS1 “I’m not really a big dater I’m just... steady with it” (1076/37). Both here and throughout the case, Henry emphasizes this ‘steadiness’ by minimizing desirous aspects of his (non)sexual subjectivity. This is also exhibited in that both of Henry’s romantic relationships are anchored in a prior friendship.

3.5.1.2 Confusing time

In April of year nine, Henry’s great granddad Steven died. This point in the telling is one of the only times that Henry expresses a significant emotionality, let alone a negative one, stating “I’m not normally very emotional at all but that really really hurt” (1098/71). This is borne out through the whole telling, with rather limited/superficial descriptions of subjectivities and limited emotional articulation.

During the period following the death of his great granddad, around the summer of year nine, Henry started to question his sexual orientation. He addresses this at a few different points in the telling, and repeatedly emphasizes that he didn’t act on these feelings “nothing happened with guys, not talking, it was more erm like... questioning whether I am straight or not” (1100/757). Henry began to deliberately change his behaviour in order to, as he puts it, “boost his gayness” (1084/232). One key feature of this was his spending increasing amounts of time around groups of girls. Henry talks generally about how “he used to dress really camp”

(1084/244); for him this means colourful “more expressive” (1115/361) clothing and a more flamboyant bodily comportment:

J: Why do you think people consider that stuff to be gay?

H: People tend to be expressive in the way they talk and act. And that's what appealed to me, the expressiveness. but then that kind of fizzled out, and I went to just wearing black clothes. And then now I'm back to the colourful clothing, but not the gay phase. The clothes just look nice. (1115/371)

Taking on popular stereotypes of gay comportment allowed young Henry to ‘try out’ being gay. This period is visited both early and late in SS2, the later telling Henry talks about how his engagement with ‘gay culture’ continued beyond the period of questioning.

In the summer of year nine, during the period of questioning, Henry went to a sleepover with some of his female friends. Some detail is given to set up this PIN - they went roller skating before, there was some debate whether it would be OK between their parents; there was a hot tub, they stayed outside in a tent; there was a thunderstorm. Henry says: “That was when I had my first kiss, because I never had one because I thought I was gay, and they just went ahead and kissed me, which was really unexpected and I didn’t really like it to be honest” (1101/803). The negativity of this memory is ambiguous; Henry recalls that there was also a sense of “relief” (1101/822) accompanying the feeling of discomfort and the sense of him being forced to do this against his will. The negative representation of the kiss contributes to the presentation of a non-sexual subjectivity throughout the interview, explored further below.

Towards the end of the ‘confusing period’, around December of year ten, Henry began a friendship with a girl from his church youth group, Cora. Between December and February of year ten Henry and Cora’s friendship deepened and in February they spent time together

alone at his house. When asked about this later in the SS2, Henry's tone changes to very stuttering and halting:

H: Erm... she came round to my house once. And that was... it wasn't like full on, lust, but it was more... yeah, yeah it was more like, I don't know how to explain it to be honest but... yeah.

J: Yeah. I know it can be difficult or confusing to talk about...

H: Yeah it's more trying to get words out actually because I can't really think of how to describe it. (1099/735)

The difficulty Henry experiences in this telling can be variously interpreted. It is possible that Henry is uncomfortable with admitting what it was that they did, it is possible that he doesn't have adequate language to describe what happened in an acceptable way for this context. It is also possible that there was no physical interaction whatsoever and what Henry is struggling to describe is an inner emotional state rather than an outer activity. In any case, it is a moment of significant emotionality and attests to the difficulty Henry has with articulating himself in this particular thematic field. Henry exhibits some ambiguity and difficulty in describing his interactions with Cora as being a "quick fix" (1099/746). It is language it seems he has resorted to, but he dislikes its implication that he was "disrespectful, but it was almost kind of that mindset... So like a quick boost almost" (1099/714). What Henry claims was being 'fixed' or 'boosted' is the negative feelings of this confusing phase of life.

The day after the incident with Cora, Henry asked out Tara, another girl he had been developing a friendship with. In Henry's SS3 he notes that they had been friends for a while, but that it wasn't a very involved friendship. His reason for this is discussed ambiguously:

Yeah so that was... that was like a bit of an odd period. It was just after the gay bit. So it was like I need to get rid of this and then start... start something new.

And I think that's why it wouldn't have worked, because I was still trying to get out of that period. (1092/480)

As he implies in the later quote he says explicitly here – the reason Henry gives in the telling for trying out dating Tara is that he needed to get rid of his lingering feelings of same sex attraction and identity questions (“it was like I need to get rid of this and then start... start something new.”(1092/480)). When Henry asked out Tara, on the same day that she accepted he reconsidered and ended the relationship by the end of the day by text. Following this time, at a youth camp seminar, Henry realised that his desire to help and support girls (not just Tara but others he was also ‘helping’) could be misconstrued as flirting, and suggests that this was what happened with Cora – that he became further involved in a friendship with mismatched expectations and confusions over what others want (“then I realized that, that i was doing it wrong. That I was making this mistake” (1129/785).

Describing the mutations of subjectivity taking place during this time is challenging – because, as Henry says, it was ‘confusing’ and multiple meanings are established for this period through the telling. Clearly there are developing feelings for Tara that persist during his time of looking for a ‘quick fix’. The then-realization that he only wanted to be friends, coupled with his then-feelings of guilt and shame at having engaged in something lustful with her (re. having treated her as an object for his own repair) jolts him out of this state of looking for a fix. For Henry, Cora represented the fast, passionate and desirous and Tara (with whom he had already developed a non-romantic friendship) the slow, steady and considered. The ‘fast’ feels dangerous, unfamiliar, immoral, and the ‘slow’ feels healthy, morally upright and comfortable, further demonstrating the pattern of living/presenting non-sexuality within the case.

3.5.1.3 Transitioning to Tara

Henry's friendship with Tara survived the one-day relationship he initiated. During year eleven Henry and Tara's friendship became more obviously public and alongside this they began to spend more time together. In September of year eleven, in an unsupervised school lesson, a group of their friends playfully pushed them together. This implies their wider social group's awareness of the relationship and wanting them to get together, applying humorous pressure and enjoying the power dynamics of creating awkwardness and tension between Henry and Tara in these moments. Elsewhere Henry describes that the pressure during this period became "quite intense" (1091/457).

Later on in year eleven, during April, Henry and Tara went together to a friend's birthday party. As a result of there being not enough seats (he was not expected at the party) Henry and Tara ended up on a seat sat close together in physical contact. Henry recounts how there was at one point "a look" (1119/497) that seemed to confirm their mutual attraction. This was the first time that they addressed their attraction mutually and explicitly through a phone conversation afterwards.

The day after the end of GCSE exams in the summer of year eleven, Henry and Tara went to a house party. The PIN of the party is recounted in some detail (1090/407). At one point in the party public attention was drawn to the presenting matter of Henry and Tara's 'unofficial' status, presumably it was common knowledge as well as the fact that they were delaying their relationships due to exams. Someone asked words to the effect of "are you going out now then?"; a flippant affirmative answer by Henry then elicited wild cheering and an exuberant group hug (1090/424). This highlights how a key feature of the changes in subjectivity during this time is how Henry feels about the pressure he is under. Encapsulated in this statement that "I loved it" (ibid.) at the moment that they finally got together, it is clear that Henry enjoys the sense of pressure that comes throughout year eleven. It is testament to his desirability and actually to some extent bestows the benefits of the status of being in a

relationship already. The stabilizing function of this underlying dynamic with Tara means that the confusion that characterized the previous phase of subjectivity is not visible here.

3.5.1.4 Building with Tara

In June, a few weeks preceding the interview, Henry went on an outing to the cinema with Tara and her family. Because they were not going to be back until late, they decided the most practical thing was to stay over at Tara's. Henry implies the time from hearing this plan to the time itself as a time of anxious anticipation in the time leading up to staying over. His then-imaginings and considerations of the idea of 'staying over at my girlfriend's house' as imminently sexual and thus, in tension with his own internalized beliefs about pre-marital sex, this space as one of sexual temptation.

This is referred to very quickly in SS1 and is one of the chief things that feels tellable in his mind – recognizable as a time of weakness that he overcame. He then describes this 15-minute conversation that took place in the anxious, potentially-sexual environment of the unsupervised bedroom:

Erm, so... she was saying do you want to take this further, and I said no immediately. But then she.. started to convince me more. Then I tried to convince her, why, not. And then she suddenly realized that I had a valid point (J yeah). And now she's a lot more... erm, supportive. Because she wasn't Christian to start with. But there was always that hint that she could change in that. That was like a mini project (J right, yeah). (1094/535)

This appears to be a reversal of the expected narrative where the passive girl needs to be persuaded by the active, initiatory man. Not a lot of detail is given of the conversation besides the broad gist and Henry refuses to elaborate any more detail or possible emotionalities of this moment when pushed. The narrative given is one of sudden realization

on her part, a moment which seems in Henry's mind to be the turning point leading to the current situation of feeling more supported in his values and sexual boundaries. In this way, Henry presents himself as the successful defender of his integrity with the result of a change in her orientation from not supportive/understanding to supportive of his views. This time is explicitly tellable because it feels successful, in contrast to the other described time of unsupervised intimacy with Cora which is unspeakable because it felt/feels like a failure. In the telling of how things unfolded in her bedroom, he also attends to the bodily arrangement of the space – first they were in the same bed, then they changed to sleeping head to foot. Further, Henry's repeated emphasis that he was "really tired" (1094/544) also helps balance and mitigated against a perception of himself as desirous in this situation. Since this incident, Henry has been inviting Tara more frequently to church services and feels that, although she is not a Christian, she is "going that way" (1076/4).

3.5.2 Integrated account

3.5.2.1 Desiring clarity

The desire for clarity rather than confusion is of course not unique to Henry but a common impulse to move away from incoherence towards coherence and familiarity. For Henry this desire for clarity is articulated particularly clearly in his learning account and connects with patterns of his wider story. As wider research on queer lives has shown, Henry's initial sense of non-conforming to heterosexual norms (as he puts it, "questioning whether I am straight or not" (1100/758)) appears as an identity incongruity (Liboro, 2014, p. 1210) (it may be that Henry's overall social confidence and particular ease with girls, distinct from the prevailing tendencies of his pubescent male teens was part of this questioning process), encapsulated in particular narratives like the sleepover/first kiss. Henry's dealing with this period is through efforts to act in such a way as to show to himself that he was not gay, this is intensified into the 'rebound' with Cora and immediate asking out of Tara.

This can also be seen as Henry engages with the idea of sexual boundaries as part of the ethics of pre-marital abstinence. Henry describes a particularly helpful seminar at the ReCharge festival which "unblurred the lines" (1136/139) in contrast to the lack of clarity from his church:

J: So you said helpful but not enough, what do you mean by that.

H: So like I could do with a bit more... information in detail.

J: OK. So what would that look like to you, how could it be better, what kind of detail, extra stuff.

H: Like, putting it straight. Like saying 'don't do this, you can do this, or you can't do this'. Or here in the Bible it says this, but that doesn't really apply now. Cos

there are some things in the Bible that don't really fit in with current culture.

like... and some things that I completely don't agree with. Erm... but yeah.

(1137/169)

One pointed issue in the practical Christian sexual ethics of abstinence is what 'counts' as sex, and thus what exactly counts as a sin. Communicating exactly where the 'line' is a source of much consternation for Christian youth workers, who are forced to say something about the lines while also emphasizing 'doing as much as you can without sinning' is not the right attitude, though neither is an overt prurience. Henry is particularly concerned for clarity and has little tolerance with states of uncertainty that more liberal Christian ethics might espouse, while also desiring more of a culturally relevant hermeneutic regarding which parts of the Bible might be outdated. The youth camp seminars where Henry engages most directly with this ethical discourse are prominent in the case and function as turning points in the narrative, both the seminar that 'unblurred the lines' and an earlier one that convicted Henry regarding his flirty behaviour in leading girls on inappropriately.

3.5.2.2 Not wanting/not knowing

As noted above, in the telling of the narrative Henry actively works to distance himself from his own sexual desires. This is evident in the way he presents his relationship with Rachel (not sexual in any way), his time of questioning (interest in gay culture rather than desire for men), his 'rebound' with Cora (which is hard to talk about) and his time of temptation with Tara (overcome through applying willpower and rationality). This accords well with his SS1 coda synthesis of not being a 'big dater'. The context of the interview plays a part in this – the visibility of desire to me, a perceived authority figure, is uncomfortable and the minimization of desire is a pattern across all participants. However besides the telling, Henry's 'lived life' demonstrates a persistent disinterest in, or else a mastery of, sexual

desires (e.g. Henry's disciplined holding off of relationship with Tara for the sensible, rational reason of prioritizing his academic achievements). Henry's case supports Seidler's (2003, p. 196) notion of Christian masculinity as sexually ascetic and subordinating bodily desires to a controlling rationality. It also enriches and extends this idea in showing how the ascetic minimization of desires develops through complex and shifting life contexts.

With regards to Henry's learning, the distinctiveness of his apparent non-curiosity aligns with this non-sexuality, linking together 'not desiring' with 'not wanting to know'. When asked if he can think of a particular thing he learnt from his peers, he replies,

I can't think of a particular thing... apart from the first experience is quite painful apparently. And that's about it. So I don't know very much to be honest. But yeah it is mostly from a few people talking about that they've done and how it's been.
(1133/31)

Henry describes how his pattern of asking his friends questions followed the pattern of "tell me but don't be disgusting about it" (1140/259). Notably absent are the sharing of rumours and sexual images prevalent in other accounts. Here there is a tension between desire and disgust – the desire to be privy to his peers developing sexuality while mitigating against a possible threatening feeling of 'knowing too much'. This connects the case structure of non-sexuality with the emphasis on not knowing very much/not desiring to know. The demonstrable ideal of non-sexuality is reinforced by the context of the telling with the present ideals of a non-desiring Christian sexuality supported by an ethic of pre-marital abstinence, however Henry clearly draws a line between his own reflection on his desires and his religious beliefs ("So I've justified why I don't want to have sex with, religion, but also it's sort of down to me just not, wanting it really." (1125/656)).

Finally, in SS4 Henry immediately frames his accessing of pornography as a “struggle”, and later specifically as a problem of addiction (1132/20). He describes his learning from porn as visual, “where things are in the body”. Henry goes into some detail as to the nature of this addiction “I was always feeling this... need. And not, it not being met” (1133/53), and experiences some confusion over this (“I don’t know whether it’s desire to have sex or just to see this particular thing” (1134/65)). As a source of learning, pornography is problematic for Henry because of its provocation of a desire that could not be met and confuses the desire for visual consumption with a desire for sex with a partner. Resorting to pornography for visual knowledge is risky because it is both very informative yet potentially addictive. Henry’s account begs the question about the desire for the underlying knowledge that pornography offers and gives and shows further how pornography threatens the ‘non-desiring’ self-image.

3.5.2.3 Desiring authenticity

The desire for authenticity, displayed in the sources of learning formative on Henry, is a prevalent feature in Henry’s learning account. There is a close association of positional authority with inauthenticity – an awareness that adult figures representing institutions are obliged to ‘follow the script’ of the church or the school. For Henry, authenticity means to speak ‘against the script’, in this case, what he feels might be the expected message of that institutional representative. In this vein he recommends that school education involve “more face to face talking and honest-ness” (1140/235), along with “going along after class to talk about it” (1140/247). These imaginations and desires indicate the value of learning about sexuality specifically in a school context in contrast (e.g.) to Ethan for whom the teachers/schooling were irredeemable as sources of knowledge.

In the context of learning from his peers, Henry talks specifically about the “expression on their face” (1140/256) when they were telling him stories about their sexual activity. These

moments of telling go beyond the information conveyed. Henry directly and explicitly recalls how he was looking for specific cues as to how the person *really* felt about what they had done:

H: And peers, peers was good because it was more personal. So I could see like the expression on their face when they were talking about it. They weren't talking about it as in like 'yeah I did this person'. It was more... this is how it... works. Er. Cos i was asking out of complete... like can you tell me, stuff that happens and how it works? (J yeah), in detail, but don't be disgusting about it.

J: That's the kind of thing you are asking them. What do you mean by the expression of their face?

H: It makes it more real, I think, Cos you can tell if they're genuinely happy about it or not. So like whether they regret it, whether they enjoyed it. (ibid.)

Here Henry addresses the idea that people may be having sex but not enjoying it. Because of this it is important for him to be able to see the face of the teller. This is set up against the inauthentic, parodied masculinist “yeah I did this person”. This form of tacit knowledge is not often acknowledged within accounts of learning and draws attention to how various sexual narratives can have communicate more than what is formally intended.

When asked about how his learning from his youth group could have been better, Henry responds:

I think more talking to youth leaders directly, and seeing their opinion. And talking honestly, instead of them reading from a script. That, I've not had that experience of them reading from a script, but I can imagine that's almost what it would be like, if I were to ask. (1138/189)

Notably, it is not the actual experience of scriptedness but the anticipation of scriptedness which keeps the discussion from being valued. Henry is seeking authentic examples of existential struggles with Christian sexual ethics against the challenges of the wider sexual culture. For Henry there is a distinct split between the clear propositions of sexual boundaries and the formative contact with authentic speech. The fact that ‘scriptedness’ is an anticipation that precludes his own agency in seeking support demonstrates pre-existent set of expectations about adult/child formative relationships in general, that adults in positions of leadership have to say the ‘right thing’ rather than be honest. Those in these positions of leadership may feel that if they share their own inadequacy in this area that they will be acting poorly pastorally, perhaps ‘giving licence’ to sin. At the same time, adults feel they must embody the moral standards that they talk about, ‘practicing what they preach’, or their authority is undermined/they act hypocritically. In this way Henry’s account draws attention to the problematic nature of sexuality education within hierarchical systems, and similarities can be seen in the case of both the school and the youth group.

This theme thus relates closely to ‘desiring clarity’. The underlying assumption is that if desires can be authentically expressed, and the veil of performance/scriptedness penetrated, then clarity about his own confusion can be reached. To see others speaking authentically in this way is imagined to be reparative of the confused aspects of his own sexual subjectivity. This builds on Olson, Vincett et al.’s (2013) research on authenticity noted as key in chapter 1. As well as negotiating his own adequacy as an authentic Christian, Henry is also desirous of authentic sources of Christian formation. Authenticity is addressed further in section 3.7.3.3 of the cross-case synthesis below.

3.6 Tim

Introduction

Tim was recruited from Hillview, the same Catholic retreat centre that Mark was recruited from. Tim describes himself as working/middle class (“between the two”) and White British. His Mum works in the home and his Dad has been unemployed for three years. He went to a small public Catholic secondary school in a rural part of the Midlands.

Much like Mark, Tim was exceptionally polite and professional in his greeting me at Hillview. The interview took place in the dining room, the same location as with Mark. Tim began the interview with a limited idea of what he could offer and I felt he was there to tell me ‘what I wanted’ or what was useful to me. Frequently Tim gave response to my narrative questions non-narratively, as if he was trying to sense ‘the question behind my question’ – that really I wanted to know what he (non-narratively) thought or felt about issues rather than wanting to hear his story. This changed over the course of the interview and SS2 contained plenty of rich subjectivity. At the same time, Tim tended towards long digressions into argumentation and this was particularly prominent towards the end of the interview, making it difficult to sustain the momentum of PINs.

3.6.1 Tim's HCE

Fig. 10 Overview of Tim

Biographical data analysis	Successive states of subjectivity	Teller flow analysis
<p>Early Girlfriends Y7 Asks out girl in DT Multiple short relationships</p> <p>Sexuality amongst school friends Y8 Feb Friends start to watch and talk about sex Oct Textiles class, pictures Feb Confirmed in Catholic church May Xbox playing, links to shock porn sites Y12 Jul In Lourdes, meets someone who he texts</p> <p>College Y13 Sep hearing story of friend having sex Sep friends to laser tag and they are high/drunk Nov Spit balls in McDonalds Jul At Lourdes trying to get other girls snapchats</p> <p>Hillview Sep: Begins attending Hillview Oct Theology of the body workshop Jan Sleepover with Catholic friends Jun: Finds out about female friend's sex details Jun: At pub, conversation with uni friend Jun: Conversation with his friends in the park</p>	<p>Early relationships excitement and unreality</p> <p>Increasing sense of difference at school Resistance to digital sexuality/nostalgia 'What if your mum saw'? Rejection by girl at Lourdes</p> <p>Culture shocks at college Sex with neighbour story Spitballs/drugs Explaining his religion Music blog/nostalgia</p> <p>Pressures at Hillview Sleepovers, complicating ethics Theology of the body Reactions to hearing about uni friends Vocations pressure Park conversation/asexual</p>	<p>SS1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Don't really have a story because no girlfriend 2) Not really thought about it 3) Feeling different in school, feeling pressured 4) Pressure on priesthood 5) issues with being Catholic <p>SS2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Evaluating early relationships 7) Feeling outside sexual culture 8) Catholic friends and sexuality 9) Nostalgia 10) College culture, friendship development 11) Pressure on vocations at Hillview 12) Exploring morals vs rules 13) Explaining religion to friends

3.6.1.1 Early relationships excitement and unreality

In year seven, Tim asked out a girl after a DT class at school and she said yes. Tim describes then-feelings of excitement and a sense of (humorously) “oh wow, I have a girlfriend” (571/15). This particular first-time experience is memorable – Tim shows some surprise at how vivid his memory of it is and the feelings of intense nervousness and subsequent excitement, recalling the movement of opening the door, walking out of the lesson to the next one, and saying “can I ask you something...” (571/39). Despite this, in the telling Tim’s narrations are interspersed with frequent, repeated evaluations of the humorous meaninglessness of this and subsequent relationships (“the only model of what actual relationships are you’ve got is like High School Musical” (591/18)).

Following this relationship, Tim had what he calls in SS1 “strings of girlfriends” (566/16) which continued until Christmas of year eight. Tim does not recall (or want to recall) any of these minor relationships as being significant and no names or narratives are given. Thus, Tim participates for this phase in the early adolescent practices of frequent, short-term and rather meaningless relationships. This early sense of success, supported by various features of the subsequent narrative of Tim’s school life, suggests that Tim enjoyed a rather secure place in the social hierarchy at school. Compared to some of the other cases, Tim’s social group throughout school is stable and there are no episodes of exclusion, vulnerability or humiliation that might be anticipated after reading some of the other accounts.

After these early relationships, Tim does not seek any more relationships until much later in his life (the summer of year eleven). No distinct reason is given in the telling but it is likely from the way that Tim discusses his subsequent life that his leaving behind his dating practices on progression to year eight is part of the growth of a sense of difference from the emergent, intensifying heterosexual culture of school life, addressed below.

3.6.1.2 Increasing sense of difference at school

In year eight, Tim's friends began to talk about sex and show each other explicit pictures. Tim's projected narrative sense of disidentification from the prevailing sexual culture is elaborated through a series of connected PINs and GINs illustrating occasions of sexuality emerging in the context of male friendship. The stories are told in fragments and usually centralize Tim's own recalled inner thoughts. At one point, in a textiles class (Tim says it was the textiles class that these practices frequently took place), Tim saw a picture of a naked girl as his friend's phone background (which was a common practice) and reports that he thought "what if your mum saw that, I remember thinking how risky it was (laughing)." (573/98). The humorous way that he reports this felt like a moment of seeking identification, the expectation that I too would feel that it was both morally suspect, but also pragmatically foolish, to have a sexual image as a phone background. The sexual aspects of his peer relationships developed further over time, and Tim recounts GINs from later that year when his friends would send him links to shock porn sites while they were playing Xbox, trying to trick him into going on one (577/283).

In the summer of year eleven after his GCSEs, Tim went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes with some of his Catholic friends. He met a girl who he continued to text after the event. Eventually he asked her out, but she refused. Tim recounts how this led him to consider marriage, and that this was the age that both his parents and his grandparents married and thus that from this point on, anyone he met could potentially be his future wife. In light of this, Tim has adopted certain strategies to emotionally distance himself from people so as not to become too involved prematurely, considering relationships not clearly oriented towards marriage as a "waste of time" (592/62). Reaching this stage is a sign of his now being "mature" (591/28).

Through Tim's school life from year eight to year eleven there is a clear progression in his school environment of more frequent and visible romantic and sexual practices accompanying a growing sense of subjective difference from this culture. Although it may not have been the case through the living of this phase, Tim ascribes this difference in the telling primarily to the feeling that sexuality is a private thing and that there is something morally problematic, not necessarily in the sexual actions of others, but in their relentless publicity. This movement happens alongside the development of Tim's religious identity through friendships with other Catholics and participation in various religious activities (confirmation classes, retreats at Hillview). Within the case there is no particular reason to draw a clear association between the two movements within this phase, however, the moral problems that drive the structure of the telling (addressed below) do provide some evidence that the disjunctions of religion and sexuality play at least some role during the changes of this phase.

3.6.1.3 Culture shocks at college

After his GCSEs, Tim began attending college on a course to do science, but after a few months dropped out, intending to re-start college on a different course the following year. During this year, Tim started a music blog with his friend. While curating this, he wrote a post about Frank Sinatra, one of his favourite artists. Tim discusses how Frank Sinatra, and specifically the song he wrote about on the blog, 'Strangers in the Night' is important to him in association with the story of how his parents and grandparents met (580/435). Tim tells the story and its humorous elements of his granddad flirting with his grandma at the town dance. The meaning of this story may have changed over time (likely), but one relevant meaning of the story for Tim now is that it represents something starkly against the digital sexual public he is forced to negotiate and has already mentioned (the idea of needing to "slide into DMs")

(567/69) (private messages on social media) and the “rules” of digital courtship being confusing (ibid.)).

Throughout college there were a series of interactions with his college friends concerning Tim’s digital practices. When asked about more specific times of confusion over digital messaging, this leads Tim to free-associate to his time at college, recounting GINs of his friends trying to convince him to respond to messages and ‘follows’ from girls on Instagram (580/455). His time at college is a significant transition and represents a somewhat intensified version of these sexual cultures and digital situations. Further, in these narratives Tim is at pains to show himself as not knowing the rules and humorously enjoys the presentation of himself as rather out of touch with the sexualised, mediatised practices of his peers.

In the first week of his second college, Tim had a conversation on the train with one of his male peers in which he described a sexual relationship with his next door neighbour, how he would go around there regularly and have sex with her while her parents were out, but that it had to stop when she got a boyfriend. In September he arranged to meet his friends at a Laser Tag place after college, but they turned up “high and drunk” (583/551), and Tim describes how he experienced great consternation at this. These narratives set Tim apart from his college friends in terms of their publicly libertarian attitudes to drugs and sex. However, he describes how “At the beginning of the year there was definitely friction about it. But by the end of the year we were definitely at peace with each other” (582/518). There is no specific situated subjectivity that encapsulates this other than a generalised sense of increasing understanding and bonding between Tim and this group of boys he felt so different from.

3.6.1.4 Pressures at Hillview

In October of his year at Hillview, while at a Catholic youth festival Tim attended a theology of the body workshop (575/226), an event which he recounts in some detail and regards as

having a significant impact on his thinking about sexuality and relationships. Catholic theology of the body is an influential set of theological ideas inaugurated in a series of lectures by Pope John Paul II between 1979 and 1984 and encapsulated in the papal encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. Theology of the body has been applied to a number of pastoral contexts including marriage and contraception. It seems the workshop that Tim attended focused on the theological meaning of marriage and sexual intercourse therein. In the workshop the bonding function of the male and female orgasm is aligned with the intention of sexuality as being within a committed relationship (doubtless marriage for the workshop leaders, but for Tim “a proper relationship... one you know is going to last... not necessarily marriage” (576/234)). This idea around the sacredness of sexuality is particularly valuable for Tim in supporting his sense of difference to the publicity and ‘cheapening’ of sexuality he feels distant from.

In June, a few weeks before the interview date, Tim met up with some of his Catholic friends from school returning from their first year at University. While at a pub, he had a series of conversations and discoveries about his Catholic friends’ activities in their first year of uni. He describes one of his friends “boasting about drugs, doing balloons [laughing gas], sleeping around” (578/341). A few days after this meeting he found out that a girl who he had been on pilgrimage to Lourdes with had set up an Instagram account called ‘your favourite slut’ detailing her sex life, performing out loud his previously internal confused reaction; “What? Is this the same person... just a bit weird” (578/335). Tim’s discussion here echoes the sense of anomie and confusion experienced by the other young men on discovering their friends (unexpected) sex lives. These accounts centralize Tim’s ‘then’ inner commentary and ‘now’ reflections on the conversations and do not go into his own actual responses or involvement in the discussions. The moral breakdowns elicited by Tim’s coming to terms with his Catholic friends’ new lifestyles is one the most important aspects of the case and

drives much of the argumentative material in SS3. The change in their lifestyles, along with their continued clear identification with Catholicism, leads Tim to serious questions. He describes this in SS3: “have I got it wrong... that's what puzzles me, maybe I should be, maybe I should be sort of sex obsessed, not sex obsessed but a sexually oriented person” (598/257).

A few weeks after this, Tim met with some of his male peers from Hillview in a park on their day off and they had a conversation about sexuality. Tim’s condensation of the conversation is worth quoting in full:

Yeah I think what led to it, someone was talking about, I think, jokingly, was talking about oh... (very low voice) I think someone was saying that they weren't going to see their girlfriend for a while or something like that, then talking about... having sex after. And I was like, (laughing) I don't need to know about that sort of thing, and then going into explicit detail about something. And then... (in mild disbelief) I remember one thing, was like, one of my mates was like, 'oh, erm... you say everything's disgusting', and I was like (annoyed) 'no I don't'. I only say things that I think are, genuinely, like sex isn't disgusting, its only when people are saying really weird stuff that I find it disgusting, then he was like yes so what if I said that, someone, 'ate ass' or something like that. And I was like 'that is disgusting'! (laughing) It's like I don't, I do think that's, like, no, that's not my thing, I was like, and then everyone else was laughing like 'yeah that is pretty grim' (laughing), it was a bit of a grim example of him to give. And then that sort of ate to the thing of like, it sort of led to the example of (low voice), it was something like 'you must be asexual' if you don't have like a drive for it, then you must be asexual and it was like, no I'm not asexual, sort of thing. (573/113)

The conversation in the park held a number of tensions for Tim and works in the telling to exhibit these aspects of his sexual subjectivity that he finds problematic – his resistance to the public exposure of sexuality being perceived as ‘disgusting’ and his comparative lack of obvious sexual desire as evidence of an exotic asexuality. The account is initially introduced in SS2 as a free association from an early narrative of sexual imagery in school (describing this emergent culture as carrying the message of “you must be asexual if you’re not obsessed with sex” (573/91)). The association of the general feeling of difference early on and continuing through his school life is present as a predecessor to this essentializing of this difference. The accusation of asexuality is unwanted, but also gives Tim something to encapsulate and solidify the cultural othering he has felt. Talking about being labelled asexual helps him to see a real product of his difference as well as being yet another essentialization (like needing to decide a vocation) to be resisted.

3.6.1.5 The day

Because Tim’s interview featured such a significant amount of non-narrative argumentation it is necessary to conclude his case history with an account of this argumentation.

At the end of SS2 and more extensively in SS3, Tim struggles with the reflexive task of working out why he thinks what he thinks. This is instigated by the increasing sense of breakdown he feels as he encounters Catholic peers living lives that he feels he could not. In particular, Tim struggles over whether his lack of desire for promiscuous sexuality is divinely rooted or something incidental to his unique personality:

It goes back to what I was saying on Friday, how can it fit for some people but not for others? It kind of comes back to the... it's, it, I suppose it comes back to the individualism thing, a thing I've been thinking about recently is like, is it the way that God made me, or is it something that I've chosen personally? And for

me, trying to understand the difference between them and just the, erm, because how can it work for some people and not for other people, how can it be confused I... I don't really know how to describe it in all honesty. (600/340)

Tim develops a rudimentary critique of individualism while moderating and resisting the potentially undesirable uses of such a critique. For Tim individualism comes from what he calls the “revolution of expression” (599/282) coterminous with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Excessive individualism leads excessive personal expression: “everyone's trying to express themselves to the most of their abilities, so everything that was private, people are now trying to break out.” What Tim is articulating here aligns closely with Robert Bellah’s influential notion of expressive individualism (1985), a theory of cultural change in America through the 19th and 20th Century. He finds this problematic because

I feel like everyone's trying to express themselves so much that everyone's losing their personality, if that makes sense. Maybe not but. Personableness. Yeah. And the actual true selves. So I feel like it's actually, trying to stay, trying to be... I think what makes it head is being yourself and the confusion between what society is trying to give to you, and what the true... morals of your heart are, if that makes sense. (599/281)

This reflexive struggle occurring in the interview comes at a point in Tim’s life where his sexual subjectivity is being called into question in a particular way, conditioned by the unique space of the retreat centre and the unique time of his friends’ changing sexualities. Research has noted the increasing differentiation and fragmentation of previously static religious/Christian denominational traditions (Woodhead, 2016). Often, disagreements on sexuality and gender are the lines along which these fractures occur. Tim’s case deepens this narrative by demonstrating the subjectively fracturing nature of inter-religious moral

differentiation. As religious sexual expressions become less unified and easy to assume, being Catholic (and by implication evangelical) by no means provides one with a clear sex-ethical position. The way this is experienced by Tim, as someone who feels himself in tension with the concessions to expressive individualism, is as a sense of being behind the curve. The adoption of a sense of nostalgia for the sexual past, the resistance of digital and mediatization and the problematization are some the ways Tim responds to this in the context of the telling.

3.6.2 Integrated account

3.6.2.1 Assuaging difference

Tim's description of his learning from his church emphasizes the total absence of any meaningful input. He states:

Church up until the recent things I've spoken to you about, the theology of the body... I *never* felt like there was *ever* any explanation whatsoever for... the beliefs on sex and things like that. (607/14)

This is explained soon after by Tim's not having attended any regular Catholic youth groups.

Thus within the case as a whole, the theology of the body workshop works to provide a framework for Tim's understanding/positioning/reinforcing of his own ethical sexual subjectivity. At the same time, it is felt to be too late, regretful that it was not given earlier and imagined as ideal if given earlier (see below, Tim imagines the theology of the body message of "emotional superglue" (613/216) within the context of a sex education lesson, as reasons why one shouldn't sleep around).

Tim gives an extensive recommendation concerning his school-based sex education that is worth quoting in full. He says that the message he felt he was received was:

It's inevitable that you're going to do drugs, it's inevitable that you're going to have sex, so we might as well tell you what to do. It's like when you sleep around... wear a condom. Rather than 'be careful when you're sleeping around' or 'these are the reasons why you shouldn't sleep around'. This is the moral and the... even like the theology of the body the emotional superglue and things like that, you're told about, 'put a condom on when you're sleeping around', 'when you're doing drugs, these are the ones that you should be careful for'. Not here are the risks of doing drugs, just here are the ones where there are less risk, well it was

explained, the risk of drugs and things like that. It very much feels like, as a society, we're saying to young people, you're gonna do it, so... try and avoid these things. like, it's ok to be... I don't drink alcohol or do drugs or smoke or anything. And I just think it's given to people like you're gonna do it. (613/212)

The discourse of inevitability is by Tim as problematically reinforcing a culture from which he felt conspicuously excluded. Against this, Tim imagines sexuality education, both for himself and for those that might feel similar, as opening up the possibility for feeling comfortably abstinent within the school. The possibility of comfortable abstinence contrasts strongly with the uncomfortable abstinence that structures the case more widely.

Tim goes on in the same response to the same question to connect the problematic approach taken in sex and drugs education to the cultural critique of expressive individualism developed in earlier sub-sessions.

I think it comes back down to that expression thing, this constant need to express ourselves in different ways, in society, and that comes into, you're going to do these things to try and express yourself. I suppose that's what it comes down to. And it's like, yeah. The assumption that you're going to do these things why should we tell you any different? (613/223)

Tim's developed ideas of a sex-obsessed culture of expressive individualism function within the case to help him understand his sense of difference. An assumption that sexual experimentation would be an essential part of this 'self-expression', assumed throughout sexuality education discourse (e.g. by Whitehead 2005, p. 215), is carried through in the discourse of inevitability. The way Tim imagines sexuality education thus functions within the case as reparative of a past devoid of appropriate formation around sexuality, most obviously within his religious development. The alternative narrative tacit within this

imagination is one where his own individual sexuality is not called into question so consistently, first within the space of the school, and now at Hillview.

3.6.2.2 Problems of privacy

One significant feature of the case is a pattern of distancing from digital forms of sexuality and dating. Tim enjoys presenting himself as humorously unaware of the myriad unwritten rules of sex and dating negotiations online and through social media, while also indicating his humorous/ironic participation (trying to get girls snapchats at Lourdes). This is reflective of the ‘love/hate’ relationship described by Donna Freitas in her research with American students on social media (2017). In SS4, Tim addresses directly his felt sense that a lot of the influence the wider sexual culture is exerted through the internet.

So news articles, I find a lot of the news articles that appear on feeds, and even on like BBC news and things like that are so like sexually oriented and definitely like... yeah that's what I meant by internet i feel like it's constantly like, I think that's like forced society, society is that a word? So I was saying it before, like society before it's constantly pushed out there, everything's sexualised in a sense, and I feel like that's sort of..., constant on social media and stuff like that.

Snapchat you get apps for dating apps. Dating apps... although that's not a sexual education its lie... things like Tinder they're sexually driven. Sexually or erm... orientated (609/88)

Tim is giving a critique of the internet as a sexualised space as another example of his discomfort with the publicity of sexuality in his life. The explicit use of the scholarly term ‘sexualisation’ is notable and plays a similar role to that of ‘expression’. In this case sexualisation is used narrowly to encapsulate the problematics of sexual publicity.

Against sexualisation/sexual publicity, nostalgic visions of the past breaking in to the future allow Tim to imagine a less confusing pathway through courtship vs the digital, new sexual publics. Tim's case shows a youthful nostalgia deployed as part of a mutating sense of (non)sexual difference that resists these assumptions. The hopeful vision of the past courtship of his ancestors buttresses his sense of exclusion.

Although Tim's imaginations of sex education also bring this problematic publicity into focus, this critique becomes ambiguous at points during SS4. Tim mentions how his school were challenged by pupils demanding sex education

Yeah, because we went to a Catholic school there had been no training like that, training (humorously), no, education like that before. And so they said it's really important for us as young people to learn these sort of thing, we want the standard sort of quality education. Erm. Sexual relationships. So they got the nurse in to do that the following that. So now whether that's evolved even more... (608/68)

For Tim the ideals of privacy are called into question by the acknowledged need for his Catholic school provide sexuality education.

There is a constant tension between government curriculum, what are we required to teach and what can we avoid. And I feel like that sort of balance... I mean there is a balance, I don't think xxx you're going to do it, things like that, I think the Catholic ethos of the school kind of does take into consideration a bit more those who might be a bit more apprehensive and maybe a bit more... reluctant to be involved in that sort of society. It does take into account more, the true benefit of the society. But on the flipside of that, the disadvantage is a lack of education in it. So I feel like a balance in it would be, having that acceptance and that...

understanding of those who aren't going to be (inaudible) trying to get as many people in bed with them as possible. (613/236)

Here, Tim engages the perspective of his Catholic school (and the higher diocesan authorities) and the balancing act he imagines they face with regard to providing sex education. For Tim, making concessions for sexuality education provision seems to him, to be a concession that leans in the direction of the expressivist sexual culture. At the same time, he doesn't want "a lack of education in it" (ibid.), recognizing the insufficiency of what he received from school. Considering Tim's sex education was so limited, it should be noted that what he is talking about here is a complex combination of recalled feeling and imagined feeling. The possible messages of inevitability he may have perceived during his school sexuality education are thus amplified by the imagination of what such lessons might be like if they followed the discourse of inevitability. Overall, Tim's case provides insight into the lived tensions of publicity and privacy through his reflexive negotiation over sex education in relation to his differential position within a general sexual culture. In this way, the problems of privacy faced in his own life are imagined by Tim to be the same problems faced by the leadership of Catholic schools, maintaining the religious ethos of the school while meeting the needs and demands of its students. These challenges will be addressed further in chapter 4.

3.7 Cross Case Synthesis

Fig. 11 Full thematic table

Ethan	Mark	Rob	Jack	Henry	Tim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surviving school by learning to speak about sexuality • Authentic vs inauthentic sources of influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding guilt, affirming choice • Desiring a mediating figure • Ambiguity of digital sexuality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexuality from lightness to heaviness • Mature communication • Desire for regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequences of failed sexual tact redeemed • Lost sexual innocence • Desire for knowledgeable sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desiring clarity • Not wanting/not knowing • Desiring authenticity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuaging difference • Problems of privacy

The pain and power of sexual knowledge	Being masculine and being abstinent at school	The absence and presence of meaningful pedagogical relationships with adults	Desiring regulation and desiring freedom
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3.7.1 The pain and power of sexual knowledge

3.7.1.1 Peer initiation and emergence of sexuality as a social standard

All the cases refer at some point to the sexual initiation of close male peers. As their friends became sexually active, the young men experienced a sense of vertigo or generalized ‘weirdness’ as the changes unfolded. In Jack and Ethan’s cases, the weirdness is attributed to their knowing of a particular friend since childhood. The sexual initiation of their close peers functioned as a clear marker of their growing up, inducing anxiety over the changing form of social relations and the realization that sexuality was now a social matter needing careful navigation. Sexuality in this way is an intrusion into hitherto simple network of social relations. This sense of unwelcome complexification is combined with the fear that they may not meet the standards of an emerging hegemonic masculine heteronormativity. Sexuality becomes yet another standard to meet amidst the multiple emergence of performance standards during the transition from primary to secondary education. Further, religious beliefs and commitments, such as in the cases of Jack and Tim, exacerbate the sense in which a non-sexual state of relational simplicity appears to fracture during the transition through puberty. The complexity of emergent desires is all the more unsettling because of the need to not only now consider sexual dimensions of school life but to consider what this means for them as a Christian.

The differences between Jack and Ethan’s cases are notable because they ostensibly occupied opposite ends of the masculine social hierarchy. After an initial period experiencing the aforementioned anxiety over the emergence of sexuality amongst his peers, and conditioned by a lack of an image of himself as sexually valid, Ethan enjoyed the ability to meet the putative standard and feels this as empowering. This then fades later in the case, alongside his increasingly clear desire to emphasize his difference from the sexual culture in the interview

context. This fading, along with a resurgence of pronounced religious ethical subjectivity, leads him to feel his prominence and sexual reputation as problematic in terms of his new desires for a sexually boundaried relationship. In contrast to this, for Jack, the emergence of sexuality is accompanied by an immediate sense of irrelevancy, which intensifies rather than fades as Jack undergoes painful social rejection. Following this, becoming knowledgeable works reparatively within a case history that demonstrates the consequences of a lack of sexual tact. Despite these differences, a notable feature of both Jack and Ethan's cases is the narrative movement between knowing about sexuality as burdensome and knowing about sexuality as empowering. In both cases, religious commitments lead to a sense of disidentification with school sexual cultures, though it happens at different points in the lived life.

3.7.1.2 Resisting public knowledge

In Henry and Tim's cases, sexual knowledge is more actively resisted. Henry's perception of himself as relatively sexually unknowledgeable, along with an anticipated disgust at the explicit details of sexuality, is consistent with his presentation of a minimized sexual desire. Sexual knowledge is resisted because of the possible dangers of incited desire destabilizing a clear and focused rational 'steadiness' around romance and sex – this is also captured in Henry's presentation of the possibilities and dangers of pornography. Similarly, for Tim the experience and anticipation of knowing about the sexuality of others is explicitly resisted as part of a general social critique of sexual publicity exacerbated by the recent discovery of his Catholic friend's sexual activity at university. Tim's desire for sexuality to remain private allows him to minimize the frequent awareness of his own problematic sexual difference. Both Henry and Tim's explicit resistance to public displays of sexual knowledge and knowledgeableness are guided by religious ethical standards about the sacredness or

specialness of sexuality while at the same time being structured by gendered norms of masculine ascetic sexual self-control.

3.7.1.3 Porn and cybersex

All the young men besides Tim acknowledge the Internet as a significant source of learning, and most of them talk directly about their experiences with pornography. For Mark and Henry pornography is felt as ambiguously both informative and potentially addictive. It is also felt to be a catch-22 - they are left with no other choice given the demand for knowledgeable amongst their male peers. Pornography is valued across cases as a visual knowledge of what 'actually happens', allowing young men to engage in sexual conversations with peers. Familiarity with this visual knowledge works as a back-up within the anxious environment of needing to display sexual knowledgeable. Curiosity may be one of the primary reasons leading to young people's accessing pornography (Horvath, Alys & Massey, 2013), but Mark and Henry's cases show the importance of understanding the wider narrative context of that curiosity.

Similarly, Jack's case highlights the ambiguity of cybersex experiences. The case moves between the experiences as empowering, providing distraction and as a context to experience feeling desired and participating in a system from which he was excluded. At the same time, his actions are considered/presented in the telling as part of a 'loss of sanity' preceding a redemption and return to sanity. This highlights a dearth in scholarly understanding of how young people engage subjectively with cybersex and the context of cybersex as formational, particular how those with religious identities navigate permissive and experimental online sexual contexts. The cases resonate with the psychological notion of moral incongruence developed in pornography and religion literature (see section 1.3.6), but also show how this incongruence is resisted and/or accepted across time. This is done variously, sometimes

through positioning oneself as excluded from the possibility of having a relationship and sometimes through positioning oneself as needing to keep up with the sexual knowledge of one's peers. Religion is involved in both these self-positionings, providing a sense of the impossibility of having a relationship congruent with Christian ethical standards in the former and providing a sense of inescapable moral compromise in the latter. The parts of these recalled experiences that felt good can arise problematically in contexts of telling, particularly to respected figures, while at the same time clarity and catharsis can be gained from speaking these out loud.

3.7.1.4 Dangerous lessons

How the young men felt about their learning is closely related to their sense of sexual knowledge as both empowering and disempowering. Tim's case displays the tension between the need for sexual knowledge and the collusion with a culture of excessive sexual publicity, obsession and sexualization that he feels distanced from. He worries about the potential of sexuality education in reinforcing this and exacerbating the alienation that both he and those he imagines are like him might experience. Jack's concerns are different; Jack describes how the sex education lesson might give young people knowledge they don't need. Evidence cited from Douglas Kirby's (2002) research in America is frequently used to prove that sex education lessons do not increase young people's sexual activity, a frequent anxiety on display in sexuality education discourse. However, Jack exhibits that same supposedly irrational anxiety directed towards those younger than him; Jack's strong commitment to a Christian ethic of abstinence as relevant for both him *and* his peers is testament to this. Jack's views, which might be called conservative in the mouth of an adult, sit alongside demonstrably progressive views about diverse sexualities. Although Jack and Tim are both at the end of their formal schooling, their retrospective accounts both exhibit different worries about the dangers of sexual knowledge and these anxieties need to be understood as involving

both their religious commitments and the individual narrative shaping of their cases as wholes.

3.7.1.5 Guilt and Shame

Mark's anxiety about sex education lessons is inverted from those of Jack and Tim. Mark worries that lessons encouraging abstinence may induce guilt and 'damage' young people. This is again a recognizable sexuality education discourse organized around the pressing need to avoid inducing shame in young people over their sexual decisions and intentions. The avoidance of shame and other negative emotions an important feature of progressive sexuality education identified in chapter 1. Although Mark stands out within this sample, his case demonstrates, along with Jack and Tim's, the way that sexuality education discourses that might only be understood as adult (nostalgia, dangerous knowledge, shame avoidance) are also present in youthful sexual subjectivity.

This is also relevant for Rob and his experience of masturbation and accompanying shame. Rob reflects on the consistent message of moral judgement on masturbation and porn reinforcing his feelings of shame and his own 'twisting' of that message reinforcing his negative self-image. Nevertheless, Rob's case does not feature an eventual moral acceptance of masturbation but rather the progressing of his sexual subjectivity from internally hidden to externally known; for Rob the progression of his ability to tell his story is itself part of his story. Mark's case closes down sexual guilt as a possible source of positive change, while Rob's case opens up sexual guilt as part of a journey towards cathartic sharing without necessarily distancing oneself from apparently restrictive sexual ethics.

3.7.1.6 Conclusions

This theme has highlighted the different ways that sexual knowledge of various kinds – the what, how, and why of sex - is felt as both painful and empowering. I have shown this

through noting themes of 1) the social emergence of sexuality through peer sexual initiation, 2) resistances to public sexual revelations, 3) the danger and necessity of familiarity with pornography, 4) resistances to age-inappropriate sexual knowledge and 5) potentialities of sexual guilt/shame. Through these sub-themes I have drawn attention to the role of religion in these fractured subjective engagements with sexual knowledge and knowledgeableness. It is the ambiguous conditions of postsecularity, in which spaces are opened up for both the profound challenge and the reification of religious sexual standards, that structure this apparent incoherence regarding the meaning of sexual knowledge and knowledgeableness. Sexuality education discourse frequently assumes a simplistic picture of young people as desirous of and ready to absorb sexual knowledge. This often supports arguments supporting earlier intervention over and against the fear of providing ‘too little, too late’. Chapter 4 will pose some serious questions for sexuality education assuming this model of young peoples’ relationship to sexual knowledge.

3.7.2 Being masculine and being abstinent at school

3.7.2.1 Compelled heterosexuality and masculine hierarchies at school

This theme shows how the role of the ethics of abstinence across the cases relates closely to the young men’s experience of social hierarchies at school. All the cases show the emergence of sexuality amongst their male peers as simultaneous with the emergence of compelled heterosexuality. The perceived acquisition of romantic and sexual partners contributes to the structuring of masculine hierarchies in school from the early phases of all the cases. In the early phases of the cases the young men positioned themselves within these hierarchies both in terms of where they felt they fitted and how they feel about that in the telling moment. For example, Mark refers to being “on the list” (348/104), an imagined grouping of those who had gained approval through their relationship status, and his own sense of not being on the

list. Jack uses the language of “the bad boys” (882/32) to create a similar grouping and positions himself and his friends as “not relevant” (ibid.). While the young men adopt differing moral stances to the social hierarchies they recall, all the cases show the demanding nature of these hierarchies.

All the participants apart from Mark construct their narratives from a current position of (at least in the presentation) intended sexual abstinence, some until marriage, some only for the time being. As such, the ethical *subjectivity* of Christian sexual abstinence - *feeling* abstinent as well as actually *being* abstinent - plays an important role in the way the boys negotiated the demands of compelled heterosexuality at school.

3.7.2.2 Pedagogies of abstinence

Although it is not directly addressed, in the case of Rob, Jack and Henry abstinence is deeply assumed by the time of the interview and works as a cultural background rather than something to be engaged with actively and reflexively. For Jack in particular, the authoritative nature of his church’s position on pre-marital abstinence is transmitted clearly through his extensive and committed involvement with his youth group since his early adolescence (even where he deeply questions their approach to LGBTQ issues). Similarly, Rob’s internalization of the ethics of abstinence is evident in his assigning of blame to his own twisted interpretation of youth group talks on sexuality rather than to the moral authority of the message given.

However, abstinence is also engaged with more reflexively. Tim, Henry and Ethan all directly express a lack of certainty as to the future likelihood of their adherence to these standards. As they take differing stances the ethics of abstinence are fractured into religious and secular components – the intrinsic, pragmatic appeal of the sexual regulations that the Christian ethics makes available, and the explicitly theological relating of sexual morality to

the felt sense of relationship with God. For example, in the cases of Henry, Tim and Ethan, the explicitly religious ethics of abstinence are discursively separated from the lack of consistent or significant sexual desires in the interviews. These young men attributed their abstinence or intention of abstinence more to a natural lack of desire for sex compared to what they felt to be a sexually oriented (Tim) culture. This didn't mean the religious interests were irrelevant - for both Ethan and Jack, resurgence of felt religious commitment through mystical moments of communion (Jack) and ethical revelation (Ethan) narratively frame the felt commitment to abstinence.

In this way, the cases provide evidence for the different ways that abstinent subjectivities are formed in and occupied by the young men, with the common pattern that strong ethical resolutions and significant reflexive negotiations co-exist within individuals.

3.7.2.3 Negotiating abstinent masculinity

In the earlier phases of Ethan's case, abstinence from penetrative intercourse allowed him to justify other kinds of sexual activity while in the later phases, his more rigorous intention of abstinence cost him a potential relationship. In this phase Ethan's abstinence arises as problematic within the college environment. In a similar way, Tim's rather visible abstinence creates a sense of problematic difference, first from the digitalizing sexual culture of his school peers, and more recently from his increasingly sexually engaged Catholic peers. Further for Jack, abstinence contributed to his sense of him and his friends' 'irrelevance' while later, re-establishing abstinence in response to the sexual roleplays created the sense of return to stability and sanity. In contrast, Mark finds a religiously motivated abstinence to be a useful buttress for his sense of exclusion from the romantic and sexual culture at school, while at the time of telling he feels it as an unfair externally imposed standard.

Thus abstinence works in very different ways both within and across the cases. Focusing on the cross-case comparison, one notable pattern is the way that being abstinent creates problems for the positioning of the young men within the masculine hierarchy of compelled heterosexuality at school. This is especially prominent in the early case phases, while in the later phases the meaning of abstinence becomes more complexified and diversified as sexual subjectivity mutates. Some young men were able to deal with these problems effectively, while others were significantly impacted – Ethan’s growing sense of the unjustifiability of his sexual practices led to a significant crisis point and subsequent disappointments. Much more significant are the self-harming practices of Rob, for whom the sense of failure in the face of the pressures of both compelled heterosexuality and sexual abstinence led to self-harm.

The changes within cases are particularly notable and show the need to adapt masculine presentation to survive in school. Rob and Tim both encountered this as their peer groups shifted. Rob feels his successful integration with the older college boys carries with it a sense of compromise, Tim has no such feelings. The stories he tells demonstrate Tim’s sense of integration with the group while maintaining his moral distinctiveness, while Rob’s description of his feeling forced to speak and joke in a way that aligned himself with the group suggests a lack of successful maintenance of integrity through the process. This further shows how social shifts through the structured transitions of schooling bring new demands for masculine performance that are intensified by those with abstinent sexual subjectivities.

3.7.2.4 Conclusions

This theme has demonstrated the problematics of being abstinent and being masculine by showing 1) compelled heterosexuality at school, 2) the varieties of formation in, resistance to and acceptance of, abstinence ethics and 3) specifically how this form of sexual subjectivity problematizes young men’s negotiation of masculine norms. Understanding the fractured

sexual subjectivities arising from the simultaneous demands of masculinity and abstinence is productively framed by a postsecular approach to sexuality, considering the proximity and blurred lines between spaces that support religious sexual ethics and spaces that radically reject them. The ambiguous processes of narrative negotiation engaged by this theme poses serious questions concerning the relevance of school-based sexuality education for abstinent young men. It also opens up possibilities for thinking about the relationship between abstinent young men and the role of gender in the general structural organization of the school – both of these issues arising will be addressed in chapter 4.

3.7.3 The absence and presence of meaningful pedagogical relationships with adults

3.7.3.1 School possibilities

In agreement with a common theme in the sexuality education literature (e.g. Haste, 2013), Ethan, Rob and Tim's cases demonstrate considerable disdain for school teachers and school lessons as valid sources of accurate information and moral guidance. However, there is also cross-case evidence for a desirable type of relationship with school authorities (teachers or otherwise). Rob and Ethan imagine this to be in the context of small groups or time outside of school, with Rob specifically mentioning talking to teachers in more depth. Disillusionment with teachers as sources of authority does not preclude being able to *imagine* a desirable teacher/student relationship that could sustain meaningful sexual learning and formation. Although the imagination of these relationships is not directly related to religious ideas, it is the subjectively felt tension between secular and religious sexuality that creates the need to imagine relationships speaking to this unique sort of tension.

3.7.3.2 The importance and limits of maturity

The desire for a mature approach to sexuality is a major feature of Rob's case. The case movement from internality to externality accords with a sense of becoming mature and of

mature conversation around sexuality becoming more possible over time. This highlights the subjectivity and narrativity of maturity. For Rob ‘mature’ means honest and non-judgemental, exemplified by his relationship with Dan, and increasingly, with his Mum. In contrast, humorous sexuality is felt to bring out his sense of anxiety of displaying adequate masculine sexuality in the context of power plays. Immaturity for Rob represents the insecurity, inauthenticity and toxic hiddenness incited by these power-playing environments. Besides Rob’s more detailed reflexivity, there is a general cross-case awareness and disdain for the immature environment of school-based sexuality education.

In other cases, maturity also presents problems for valid learning about sex and relationships. Ethan frequently expresses his difficulty in taking seriously particularly aged individuals as sexually experienced/authoritative. He refers derisively to the age of his biology teacher, youth group leader and his parents. Ethan’s case displays attitudes commonly noted in research regarding the non-sexuality of older adults and precludes any respect for these ‘mature’ sources of authority.

Thus, for Rob, meaningful sources of learning are experienced as/desired to be ‘mature’ – encouraging and supporting the progression of externality and non-judgemental true speech rather than needing to perform. Rob’s case is unique within the sample in his experience of the *presence* of these meaningful relationships (besides romantic relationships themselves – see next section). In contrast, Ethan’s case shows the limits of maturity as it pushes towards irrelevancy. Ethan, like the rest of the young men, feels a conspicuous *absence* of the kinds of relationship described by Rob.

3.7.3.3 Authenticity

One of the main obstacles to meaningful pedagogical relationships (henceforth MPRs) with adults across cases is the experience or anticipation of inauthenticity. The evidence here

supports the general picture of student perceptions of irrelevance and widespread low regard for sexuality education. Further, both Henry, Ethan and Jack's cases present inauthenticity in the addressing of sex-ethical issues in their church youth groups. There is a keen sense that leaders are giving the 'right answer' from their awareness of the stance of the church on various sexual issues. Ethan's more extensive account of the different approaches to sexual topics within his youth group, told as part of his development of a critique of sexual 'hype', stand out from Henry and Rob's as Ethan finds within Eric's humorous framing of skiing as better than sex. From the evidence, we can see that the more candid, honest and personalized approach to the topic by Eric led to an internalization of this message that assisted Ethan in negotiating the school culture.

The boys experience of sexual authenticity in their friendships and romantic relationships with peers is also significant. The overcoming of shame and isolation through the experience of hearing others' struggles is a key turning point in Rob's case. Dan, a figure of religious moral authority throughout Rob's life, is willing to disclose his own struggles and weaknesses at the same moment Rob shares with him on the steps outside their church, exemplifying authenticity. Both Rob and other young men also find this authenticity in their current romantic relationships. For Mark, his relationship with Bella is understood as divinely instigated and redemptive of his years of sexual abjection. For Rob and Ethan, the sexually boundaried relationships with their girlfriends strengthen their sense of coherence with their religious sexual values while for Rob in particular, Sophie works as a support for him in times of sexual temptation, rather than being the source of possible temptations, as with Ethan. Further, Rob's comparison of Jenny and Sophie, a key structuring feature of the case, turns most prominently on the different levels of openness and honesty exhibited.

In this way it becomes clear that across the cases a barrier to the formation of these meaningful relationships with adults was the anticipation and experience of inauthenticity.

Where authenticity facilitated interpersonal sharing these events functioned as turning points in narratives; for Mark, a sense of the past redeemed by a relationship, for Rob, a sense of progression from internal/private hurting to external/public healing and for Ethan the ability to feel the pleasure of meeting his religious community's standards. Although our data does not permit us to discuss the experience of the youth leaders themselves, it can at least be noted how authenticity might also introduce fractures into youth leader subjectivities through the dual demands of faithfulness to the 'position' of the church and honesty to their own struggles. In this way authenticity should be understood as a postsecular ethical demand posing potential challenges to the consistent modelling of traditional sexual ethics by leaders while also making possible their reinforcement.

3.7.3.4 Recognition

Evidence for the importance of recognition in meaningful pedagogical relationships with adults can be seen across cases. Most prominently, Ethan's case shows the need for a relationship with someone who he feels has lived through the same challenges as him and feels keenly the absence of this recognition in his interactions with various adults around sexuality (his parents/his teachers). In this way Ethan's felt need for recognition requires a form of identification only possible if the other person were also a Christian.

Jack's need for recognition takes a somewhat different form. For Jack, whether or not he felt his youth group leaders (and perhaps other authorities) displayed an adequate understanding of sexual diversity governed to some extent his regard for their authority. A failure to recognize the sexual context they were speaking to betrayed for Jack a lack of willingness to understand and recognize the moral landscape of him and his peers. Notably, Jack does not demand that leaders make the moral adjustment of 'getting with the times' as Mark does, but rather an adjustment of display, to at least display knowledgeableness. Becoming

knowledgeable and signalling knowledge is reparative of the humiliations of his earlier adolescent tactlessness such that the emotional drive for his request for knowledgeable is conditioned by both the interview interaction itself (feeling recognition with me) and the imagined interaction (feeling recognition with his youth group). Through the painful processes of social exclusion, becoming knowledgeable allowed him to feel some value within the group. Finally, as discussed above, for Rob recognition was a narrative turning point as he began to feel his struggles were shared with his peers, even those he felt to be morally superior.

In this way we can see there is a close relationship between authenticity and recognition in the young men's desires for pedagogical relationships. Authenticity and recognition present 'filters', that permit or deny the formative value of a particular adult relationship, and these filters must be understood against the narrative development of their subjectivities, sexual, religious and otherwise. While for Ethan authenticity means a 'down to earth' realism of acknowledging the difficulty of Christian life in the sexualized school, for Jack authenticity means giving a personal rather than an institutional answer to difficult moral questions. It is common across the cases for the need for the recognition to come from someone with the same religious identity. This is demonstrative of how fractured religious sexual subjectivities gravitate towards those with the same kinds of fractures to achieve recognition.

3.7.3.5 Conclusions

The theme has shown the presence and absence of meaningful pedagogical relationships across the cases along with the various desires concerning them. We have noted 1) the possibility and desirability of meaningful relationships with school staff, 2) the importance of maturity as a characteristic of MPRs and the limitations of this, 3) authenticity as characteristic of MPRs and 4) recognition as a characteristic of MPRs. Human beings are

relational, this much is obvious. The cases show how the absence or presence of supportive relationships of all kinds may affect the development of sexual subjectivity specifically. While the desire for authenticity and recognition is not uniquely shaped by the postsecularity, it should be noted that the desires for *religious* forms of authenticity and recognition in MPRs, in response to the specifically *religious* shape of fractured religious sexual subjectivities, is what makes these expressed needs particularly visible in the cases. This sets up important questions to ask in Chapter 4 about how sexuality education fails or succeeds in facilitating MPRs for both religious and non-religious young people.

3.7.4 Desiring regulation and desiring freedom

3.7.4.1 Wanting boundaries

The desire for clear sexual moral boundaries can be seen in the cases of Rob and Henry. A major feature of Henry's case is the need for clarity regarding his own and others desires. Henry struggles to come to terms through the telling with both the history and the presentness of his same-sex desires. He is still not able to say for sure whether he is unambiguously straight, and though he is accepting towards LGB Christians and same-sex marriage there is still a lingering fear of the consequences should he ever have to come out. The frustrated desire for a clear, bounded sexuality can also be seen in Henry's appreciation of clear statements of boundaries in the context of youth talks, requesting more explicit dealing with "what you can do and what you can't do" (1136/139).

For Rob, in contrast to Henry, the pressure to conform to his peers' expectations is central to the case, as has been described in detail above. At the same time, Rob's desires for clear sexual boundaries are comparable to Henry's; he finds his church teaching to be helpful in drawing the lines and making clear the negative consequences of pre-marital sexuality.

Ethan's case shows clearly a reflexive awareness of the felt negative consequences of sexual activity, particularly the sense of disappointment and the development of an undesirable reputation. Following this, he finds the sexual boundaries make sense for him and is quite clear about his pragmatic reasons of waiting "it is better with someone that you love" (483/400). Ethan, like the young men in the work of Heyes and Stolberg (2018), adopts the idea that sexual boundaries before marriage will lead to greater emotional satisfaction of sexuality within marriage (or at least a committed relationship). Further, the sexual boundaries in his relationship with Laura give him a sense of accomplishment and recognition within his Christian community.

In Jack and Tim's cases we can also see how the desire for regulation is accompanied by the desire for good reasons for those regulations. Jack attributes authority to his church's stance on sexuality but does not value the teaching from his youth group because of their failure to give adequate reasons for their views or engage with the challenges of sexual diversity. Only Jack and Tim's cases contain notable theological discourse grounding reasoning around sexual morality. Tim found solace in the Theology of the Body seminar because it finally gave him a language with which to articulate and defend his sexual choices – the quasi-theological, quasi scientific language of "emotional superglue" (576/255) bonding hormones in sexuality allow Tim to justify his feeling that sexuality is sacred, and thus private. For Jack, the biblical language of being "joined in one body" (930/111) is part of his theological justification for pre-marital abstinence.

Both Rob and Jack's case feature discussion of regulated access to the internet. The imagination of a greater insulation against the 'dark' parts of the web aspires to an online life the anxiety of exposure to something inappropriately arousing, age-inappropriate (for those younger than them) or excessive (as Jack says, "too much information" (937/405)). In this way, although we can see consistently the appeal of clear sexual boundaries across the cases,

the ways in which they appear as desirable varies both across and within cases. The expression of desire for boundaries has a dual effect of creating imaginative aspirations that balance felt sexual anxieties and presenting a moral, appropriately self-regulating subjectivity within the interview interaction.

3.7.4.2 Resisting boundaries

Mark's case provides the most obvious examples of how religious moral standards are directly challenged and eventually subverted. Mark's rejection of Catholic norms of pre-marital abstinence are achieved through passionate love functioning as a proxy for a formal marriage. At the same time, the moral standards of Catholicism are still present and problematic for him at Hillview and so his arguments about teaching young people centralize the importance of avoiding guilt and shame via abstinence teaching.

Ethan's primary concern is that a message of understanding and sympathizing with moral challenges be centralized. Although he does not go so far as to reject Christian moral standards, Ethan recognises that an authoritarian approach will not get results. In this way the boundary is resisted on the basis of its unrealistic or faintly ridiculous expectations. At the same time he is aware of the possible problems with this, that it might lead to an interpretation of absolute permissiveness. Similarly, Rob resists the 'heavy' way that sexual boundaries are presented, while also affirming their useful moral orientation.

A common site of resistance across the cases regards the church's teaching on same-sex marriage. Although most of the participants came from non-affirming churches, Mark, Jack, Henry and Tim all exhibit permissive attitudes to same sex marriage as part of a general resistance to their institutional position. Anti-same sex marriage positions are resisted on the basis of lack of scriptural contextualisation and on the basis of the demands to 'move with the times'.

3.7.4.3 Complexity

Rob's relationships with his college friends, whereby questions about whether or not he should be sexually active, lead him to a growing awareness of what he calls the "spectrum" (712/200) of views on sexuality. The differentiation of sexual ethics and the role of modern technologies in disseminating awareness of these differences explains the tension within many of the cases. The ambiguity of sex ethics is a prominent feature of Mark's telling with strong movements back and forth from resistance to standards to granting concessions; similarly, Ethan's stance on the education of those younger than him changes subtly from restrictive to permissive. The problematizing nature of intra-religious moral differentiation is a particularly significant feature of Tim's case – Tim struggles with his seemingly devout Catholic friends' sexual activity at University and the questions this introduces into his own sense of sexual difference. In this way the unstable and differentiation moral landscape of Christian sexual ethics, vacillating between regulation and freedom, is a significant factor in the changes of subjectivity within these cases.

Finally, it is important to note that the interview context plays an important role here; as the participants are aware of a moral 'spectrum' of Christian beliefs, my own beliefs remained ambiguous throughout the data collection (deliberately so). The ambiguity of some of the ethical stances taken should be understood as part of the complex co-construction of the interview.

3.7.4.4 Conclusion

This theme has shown the how the cases exhibit 1) desires for clear sexual moral regulation 2) desires for sexual freedom and 3) the complex co-existence of these desires.

Understanding these desires requires attending to their place within the changes in subjectivity enabled by our methodological approach. Perhaps most of all out of the four, this

theme is demonstrative of the fracturing nature of postsecular sexuality. The postsecular possibilities for religiously-shaped sexual ethics to be both supported and undermined explain the young men's consistent hesitancy to present these ethics as closed off from challenge or modification. In this case, postsecularity creates the double demand to be both clear and convinced about one's convictions and a willingness to surrender this clarity at a moment's notice. Chapter 4 will take up this complexity and address some of the problems with how liberal sex education frames ethical/moral sexual regulation and freedom.

3.8 Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided an answer to my two research questions:

1. How do heterosexual Christian young men experience romantic relationships and sexuality?
2. How do heterosexual Christian young men learn about romantic relationships and sexuality?

I have done this through a narrative study, providing six rich, in-depth accounts of mutating religious sexual subjectivities, placing these in integrated accounts of learning about sexuality and relationships from parents, peers, school, internet and church. The integrated accounts and the cross-case themes that arise from them open up new spaces within the field of youth sexualities expertise that have not yet been explored while challenging some existing positioning of religion and religious young people in youth sexualities research.

The findings also open up possibilities for translation into sexuality education policy by illuminating religious young people's expressed desires for their sexuality education in different contexts and showing how they emerge from the lived/told patterns and mutations of their sexual subjectivity. This has not been done before in sexuality education scholarship so constitutes one aspect of this study's originality. The four cross-case themes, notably, all

have a paradoxical character. In this way, what unites the four themes given is the fractured religious sexual subjectivity that we noted at the conclusion of chapter four, referring to Strhan's work on the unique way that religious life within spaces of postsecularity gives rise to these fractures. The final chapter draws on the major themes to address the aims and objectives of the thesis, outlining a postsecular re-imagination of sexuality education. This involves thinking about how education responds to fractured religious sexual subjectivities both expressed and implicit needs, that the narrative character of these subjectivities as distinct from prevailing assumptions about youth sexualities allows us to reimagine an enriched form of sexuality education.

4 Chapter 4 – Reimagining Postsecular Sexuality Education

Introduction

In this chapter, I set out the second part of this thesis' original contribution to knowledge – a postsecular reimagination of sexuality education. Although the findings of the study are applicable across various educational institutions, I prioritize school-based sexuality education in this chapter while also pointing out entanglements with the other informal contexts of learning engaged through the interviews (parents, peers, church, internet).

I begin by drawing together commonalities through the four cross-case themes described in the last chapter, showing the productivity of approaching sexuality as postsecular. I then give a rationale for why sexuality education should thus be reimagined as postsecular in light of this.

Next, I develop the four cross case themes into four key features of postsecular sexuality education, showing the entanglements and dependencies between each. 1) 'Pain and power of sexual knowledge' is developed into 'pluralized sexual knowledge', 2) 'being abstinent and being masculine at school' is developed into 'postcritical pedagogy' 3) 'absence and presence of meaningful pedagogical relationships' is developed into 'a relational approach' and 4) 'desiring regulation and freedom' is developed into 'ethical sex and relationships as the goal'. Rather than making prescriptions that can be unambiguously argued from thematized findings, in this chapter I think *with* the study findings and *with* educational theory and philosophy that illuminates the issues arising from the data. I finish the chapter and this thesis by evaluating the methodological approach before drawing together the overall argument of the thesis.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully flesh out the practical steps needed to implement my recommendations. Rather, my discussion here is intended to be constructive and substantive while also opening up space for further research, perhaps in contexts where postsecular forms of sexuality

may already be being practiced or perhaps evaluating attempts to implement some of the suggestions here.

4.1 Postsecular sexuality grounding postsecular sexuality education

4.1.1 Drawing together fractured religious sexual subjectivities and postsecularity

In section 1.1.3, I introduced three key features of a postsecular approach to sexuality; (1) the resilience and resurgence of religion in influencing sexual norms, (2) the blurring of boundaries between secular and religious sexual ethics and (3) the imagination of forms of political organization supporting the co-existence of diverse sexual moral cultures. While each of the four themes show the contextual complexity of fractured religious sexual subjectivities, the postsecular approach taken helps identify a characteristic pattern of fracturing across all four major themes and across all six cases. I will now briefly draw together this cross-theme commonality before discussing the relevance for the constructive task of this chapter.

In ‘pain and power of sexual knowledge’, I showed how Christian young men access, possess and deploy sexual knowledge and performances of sexual knowledgeable in ways that fracture their religious sexual subjectivities. The influence and resilience of religion in problematizing these practices of accessing, possessing and deploying is clear across cases even where participants had limited resources for buttressing their commitments. These practices of becoming and being sexually knowledgeable appear as ambiguous through the various shifting states of subjectivity and thus produce different kinds of subjective fracturing. These features of the cases are clearly illuminated by the features of a postsecular approach to sexuality as I frame it here.

In ‘being masculine and being abstinent at school’, I showed how the simultaneous ethical demands of sexual abstinence and hegemonic masculinity across religious (church) and non-religious (school) contexts structures narratives of moral compromise, compromises that are sometimes felt

to be justifiable and in other cases rather more guilt-inducing. These fractures across lines of religious and gendered morality are illuminated by a postsecular approach drawing attention to both the spaces of religious resilience and resistance against gender hegemonic norms and the spaces of capitulation to and reification of those same norms.

In ‘absence and presence of meaningful pedagogical relationships’ I show how the young men’s desires for different types of formative relationships involve aspirations to both secular and religious modes of sexual accomplishment. Authenticity arises as an ambiguous (and thus characteristically postsecular) ethical ideal for MPRs, potentially challenging to religious authority but also potentially supportive of traditional teachings. The desire to have the uniqueness of these postsecular tensions adequately recognized is a key aspect of this theme across cases.

In ‘desiring regulation and desiring freedom’ I showed how Christian sexual ethics work to create both liberation and limitation around sexuality and that these were variously and contradictorily welcomed and resisted across cases according to the unique contextual pressures on each participant. I showed how a postsecular approach to these features of the cases explains the double demand to be both clear and convinced about personal sexual ethics and to be open to, even expectant of, these to be surrendered at some point in the future. This double demand is particularly significant in the production ambiguities and anxieties within the telling of narratives.

4.1.2 Why reimagine sexuality education as postsecular?

Having completed the descriptive project of this thesis and answered my research questions, consideration must be given as to how the analysis and synthesis of the accounts offered ground the constructive project of the thesis to reimagine postsecular sexuality education. In section 1.2 of the thesis I noted the frequent arguments in the literature that sexuality education ought to be responsive to the lived experiences of young people. On this logic, if it can be argued that

postsecularity provides the best framework of explanation for at least some young people's religious sexual subjectivity, then it follows that sexuality education, particular in its progressive desires to engage culturally diverse young people, should be approached in a postsecular mode.

Progressive, secularist sexuality education assumes a certain set of characteristically secular fractured sexual subjectivities with accompanying personal and societal risks contributing to sexual injustice. Following Rasmussen's (2015) account described in section 1.2.1, the conditions inducing these types of fracturing include but are not limited to 1) a lack of awareness of 'the facts' of sexuality grounded in evidential rationality; 2) a lack of personal autonomy in sexual decision making and 3) a lack of awareness of and tolerance of sexual and gender diversity. This framing of fractured subjectivities and their riskiness excludes the types of fractures induced by postsecularity on the religious sexual subjectivities engaged in my analysis. Thus, the point of departure for what follows in this chapter is to think about what it means to include religious sexual subjectivity in sexuality education.

A final point before I proceed – while the ideal of inclusivity does, to some extent, ground the arguments I make here, a key feature of a postsecular approach is the blurring of the boundaries between religious and secular sexual ethics. In approaching religious sexual subjectivity in this way, the clear boundary between non-religious public spaces and religious private spaces regarding sexuality is called into question. The postsecular (and the biographic narrative) approach taken requires my Christian participants to be considered not *only* as Christians because their particular religious sexual subjectivity is entangled with what is not recognizably Christian. In this way, the resonance of the themes beyond the categorical particularities of these cases make this project one of enrichment for all rather than just the inclusion of one group.

4.2 Pluralized sexual knowledge

One of the philosophical foundations of the contemporary British education system is the notion that the impartation of various kinds of knowledge through schools can work as a force for social equality (Gray, 1993). This same philosophy grounds sexuality education practice through the paradigm of ‘informed choice’ - that healthy sexuality and romantic relationships need to be guided by accurate information about sexuality and relationships (Archard, 2000). Progressive sexuality education sets itself against the destructive potential of sexual ignorance under the notion of rights-based sexuality education (Campbell, 2016) such as that which the SEF recently campaigned for, under the slogan ‘It’s my right’. Sexuality education discourse frequently attributes negative sexual health outcomes of various kinds and severities, from the contraction of treatable STIs to sexual assault and rape, to the deficit of sex education (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). These processes involve various accounts of what sexual knowledge is and why it is useful. UNESCO (2009, p. 3) usefully organizes the content of sexuality education under the headings “knowledge, skills and attitudes”. In this section (4.2) I consider propositional knowledge (such as the biological human sexual response) and procedural skill (such as how to put on a condom or how to increase sexual pleasure). I discuss the meaning of sexual knowledge in our findings (focusing on digital sexuality) and how knowledgeableness is resisted. This introduces problems to the accounts of knowledge and liberation in some sexuality education discourse. I then consider how sexuality education might expand its account of what sexual knowledge is in light of religious sexual subjectivity in our findings and re-configures approaches to overcoming resistance. ‘Attitudes’ and associated ‘values’ in UNESCO framework are also important, these will be addressed in section 4.5.

4.2.1 Resisting knowledge

Activism promoting sexuality education in schools frequently attempts to address the reasons for various forms of resistance to sexuality education to overcome that resistance. In particular, parents

are often framed as the site of resistance in contrast to young people as open-minded and keen to engage in learning (Bouma, 2018). While sexual knowledge is valued and welcomed in many ways, as expected, in our findings, we see how various types of sexual knowledge and knowledgeable-ness are resisted. Knowledge of emerging peer sexual activity is presented as unsettling (e.g. with Jack in section 3.4.1.2). Further, anticipated disgust and the resistance of ‘details’ about sex runs alongside an acceptance of lack of explicit knowledge about sexuality (Henry in section 3.5.2.2). There is a pressing need for sexual knowledgeable-ness to survive at school yet also a felt resistance to pornography and the desires it provokes as morally incongruent (Mark in section 3.2.2.3). There are recognisably ‘adult’ anxieties around early sexual knowledge alongside a resistance to the public nature of learning about sex in light of the personal and private nature of sexual intimacy (Tim in section 3.6.2.2). Questions are thus raised about the ways in which these various types of sexual knowledge are experienced as necessary, important and empowering but more significantly as fearful, painful, disgusting, inappropriate or immoral. In many cases, though not necessarily all, these resistances are related to the religious commitments of the young men. These narratives open up the question of how sexuality education accounts for resistance to sexual knowledge with the underlying ideal of creating sexually knowledgeable young people. Further, the narratives run up against the campaign-ready figure of the knowledge starved, knowledge hungry teen who presents as an open and absorbing mind ready to take in all that a diverse and comprehensive curriculum promises.

How might we imagine some possible responses to these resistances? One possible response to these narratives is that young people’s resistance to knowledge is acceptable as long as it does not prevent other young people who may want/need to access this knowledge. There are two problems with this response: firstly, it does not follow the principles of inclusivity inherent in progressive sexuality education – it precludes any effort to adapt or include those who are resistant, whether or

not this is associated with their religious identity. A second possible response is that resistant young people need an approach that minimizes or overcomes their resistance in order to lead them towards a more open-minded position. The first problem with this response is that it is not clear that these methods for getting resistant students 'on board' are successful – this is particularly unlikely when the resistance is rooted in religious identity or in psycho-social narrative complexity (as evident in our findings). The second problem concerns the presence of a secularist narrative of unthinking, irrational religion leading children towards ignorance rather than knowledge. Following Mahmood's (2005) critical stance towards feminist perspectives on religion and sexual agency, I argue that we must consider the refusal of knowledge as an act of agency rather than one only of submission to oppressive and destructive religious ideals of sexual innocence. Though serious resistance that would threaten the goals of any imagined sexuality education programme are comparatively minimal in my analysis, the findings raise questions resonant with researchers critically examining sexuality education in developing countries featuring strong cultural sexual conservatism (Miedema & Yaa Oduro, 2017).

It is also important to note feminist sexuality education scholarship's deep concern with the politics of female sexual pleasure and how this is related to a lack of, or a fearfulness about, accurate knowledge concerning female sexuality and sexual experience (Allen, Rasmussen & Quinlivan, 2013). Where this sort of sexual knowledge is resisted, the progress of women's liberation is threatened (e.g., as argued by Fine, 1988). Not acting or intervening is to tacitly affirm the patriarchal state of affairs which continues to punish and police female sexuality. Perhaps even more seriously, resistance may lead to the perpetuation of a culture of rape that the central task of consent education is inclined to address. However, Allen reflects on the difficulty of accepting theoretical realizations over the limitations of sexual pleasure pedagogy as simplistically liberating:

Despite acknowledging from a theoretical perspective the impossibility of putting pleasure to work, in the course of my everyday embodied existence, I just can't and don't want to let this go. Spending considerable time in schools means I often witness verbal and sometimes physical abuse based on heteronormative and gender normative assumptions. When dealing with broken student bodies and hopes, I find the idea I am not implementing future directed action for change is too much to bear. (Allen, 2012, p. 467)

Concerns over the failure to understand and carry through the principles of sexual consent in adolescent sexual cultures are real and justified. What is not clear is how consent should be taught and how the inescapable moral complexities can be engaged in a climate where the temptation is to give clear procedural instruction. Rather than teaching consent propositionally, as a procedure to be following, scholars are increasingly arguing for the embedding of consent teaching within a moral framework of equality, mutuality and respect (Lamb & Randazzo, 2015). Within the liberal paradigm, the imagination of resistance to pedagogies of consent is far more serious than resistance to, for example, knowing about transgender lives. My point here is not to say that propositional and procedural sexual knowledge is not important. Rather, I am arguing that anxieties about the absence of knowledge in stalling sexual social justice, provoked by narratives of resistance to knowing, need to be called into question. These anxieties are closely related to a secularist understanding of religious sexual cultures as dangerously ignorant. This is not to say that some of these fears are wholly unfounded. It is possible to imagine a pedagogical approach inclusive of knowledge for social justice, but it will require a reimagination of what counts as real/valuable sexual knowledge.

4.2.2 Knowledge is moral/narrative

My findings indicate the need to think about sexual knowledge beyond the propositional and procedural. In the six cases, sexual knowledge and subjective knowledgeableness take on a rich variety of mutating meanings, particularly pronounced in the case of digital sexuality. Sexuality education discourse frequently positions the importance of a critical approach to pornography in pedagogies (Horvath et al., 2013, p. 64). In approaching pornography as sending various types of normative ‘message’ about sexuality, the concern is to combat the ‘inaccurate’ messages of pornography and cultivate a critical media literacy (Štulhofer, Buško, & Landripet, 2010). In these approaches, the issue is not the morality or psychology of accessing or use of pornography (e.g. for curiosity or for masturbation) but the propositional knowledge about sexuality that it conveys (Attwood, Barker, Boynton, & Hancock, 2015). Accurate knowledge and a critical orientation towards gender justice is seen as the way to combat the myths of pornography, an approach consonant with the secular progressive framework of rationality, autonomy, equality (Rasmussen, 2015).

As our findings show, and in continuity with more complex, interdisciplinary research on pornography (e.g. using affect theory, see Paasonen, 2011), porn and cybersex appears in youthful sexual cultures with far more complexity than as accurate or inaccurate information. In my findings, pornography is presented as a necessary way to acquire useful sexual knowledge for survival in masculine hierarchies, while at the same time being arousing and thus threatening to coherence and moral congruency. Framed narratively, pornography takes on different meanings across lived experiences and is drawn on to signify certain static and mutating forms of sexual subjectivity.

In particular, Jack’s case highlights the need to widen the pedagogical representation of experiences of sexuality on the internet beyond mainstream social and sexual media to cover a broad range of digital sexualities. These approaches must resist the temptation to see online spaces as morally neutral, merely the realm of either ‘accurate’ or ‘inaccurate’ sexual data, and instead recognize the

moral experiential nature of online intimacy. For Jack cybersex represents both a time of repair of his self-worth and value and a time of religious moral compromise (section 3.4.1.4). Recognizing that online experiences occupy this space of ambiguity means that sexuality education engaging pornography only on the level of accuracy/inaccuracy will fail to engage adequately with experiences like Jack's. This may be more pronounced in the case of religious young people – both Jack and other young men understand pornography as quite clearly in tension with their religious ethical standards, and this is attested in wider research on religion and porn use. The pedagogical presentation of porn as morally neutral may miss the opportunity to fully engage religious young people working through ambiguous and narratively shifting feelings of moral incongruence, as well as non-religious young people working through similar feelings.

The complex meanings of sexuality in these Christian young men's negotiations of digital sexuality thus require us to think beyond the framework of accuracy/inaccuracy. By engaging religious sexual subjectivity, our findings point towards the embodied, moral and narrative dimensions of sexual knowledge beyond the propositional and procedural.

4.2.3 The religious valence of sexual shame

My findings are demonstrative of the religious valence of guilt and shame in sexual subjectivity and draw attention to shame as a distinct type of sexual knowledge that is frequently avoided or problematized in sexuality education practice. Shame over sexuality is typically taken to be especially toxic and thus in particular need of guarding against (e.g. Leahy, 2014, p. 177). The very notions of sexual freedom inherent in liberal moral and legal orders is an aspiration towards the *freedom from* shame itself. In research with young people on sexuality education, there is frequent reference to pedagogies that aim to induce shame, and young people's experience of feeling shamed in sex education lessons (Jones, 2011a, p. 139; Philpott, Knerr, & Boydell, 2006, p. 26).

Constructive work aims to form sexual pedagogies that guard against sexual shame and give mechanisms for avoiding and absolving shame, through critiquing hegemonic norms and ‘normalizing’ what is regarded as marginal (DeFur, 2012, p. 155). Without specific referent, through normalization sexuality education takes on the therapeutic task of insulating young people against certain emotions.

Thus, sexuality education often attempts to guard against or reduce these feelings of sexual shame through recognizably non-religious therapeutic techniques like normalization. However, my findings show how sexual guilt and shame is deeply entangled with the young men’s sense of relationship with God. Relationship with God is experienced as something threatened by shame, invoking various religious practices as means to overcome this and experience forgiveness (e.g. Jack in section 3.4.1.5). Further, in a number of positive narratives within the cases, guilt and shame was not avoided on the basis that it was externally imposed and thus illusory or inauthentic, but rather became an opportunity to experience divine forgiveness (e.g. Rob in section 3.3.1.3). This is part of a recognisably Christian narrative pattern of fall/redemption/transformation that arises in the cases. In this Christian narrative, shame is what brings humans to recognise their need for divine forgiveness. The narrative of redemption retrospectively views failure and suffering as having an ultimate purpose that is good, while simultaneously anticipating a future in which God removes suffering and shame forever.

Following Elspeth Probyn’s (2004) work on the affective dynamics of classrooms, my findings draw attention to the need for shame to be acknowledged as part of the affective dynamics of sexuality education classrooms and as a distinct mode of sexual knowledge. Acknowledging this inescapability, we might argue that the ambition is simply to minimize shame as far as is possible. Yet, thinking with religious sexual narratives (like Tim’s e.g. in section 3.6.2.1), it is easy to imagine how the use of normalization as a secular technology of absolution might simply shift the

shame somewhere else in the classroom. Accepting the inevitable surfacing of shame or guilt in the sexuality education classroom by no means involves the strategic use of shame and guilt as a coercive strategy for control or motivation. Rather, it means not being afraid of or surprised by shame and also acknowledging a number of different ways of feelings of shame and moral incongruence. It means bringing shame out in the open as something to be discussed, and thinking about different ways that different cultures respond to and deal with shame (including, but not limited to, normalization). Part of the skill of the sexuality education teacher is to be present with the affective dynamics of the classroom without anxiously seeking to contain and control powerful affects like shame. This approach may help in addressing the role of shame in driving young people's resistance to and disengagement from sexuality education.

4.2.4 Imagining pluralized knowledges in sexuality education

Sexuality education with a pluralized understanding of sexual knowledge goes some way towards reframing problems around resistance and shame-avoidance. One consequence of the expanded account of sexual knowledge opened up by my findings is the need to approach sexuality from multiple disciplinary perspectives. The new statutory framework in England opens up this possibility and requires sexuality to be engaged with far beyond the biological. However, there is still danger of recourse to the propositional and procedural. To guard against this, further work needs to be done on how to approach sexuality education in a multidisciplinary fashion, drawing on history, psychology, literature, biology and (most relevantly for this study) religion. This would be a postsecular approach insofar as it treats both traditional and lived religion as involving important and valuable forms of moral/narrative sexual knowledge, and insofar as it understands that religious sexual knowledge points beyond itself towards modes of thinking about sexuality beyond the propositional and procedural.

Pluralizing forms of sexual knowledge allows for a creativity in overcoming resistances through engaging students in ways that have a variety of resonances. Where students fail to engage, for example, with a purely biological account of why using contraception is important, they may engage more readily with a historical approach. Where students fail to engage with a legal approach to consent, they may engage more readily with a theological one. The refusal or resistance of students, whether obvious or tacit, thus becomes less of an anxiety as multiple forms of knowing about sexuality are encompassed. Future research should consider further how a multi-disciplinary approach could be developed and consider the use and impact of these approaches. In such a postsecular, multidisciplinary approach, *ethics* should be the underlying paradigm grounding multiplicities. What exactly an ethical approach entails will be addressed in section 4.5.

4.3 Postcritical pedagogy – religion related abstinence and the insufficiency of ‘inclusivity’

4.3.1 Religion and the ‘healthy development’ of sexuality

In dialogue with this attempt to construct an objective account, my findings show the importance of subjective notions of sexual development that change as part of mutating sexual subjectivities. Across cases, the subjectively felt, positively oriented development of religious identity and commitment is entangled with the development of sexual maturity. For Mark, retiring his aspirations and struggles for a romantic relationship to focus on his faith is causally connected to the highly valued and rewarding relationship he now has (section 3.2.1.3). For Ethan, the moment of commitment to greater integrity of his religious and sexual identity is described as highly developmentally significant (see section 3.1.1.4). Objective, secular approaches trying to find neutral common ground, such as the 15 domains (Mckee, Albury and Dunne. 2010, introduced in section 1.2.6), are thus called into question by my findings. Programmatic frameworks for healthy sexual development like the 15 domains, with ambitions for application across global contexts, do

not adequately account for multiple, contradictory ideals of what counts as ‘healthy’ or ‘mature’ sexuality as seen in my findings. As I will explain below, in a post-critical approach to sexuality education as one aspect of a postsecular approach, the task of sexuality education to produce any pre-defined notion of ‘healthy’ sexual subjectivity should be abandoned entirely.

4.3.2 Abstinent/abstinence-intending young people in sexuality education classrooms

Progressive sexuality education frequently takes a ‘sex-positive’ approach to adolescent sexual activity, while also supposing itself to be inclusive and supportive of young people who choose not to be sexually active, for religious or non-religious reasons. At the same time there is good evidence for several underlying assumptions about sexual abstinence in sexuality education discourses: 1) assuming a stable notion of ‘sex’ it is unrealistic and very rarely actually achieved (Ingham & Stone, 2006, p. 202) 2) it is damaging to healthy sexual development and can lead to a multitude of problems later 3) it reproduces gender inequalities as standards are more punishing for women. The assumptions can be seen in a number of places, for example the positioning of comprehensive sexuality education in direct contrast to abstinence only education, the setting up of ‘sex positive’ in direct contrast to ‘sex negative’ (e.g. Ingham, 2005; Brickman & Willoughby, 2017). The very idea of comprehensive ‘versus’ abstinence-only implies that because abstinent young people will probably fail to carry through their ambitions, they need to be prepared for those circumstances.

Once again, these assumptions are seriously challenged by my findings. To take the first point - most of the young men in our case are not ‘sexually active’ as defined by sexual health practitioners. In this sense they are outliers. However, recent research has noted the declining rates of heterosexual sex amongst young people and media attention recently given to young people who are celibate for non-religion-related reasons. To assume abstinence commitments to be unrealistic may continue to be consistent with statistical likelihoods, but it fails to take seriously the meaning

and importance of abstinence and may increasingly be inaccurate for young people (like some of the young men here) who feel abstinence to be both eminently desirable and eminently realistic. Secondly, the idea that a healthy sexual development necessarily involves sexual experimentation, partnered or unpartnered, is a historically contingent cultural narrative relying on stable notions of healthiness/unhealthiness, a stability that is problematized by my findings. The third point is perhaps the most convincing – it is hard to deny that sexual abstinence, when colluding with hegemonic cultural gender norms, reinforces sexual double standards that disproportionately responsabilize and punish young women. At the same time, there is nothing *necessary* about the religious ethics of abstinence that involves the collusion with sexual double standards. It is possible and indeed desirable to present and correct this collusion – this will be addressed in the section 4.4.

In this way the straightforward ‘inclusion’ of abstinent teens may not be so straightforward. For example, in the case of Tim, the issue is a reified sense of difference inciting the felt sense of exclusion from a highly valued and enjoyably presented sexual culture (section 3.6.2.2). If the young person felt genuinely supported in their position as outlier within this culture then the problem may be lessened. But, given the points made in our first paragraph, this comfortability seems unlikely in cases like Ethan and Tim. While for sexually active young people a sex-positive ‘normalization’ may be experienced as reassuring and liberative against potentially lingering guilt, for abstinent young people normalization may in fact be experienced as the opposite. This can also be seen in the case of Rob for whom the idea of masturbation being ‘normal’ became a punishing standard, reinforced by the expectations of his peers. Overall, my findings about the meanings of sexual abstinence provide further support for the post-critical argument that sexuality education should not be aspiring to form any predefined set of ideal sexual subjectivities (autonomous, tolerant, etc), which I will expound further below.

4.3.3 Masculinity and education/schooling/culture widely

In section 1.3.5 I outlined literature showing the ongoing role of gender in structuring school life and the project of schooling in England. These critical perspectives, such as that of Lingard, Martino and Mills (2009), draw attention to the need for the gendered nature of school structures and how it repeats and reinforces hierarchies, and how these processes uniquely affect young men's educational experiences. Gender-critical sexuality education is widely believed to be one part of addressing these issues constructively.

My findings support this body of work in drawing attention to the fracturing nature of hegemonic masculinity at school. Further, the various meanings of sexual abstinence in my findings provide a critique of both sexuality education and schooling more widely in its reification of hegemonic masculinity. Narratives of abstinence and the religious frameworks they sit within provide potential resources for challenging gender norms in line with gender-critical sexuality education's dominant goals. In providing opportunities for calling into question hegemonic masculinity, gender critical sexuality education that is also responsively postsecular also has the opportunity to draw on religious frames of meaning around gender to support religious young people in their fractured engagement with the pressures of both masculinity and abstinence.

However, my findings also call into question the simple alignment of abstinent masculinity with gender-criticality. Across all the cases, abstinence stands in danger of becoming transposed into a new masculine hierarchy and becoming a new standard by which to measure oneself and against which one consistently falls short. Further, in most of the cases starting a heterosexual romantic relationship functions as a point of redemption in the narratives. Thus, despite resistance to this ideal, 'getting a girlfriend' continues to serve as an indicator of status and personal worth both within secular and religious contexts. It is a strong possibility that the young men who chose to participate chose to do so because they had been or were currently in a relationship and thus 'qualified' as having a story worth telling.

In this way, the relationship between masculinity and Christianity as exhibited in my findings does not allow for a simplistic appropriation or rejection in light of the goals of gender-critical sexuality education. As noted in section 1.3.3, our findings align with Line Nyhagen's call to move beyond the binary of oppression/liberation around religion and gender. I argue that a postsecular sexuality education responsive to the role of masculinity in religious sexual subjectivities supports a post-critical approach in which gender equality is studied carefully and rigorously from multiple cultural and disciplinary perspectives with the aim of facilitating personal response, rather than something which must be mechanistically produced through pedagogical techniques (see next section).

4.3.4 Critical and post-critical pedagogy

Sexuality education practices around gender criticality, sex-positivity and normalization draw on a critical pedagogical perspective developed from the work of Paulo Freire (1996) and Henry Giroux (1988). Critical pedagogy draws on critical theory's interrogation of colonialism, sexism, classism and other forms of social oppression (Bay-Cheng, 2017). It advocates educational addressing of these oppressions through provoking students to think about their destructive consequences and how they can be undone drawing on their own, societally de-valued forms of knowledge rather than those given to them by oppressors. However, my findings introduce some problems for the critical pedagogical approach to sexuality education. For example, it is easy to imagine a situation where abstinence-intending students, through the sex-positive paradigm, are involved in critically interrogating the cultural norms that stop them from having sex, while sexually active or intending students are critically interrogating norms that make them feel they must have sex. In both scenarios there is the risk of the induction of shame or the reification of heteronormative standards. While it is of course possible to imagine a sensitive approach that would guard against these possibilities, there is still the distinct possibility of either outcome occurring.

In response to these kinds of problematics, recently sexuality education scholars have begun to think constructively about the place of religion in critical theory and critical pedagogy. Asad, Brown, Butler, & Mahmood (2013) address the entrenched notion that the critical mode of thinking and acting emerges from the conditions of secularity. They affirm that critique need not be secular in this way, against the idea that norm-critical pedagogy leads inexorably away from religious moral delusions as the very norms that need challenging. Sanjakdar and Yip follow this logic, arguing that religious sexuality has the potential to work as a form of “transgressive knowledge” or “agitational theory” (2018, p. 117-118). Critical pedagogy, according to Sanjakdar, has the potential to benefit both religious and non-religious students. For example, sexual abstinence has the power to question and challenge heteronormative and hegemonic norms of masculinity (thus is made available for liberative practice) while at the same time being at risk of reinforcing those standards if taken up uncritically (and thus requiring pedagogical critical inquiry).

However, I argue that serious problems remain for critical pedagogical approaches to sexuality education, even those that include religion. According to Hodgson, Vlieghe and Zamojsk (2018), the problem with the Freireian critical pedagogy paradigm is that it imports an historically and culturally contingent political ontology, imaging constant cycles of oppression and liberation and governed by the imagination of a future utopia. The critical stance is aimed towards revealing oppression and takes education to be oriented towards these extrinsic aims such as equality and social justice. In contrast, in the post-critical stance “extrinsic political ends, no matter how well meaning, become subject to question” (ibid., p. 15). Education is its own justification and subjects/disciplines are studied because of their intrinsic value rather than their capacity to produce an ideal citizen or ideal nation.

This way of thinking can be applied to sexuality education. In just such a postcritical sexuality education, knowing about sexuality is valuable *apart from* what it can achieve for us individually

and as a society. Instead of taking an extrinsic ideal of autonomous, empowered, healthy (or indeed, abstinent) sexual subjectivity as the goal, the goal is simply to study sexuality truly comprehensively, meaning, as I argue, studying it as postsecular. In this way, religious traditions and lived experiences around sexuality and relationships are taken seriously on their own terms rather than marshalled for an extrinsic political project. A postcritical approach attempts to pass on what is valuable from the diverse storehouse of human wisdom and learning about sexuality without requiring that particular forms of sexual culture (even ones we believe to be unequivocally good) will be reproduced as we do so. For example, gender equality becomes something to be studied (through multiple disciplines (see above) and grounded in ethics (see below)) rather than produced as a measurable outcome. In this way, a postcritical sexuality education aligns with a postsecular approach because it allows for the calling into question *all* visions of ‘the good life’, including the ones that seems the most culturally foundational. As such, it allows for the seemingly contradictory religious (and by implication non-religious) visions of the meanings and ethical significances of sexuality to be addressed in the classroom – not *primarily* to be critically deconstructed (though this may be part of good practice), but to be understood accurately and responded to seriously. Relating to our topic here, this would mean that, when appropriate, the ethics of both abstinence and free sexual experimentation are to be placed on equal footing and students given the chance to make a personal response to their differing ethical demands (see section 4.5.4). This ambitious vision however, will requires significant structural changes in schooling to be sustainable – the next section address this.

4.4 A relational approach – facilitating meaningful pedagogical relationships

4.4.1 Ageism and age segregation as a barrier

Our findings demonstrate young men's valuing and desiring meaningful pedagogical relationships with significant adults of various kinds for learning and formation around sexuality and relationships. The case accounts also show a number of barriers to the formation of MPRs. A significant barrier that also relates to the above points to the formation of pedagogical relationships with adults is ageism. For example, Ethan both identified and actively supported ageist notions of the laughable sexuality of the old and thus the invalidity of them as sources of sexual formation (section 3.1.2.2). It is notable however, that Ethan now identifies with hindsight the importance of some of the messages he was receiving but that he was simply unable to value the message because of who was giving it. The desire to engage with adults around sexuality is present, but cultural barriers mediated by ageist notions of sexuality restrict this. This supports wider research findings on the view of older people as both desexualised and unknowledgeable about sexuality (Bouman et al., 2006). This gives rise to the ambiguous stance taking in our cases towards otherwise valued adults with recognisable authority (this can also be seen in Mark's movement back and forward between decrying the Hillview authorities and begrudgingly acknowledging the compromised wisdom of their regulations). Research has established the close relationship of ageism with social structures of age-segregation (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). As part of historical processes of social change, various intergenerational social contexts were eroded such that the family now remains one of the only consistent intergenerational spaces (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2006). Heavily age-segregated British schooling is identifiable as one of the institutions reinforcing this separation (Montemayor & Van Komen, 1980). Thus we can draw a line from age-segregation through ageism to the barriers to MPRs noted in my findings. There is currently no work examining the relationships between age segregation, ageism and sexuality education before and this is an important potential avenue for future research.

4.4.2 Possible solutions for intergenerational MPRs in schooling and youth work

In spite of these barriers, in my findings, the young men imagined more meaningful learning from their school teachers in the context of a greater level of honesty and time outside of normal curriculum (e.g. Henry in section 3.5.2.1). However, few sexuality education scholars to date have thought about the possibilities and limitations of this with school sex education teachers themselves. These cultural barriers are part of the development of peer-led or ‘near-peer’ sexuality education programmes (Page, 2012; Stephenson et al., 2004). Many of these programmes require the peer educators to be trained. One way of understanding peer educators is that they act as a proxy for delivering adult messages within relationships of empathy (Fields & Copp, 2015). While there is no good reason against peer educator programmes, I argue their existence arises from the structural conditions of age segregation and subsequent ageism inherent in British schooling. Peer educators, as a way to create empathy and circumvent these cultural barriers, may serve a purpose, but do not meet desires for adult engagement that we see in our findings. An alternative is to imagine schooling that brings young people into contact with a wide range of educational professions that provide opportunities for MPRs – youth workers, nurses, chaplains, counsellors, social workers, etc. Insofar as these are all professional occupations, they should be trained and prepared to engage sensitively and appropriately with young people of diverse sexual cultures. Improvements may be found through expanding structured activities during break times and play/extra-curricular activity rather than unsupervised playtime. This may help bring multiple generations within and beyond schools into contact. Taken as a whole, these structural changes will facilitate the development of intergenerational MPRs of various kinds.

An intergenerational approach, emerging from critical reflection on these narratives, might raise anxieties about the promulgation of outdated or irrelevant perspectives. This potential response indicates a further need to question the notion of irrelevant or outdated sexual pedagogies as embedded in structures of age-segregation and ageism such that, for sexuality particularly, only the

young may effectively teach the young. Imagining sexuality education where MPRs are effectively facilitated means to imagine changes to the segregated structure of schooling as part of a wider cultural change across formative institutions of all kinds that repeat this segregation.

4.4.3 Inauthenticity as a barrier

In our findings, inauthenticity was another significant barrier to the formation of MPRs. The young men frequently talked about the sense that they were receiving a ‘scripted’ answer (e.g. Henry in 3.5.2.3). In these moments, the youth leader or teachers’ speech became ‘institutionalized’ and thus inauthentic. Yet we also identified briefly that these are the realities faced by teachers and youth leaders, forced to move between their own subjectivity and their responsibility to the ethical ideals of the institutions. This inauthenticity, in the context of schooling, is an issue beyond just the concerns of religious young people for recognition. Although student relationships with teachers do have the capacity to be meaningful and formational beyond information and skills, the practice of teaching is increasingly governed by neo-liberal regimes of performativity (Ball, 2010). The teacher must fabricate or project a self to meet internally imposed standards of professionalism. These professional standards police the extent of relationship possible with students. Even where more organic relationality is possible, the constraints of targets and time restrictions prevent the formation of even these superficial relationships with students. In short, the normal British secondary school teacher is in no good position to form a relationship able to sustain the sorts of meaningful pedagogical interactions about sexuality and relationships imagined by the young men. Assuming that school teachers are in a unique position to form uniquely significant relationships with students, how are we to think about how these barriers of inauthenticity are to be overcome?

4.4.4 The potential of class size reduction

One of the key steps in overcoming the barriers to meaningful pedagogical relationships described in this section is the reduction of class sizes. Smaller class sizes lead to less requirement for disciplinary structures and procedures – things can be worked out far more organically in small groups as the teacher does less work to maintain control. These are recounted in literature on class size reduction (Blatchford, Bassett, & Brown, 2011; Finn, Pannozzo, & Achilles, 2007). A less disciplinarian relationship fosters greater interpersonal growth such that teacher student relationships are able to sustain conversations involving risk-taking self-disclosure because a greater level of interpersonal trust has been established. Making the establishment of a good pedagogical relationship prior to conveying the ‘right information’ means engaging the fractures of religious sexual subjectivity as not primarily requiring *repair* but as first requiring relational and pedagogical *presence*.

My argument for the reduction of class size is part of a wider critique of mass education. Without this reduction the other three features of my postsecular reimagination will be difficult if not impossible to implement; for example, my recommendations around the importance of recognizing different meanings of shame and other negative affects would be very difficult in a large class size with little established teacher-student relationship.

4.5 Ethical sex and relationships as the goal

4.5.1 Morality, consent and ethical demands

In the liberal paradigm underpinning the progressive forms of sexuality education described by Rasmussen (2015, p. 1) and addressed in section 1.2, mutual consent is taken to be the foundational moral principle (e.g. Archard, 2000) for sexuality. The principle of mutual consent undergirds the influential concept of ‘informed choice’ because the rational, deliberative act of giving and receiving consent is strengthened by the individual being in full awareness of the possible risks and

potential consequences (good and bad) of their decision. In Rasmussen's language this is the 'promotion of autonomy' goal of progressive sexuality education. It also provides support for the 'promotion of tolerance' goal – if others sexual choices follow the principle of mutual consent then they should be tolerated regardless of moral disagreement. Teaching about the importance and complexity of giving and receiving consent is increasingly becoming a foundational element of sexuality education programmes.

Making consent the foundational moral principle of sexuality education implies the reservation of moral judgement about any form of sexual expression as long as it is consensual. However, as Spiecker and Steutel (2004) argue, in pedagogical practice this should not necessarily lead to an absolute permissiveness. Indeed, it is expected and desirable that other types of sexual moral standard are discussed. However, these other standards are not to be taught as exerting moral demand like that of consent (which also exerts a legal force). In this regard, Michael Hand (2018) draws a distinction between morality and ethics – moral principles are those which all reasonable people can agree upon, like consent, whilst ethical principles are those on which reasonable people disagree (such as abstinence before marriage). It follows then that sex education teachers should teach *directively* for young people's adherence to the principle of consent and *non-directively* for all other potentially disagreeable matters.

However, my findings introduce serious problems for the separation between morality and ethics and its pedagogical implications. In my findings, as well as in other in-depth qualitative research on issues of a moral nature (e.g. Winkler Reid, 2014), there was no clear distinction between minimum 'moral' standards and higher 'ethical' ideals. The young men did not display a concern about doing only the minimum that was required of them in sexual and relational moral matters – they wanted to do what was *best*. This can be seen clearly throughout my explication of the 'desiring regulation and desiring freedom' theme (section 3.7.4). Indeed, across most of the cases, one of the most

pressing ethical demands on young people was their sense of responsibility to God and their religious community with regards to sexual boundaries (though this was also wrestled with – see next section). For this reason, I argue that secular, liberal approaches taking consent as the minimum absolute moral standard fail to engage religious young people who consider sex within both immanent and transcendent frames of meaning, exerting considerable moral demands on them (e.g. Ethan in section 3.1.1.4), and as applicable not only to themselves but to everyone (e.g. Jack in section 3.7.4.1). Taking seriously the need to be responsive to religious young people in sexuality education classroom involves also taking seriously the demand of their lived sexual ethics.

One possible response to this issue that might preserve the liberal paradigm is to encourage practices of “values clarification”, described (and critiqued) by Mark (2018, p. 98) as characteristic of progressive sexuality education in England. Values clarification assumes that young people need to be empowered not just to make agential sexual decision but also to decide the framework of values they want to guide those decisions. On this account, it is not the teacher’s role to introduce demanding moral/ethical perspectives on sexuality and relationships but rather to accept and work to strengthen young people’s existing values.

However, my findings also call this into question. In some cases, notably Henry’s, ‘clarity’ is desired but not achieved, with confusion resurging repeatedly in both the living and the telling, problematizing the coherence of the overall narrative (section 3.5.2.1). Henry’s case reminds us that it is not entirely clear whether ‘clarity’ on one’s values is actually possible – indeed, for these young people, it appears to be extremely difficulty given the postsecular complexities they find themselves in. Further, in other cases (such as Rob, in section 3.3.2.3) clear boundaries appear as eminently desirable within a sexual culture of moral ambiguity, and the cases indicate the value and importance of these messages being authoritatively conveyed. We might ask then, following this pattern, whether there would be within values clarification any possibility for the school supporting

religious young people's adherence to these authoritatively delivered boundaries? If not, then do schools really support cultural diversity, or only up to a point? If so, then how can appropriate support be offered in a way that also support the values development of those with very different sexual moral ideals? Indeed, these questions themselves draw attention to the poverty of an individualistic approach to the moral and ethical elements of sexuality education and highlight once again the dissensus at the heart of sexuality education philosophy, pedagogy and practice. Without situating the practice of personal clarification within clear understandings of what values actually are and why/how they exert claims on us, the likelihood is recourse to those values that are most pressing and easily graspable – those in the widest cultural circulation.

The problem with the unwillingness to engage with the demanding and authoritative nature of religious and non-religious sexual ethics beyond consent, in the rare cases where religious values are engaged in sexuality education, is the presentation of these as private matters of only personal import (e.g. for religious people) rather than ethical frameworks with publicly graspable claims that if true, exert ethical demands on everyone and not just those of a particular cultural or religious identity. In light of this, I argue that sexuality education should present various moral/ethical perspectives on sexuality and relationships as just as potentially demanding as consent. While it should be made clear that consent is the *legal* minimum standard, other ethical standards should be studied, such as pleasure, mutuality, celibacy, truthfulness, forgiveness, etc. I have discussed in a recent journal article how these can be taught in classroom settings through vignettes and narrative techniques developed from theories of virtue and character education (Heyes 2018). I also discuss this further in section 4.5.4 below.

4.5.2 Questioning religious sexual ethics in sexuality education classrooms

While in the previous section I addressed the problems created by the existence of desires for regulation and boundaries, there also exists within the fourth theme the dynamic of ‘desiring freedom’, highlighting within the cases spaces of resistance to and reshaping of religious sexual moral messages. Even where relative compliance with sexual moralities was demonstrated in the ‘told story’, events and periods in which boundaries were questioned or resisted are prominent across the cases. These accompany periods of generalized doubt about faith commitments (Rob in section 3.3.1.2), periods of confusion and internal struggle (Jack in section 3.4.1.4) and times of particularly intense sexual and romantic attraction (Mark in section 3.2.1.1). In many cases, the young men were ambivalent about these narratives of resistance. They represented both regretful times of compromise and also important opportunities for learning and personal development.

In thinking about how this might relate to sexuality education, under a critical or values clarification approach these resistances to religious morality would be unlikely to be challenged in the same way that, for example, resistances to gender stereotypes would be. Engaging religious young people who are questioning these aspects of their faith in classrooms using critical perspectives may end up pushing them further away from adherence to these ethical beliefs (this is in fact how Mark imagines sexuality education in section 3.2.2.1). This touches on an important issue that can create anxiety amongst religious parents and perpetuate the idea that sexuality education is a secularizing force corrosive to religious sexual moralities.

How might we think about the teacher’s responsibility in these difficult cases? Within the liberal moral framework, one answer would be that their responsibility is to help the young person do what is right for them by giving them the best possible information to help inform their choice. However, in my approach, assuming ethical sex and relationships as the goal, teachers should not feel burdened neither by the need to re-assert the young people’s religious communities’ authority *nor* the need to encourage them to ‘do what is right for you’. Instead, the teacher may help the young

person consider, understand and question in more depth both their doubts and their responsibility to God/religious community/some other source of transcendent value. Sexuality educators gaining the competency to genuinely and sensitively support religious young people in their questioning processes will, however, represent a significant step towards a more responsive, postsecular sexuality education. One vital way that this can be addressed is by ensuring that sexuality education teacher education programmes are religiously literate and have religious literacy as one of their primary aims for developing effective sexuality educators. Dinham and Francis' (2015) theoretical work on religious literacy represents one productive way that future work can take this forward.

4.5.3 Ethical failures and characteristic damage

In imagining ethical sex and relationships as the goal of postsecular sexuality education, it is also important to consider the potential risks therein. Adopting certain ethical perspectives can, for various reasons, cause difficulties for young people and lead to a sense of damage and woundedness. This can be clearly seen in my findings. Amongst those cases who are more accepting of religious moral authorities around sexuality, the cases show a resistance to the way the boundaries are presented in a 'heavy' manner, the heaviness being the attribution of moral seriousness to moral failures e.g. around masturbation (Rob, section 3.3.2.1). They also show resistance to the way sexual ethical boundaries are presented by various moral authorities, as demonstrative of an adult lack of understanding of youth cultures (Jack in section 3.4.2.3). Further, there is an implicit stance against a didactic pedagogical style across the cases and accompanying desires for a less authoritarian approach to communication about sexual ethics and a greater honesty about personal struggles (Ethan, section 3.1.2.2). Finally, there is the recognition that some kinds of moral standards may be inherently unrealistic or damaging for both themselves and others (Mark in section 3.2.2.1).

How can the reimagination I am developing here take account of the narratives of damage and pain caused by the practice of religious sexual ethics like abstinence? I have found useful here Lauren Winner's concept of Christian practices as 'damaged gifts' that inflict 'characteristic damage' (2018). Her work engages the Christian practices of Eucharist, prayer and baptism, showing how these become implicated with destructive and violent regimes. However, her thinking can also be applied to Christian sexual practices such as pre-marital abstinence. Winner argues that the essentially damaged and dangerous nature of these practices does not preclude them from being divine gifts that Christians can and should continue to perform. Instead of rejecting these gifts, she argues we ought to 'depristinate' them from the assumption that they will mechanistically lead to human flourishing and rehabilitate them, working against the grain of the pain that they characteristically cause while acknowledging that these practices will not be perfected until (within a Christian theological perspective) the return of Christ. A sexual pedagogy shaped in this way would lead to the presentation of the 'gift' of Christian sexual ethics in ways that are immediately transparent and aware of the potentialities for the gift to be destructive in our giving and receipt of it. The concept of depristination could also apply to other religious and non-religious ethics that may inflict similar sorts of 'characteristic damage'. The idea of depristination also aligns neatly with postcritical pedagogy's cynicism about the cruel optimisms of social justice implicit in critical pedagogy. The 'gift' of a particular form of sexual knowledge, be it negotiating consent, cultivating good communication with a partner, exercising abstinence, practicing 'safe sex' – these are all practices valued within both contradicting and overlapping visions of good/ethical sex and relationships. The 'giving' of the gift – teaching – requires the *full* giving of the gift in such a way that the full demands of the ethical practice are made clear, and sensitive to the receiver of the gift and the context within which it is received (Biesta, 2013).

4.5.4 Postsecular sexuality education and public vs private religion

At this point it is worth considering how the ethical goals I am arguing for align with the overall postsecular sensibility of my reimagination of sexuality education. Throughout this chapter so far, I have been arguing for the importance of teaching about both religious and non-religious sexual ethics. One of the characteristic moves of postsecular theory is the troubling of the clear divisions between religion and non-religion and of the idea that religion is increasingly a private/not public matter. Indeed, in so-called ‘private’ church youth settings, Christian groups can no longer assume or expect a consistent Christian ‘worldview’ within which sexual ethics can sit. Even in the case of relatively ‘highly religious’ young people in this sample, recognizably non-religious sexual ethics have a force that both co-operates with and problematizes theological ethics. Similarly, in so called ‘public’ British schools one can rarely assume the presence of monolithic sexual moral cultures in sex education lessons. In many cases, sexuality education classrooms could accurately be described as forms of interreligious dialogue.

Educational research is increasingly engaging with the postsecular as a way of engaging the entanglements of educational and religious sensibilities as well as the persistent presence of religious issues in the politics of schooling. Though much of this literature concerns issues around religious education, David Lewin’s work takes a more theoretical approach, addressing religious categories of attention, union and submission and noting their resonances with and challenges to current educational paradigms (2017). I strongly agree with Lewin’s argument that education is always already bound up with some notion of transcendence, and that this should be accepted rather than attempted to be overcome through use of concepts like indoctrination that require the relegation of religious knowledge to private spaces and the shoring up of the public spaces of schools as ideally governed by evidential rationality.

For postsecular sexuality education with ethical sex and relationships as the goal, following Lewin, the breaking down of this divide means that the approach to religion in the classroom must be to

treat religious traditions and lived experiences of sexuality as having public significance. Note that I am not arguing for religious beliefs about sexuality to necessarily be given priority or for the teacher to place his or her authoritative voice behind any given ethical ideal (besides the legal minimum of consent) – rather it requires the teacher to be able to make clear the authoritative (or non-authoritative) nature of the ideal itself on its own terms. This postsecular pedagogical move of deprivatization thus means making clear the relevance of recognizably religious perspectives for those beyond those of religious identity *and* for the relevance of recognizably non-religious perspectives for those of religious identity.

To this end, a crucial skill for the teacher is the facilitation of a personal response from young people in classrooms, as argued for by Stolberg and Teece in their approach to teaching about religion and science (2011, p. 67). While dialogical approaches are also an important part of getting to grips with an area, the personal response (most likely in written form) is essential to the idea of ‘ethical sex and relationships as the goal’ as it is here that the student considers how the issue relates to their own experience, captures and reflects on their emotional and intellectual response to what has been discussed as well as how something within their life might change as a result. This approach also resists dualistic language of ‘learning about’ vs ‘learning from’ religion (Grimmit, 1987) that arguably arises from a secularist mode of thinking. The emphasis on personal response makes this approach recognizably liberal, while the space it leaves for the ethical demand of religious claims moves it away from the secularist placement of religious sexuality firmly in the private realm.

Finally, having sexuality education take ethical relationships and sex as its goal may, on face value, seem to contradict the postcritical pedagogical principle of bracketing any extrinsic aims for education. However, postsecular ethics preserves the radical openness afforded by postcritical pedagogy because it does not prescribe exactly what ethical ideals *should* be ascribed to (while

noting legalities), only that the demands of various ethical ideals *including* religious ones be studied as carefully as possible and a response facilitated.

4.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have set out a reimagination of sexuality education developed using four themes from my biographic narrative study with six Christian young men on their experiences of and learning about sexuality and relationships. This can now be neatly summarized in a single sentence:

“A postsecular, postcritical, relational sexuality education pedagogy drawing on pluralized sexual knowledges for the goal of ethical sex and relationships”

Before summarizing the chapter and thesis as a whole, I will first make some evaluative comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach for supporting the overall argument of this thesis.

4.6.1 Evaluating the methodological approach

In reflection on this project as a whole, I consider BNIM to have been very effective for answering my research questions and meeting the aims of this thesis. Its psychosocial orientation balanced attentiveness to the individual case with wider concerns for developing the theoretically and conceptually challenging cross-case themes that enabled the constructive arguments made in this thesis. BNIM’s historical emphasis on the mutating nature of religious sexual subjectivity allowed for a rich and textured analysis that worked strongly as a corrective to the more static approaches to youthful religious sexualities in the literature. Further, BNIM also allowed me to resist reduction to religious identity categories, pointing beyond Christian lived experience as shored up against other cultural forces towards its mutual entanglements, drawing attention to the role of the conditions of postsecularity in fractured religious sexual subjectivities.

However, BNIM is a demanding method requiring a lot from both interviewer and interviewee. In reflecting on the interviews both immediately after and during transcription I found a number of inconsistencies in my use of the method. For example, in a number of cases I came to realize that I had missed the opportunity to ask about something that was clearly of great importance to the participant, or else had spent too long pushing on something that I found interesting but the participant had no desire to discuss. Further, some participants responded positively to the narrative focus of the BNIM interviewing style, whilst in other cases it seemed like the young men were trying to answer the ‘question behind my question’ – what they *really* thought I was asking in asking for narrative detail. While no interview is ever conducted ‘perfectly’, these all factor in to the construction of my data and played a significant role in shaping my findings.

4.6.1.1 The limitations of the ‘use’ of BNIM

Because I have taken a substantial portion of my thesis to develop constructive arguments for practice based on the themes developed, I spent some time reflecting on the epistemology of narratives and what can be claimed on the basis of BNIM research. This led me to consider the role of performativity in the narratives and how this might introduce limits and caveats to the kinds of constructive claims that can be made about education from the narrative analysis of explicit and implicit educational ‘needs’.

In section 4.2, I developed some ideas about how sexuality education might engage with religious young people resistant to sexual knowledge. However, the subjectivity of ‘not wanting to know’ grounding my arguments here may well work performatively in the cases to buttress an idealized religious self. The resultant presentation of ‘resisting sexual knowledge’ may have little to do with how one young man actually orient themselves towards desiring knowledge. Further, we must ask whether in cases like Jack and Tim, the adult discourse of ‘lost innocence’ has been gradually

absorbed over late adolescence and reproduced these to give the ‘right answer’ in the interview context. Just as recalled instances of pain, embarrassment, disgust, etc. are used for various shifting projects of self-presentation, we must be aware of the way that all narratives are shaped and re-purposed for different projects (in our case, the project of questioning sexuality education’s engagement with the religious). Narratives of resistance to knowledgeableness may open up the possibilities of critiquing ‘comprehensive’ sexuality education as part of a reactive agenda, controlling adolescent sexuality for the preservation of religious cultures. If those resistant to comprehensive reforms can draw attention to the fact that *the children themselves* are resistant, then this provides significant argumentative clout. Just as sexuality education discourse deploys the knowledge-hungry child to legitimate progressive comprehensiveness, so those resistant to reform are able to draw on the knowledge-resistant child for their own ‘push back’. This frustrates the cause of constructive progress and the uncomfortable notion that multi-culturalism might in fact be a blockage to a liberal moral order creeps back into view.

There is no easy answer to this. Some level of consensus on what sorts of needs and desires are ‘out there’ is needed to mobilize advocacy and activism. Thus it would appear that the figure of the sexual adolescent is always vulnerable to being ossified either as desiring or resisting sexual knowledge. Further work is needed to make this tendency more visible and to work with advocates who are both positive and negative about sexuality education to introduce nuance.

In the same way that narratives of resisting knowledge may be deployed to push back against ‘comprehensiveness’, narratives of youthful abstinence may induce a fear of resurgent moralism associated with now repugnant ‘abstinence only’ approaches. Similarly, the performance of a ‘boundary-desiring self’ could be part of a self-presentation in order to avoid and secure against the anxiety of being perceived as permissive, immoral or ‘un-Christian’ in the interview context. The limitations of these surface appearances must be acknowledged when considering what can be

claimed from my findings. Can claims about the importance of sexuality education engaging the desires for boundaries hold given the possibility of arguing that these desires are merely performative phenomena and not really part of the ongoing structure of religious sexual subjectivity? However, the problem with this line of thinking is that the underlying question is difficult to answer since privileged access to the ‘real’ religious sexual subjectivity is not possible. Indeed, this should also lead us to consider the tendency to think of young people as always ‘desiring freedom’ – couldn’t these desires also be considered as performative rather than a ‘real’ part of subjectivity?

Following these complexities, I argue that there is a great need for a critical awareness about the claims that various sexuality education stakeholders make on the basis of representations of youth sexualities, religious or otherwise. Without this, the representational function of narrative research might end up reinforcing the idea that there is an endless power struggle over youth representation/recognition, between the sexually active, open, tolerant, inclusive, good progressive teen vs the religious, repressed abstinent teen whose sexual ignorance poses a threat. Again, further work needs to examine carefully the processes of representation of youth sexualities through expertise in the attempt to avoid the use of youth as a proxy for political claims.

4.6.2 Chapter and thesis summary

The reimagination of sexuality education set out in this chapter draws together the postsecular sensibilities of the research engaging sexuality education and religion described in section 1.2 and provides new ground for future work to articulate the tensions and possibilities of thinking about sexuality education in this way. It also opens up space for addressing the five negative consequences, noted in section 1.2.11, should progressive sexuality education continue in its secularist bias:

1. Religious young people may not enjoy the same positive outcomes currently agreed on in progressive sexuality education discourse.
2. Religious young people will be less able to engage actively and constructively in sexuality education.
3. As a result of (2), non-religious young people will not benefit from the participation of religious young people in discussion and dialogue taking place in classes.
4. The dominance of secular/progressive liberal sexual ethics underpinning sexuality education will continue, leading to a less democratic and representative classroom.
5. Wider cultural view of SE as a secularist project reinforced leading to greater public antagonism.

In our reimagination of sexuality education, this situation is inverted:

1. Religious young people will be more able to enjoy the positive outcomes currently agreed on in progressive sexuality education discourse.
2. Religious young people will be more likely to engage actively and constructively in sexuality education
3. As a result of (2), non-religious young people will benefit from the improved participation of religious young people in discussion and dialogue
4. The hegemony of a secular sexual ethics will be balanced through the greater presence of religion and religious young people and through the openness of a postcritical pedagogical approach.

5. As these recommendations are implemented clearly and effectively, the cultural perception of various religious communities of sexuality education as a secularist project will gradually erode, reducing public antagonism and widening support for sexuality education.

This concludes my thesis and completes my original contribution to knowledge. However, it should be noted that this chapter has not attempted a full articulation of the possibilities, limitations and challenges for the reimagination I have outlined and there is much more work to be done in developing this. There is also a need for more work with young people of diverse religions and no religions engaging sexual subjectivity through rich, in-depth qualitative methodologies like BNIM. Further work is needed to address the translation of this youth sexualities expertise into policy, paying attention to the tendency of struggles over representation to polarize and reduce youth sexualities to easy binaries.

At the beginning of this thesis I discussed the salience of work on sexuality education and religion in light of the recent Birmingham protests. Although this thesis has not addressed the specific dynamics and implications of related debates around LGBTQ rights and religious freedom, my hope is that it has provided both some idiographic detail and theoretical groundwork as to what a way forward might entail. Above all, the vision of sexuality education I have articulated here does not naively imagine that differences around sexual ethics can be easily elided nor that these differences are always unambiguously enriching for all. Rather it accepts that not only are there ineradicable differences between meanings, experiences and ethical commitments around sexuality in society, but that some of these differences are and will continue to be, wounding, damaging, indeed *fracturing*, in unequal ways to those who are entangled in these controversies. An “agonistic cosmopolitics” for education, as Sharon Todd (2010, p. 213) puts it, does not take the narrative visibility of fractured subjectivities to require a retreat back in to only what we can agree on, nor a

ghettoizing retreat into communities which will shield us from these fractures. Rather it dares to imagine a (sexuality) education in which both the pain and power of radically different sexual ethics and the forms of life they shape are confronted and where classrooms enact democratic co-existence rather than defer it to a later state (Biesta, 2010). Through thinking with both narratives and with ideas around postsecularity, pluralization, postcriticality, relationality and ethics, this thesis has set out just such an imagination, indeed a *reimagination*, which must be constantly renewed.

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**Reimagining Postsecular Sexuality Education: A Narrative Study with Heterosexual
Christian Young Men**

Appendices

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Prefatory note: Appendices include Case analysis materials from Mark and Ethan. The thesis references Mark's materials as part of an explanation of BNIM methodology so they are included here. Ethan's analysis materials are provided as supplementary to this, particularly as fieldnotes from Mark's analysis could not be located.

1 Ethical review

1.1 *Application for ethical review (in final form after amendments)*

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW
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Who should use this form:

This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who have completed the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review of Research Self Assessment Form (SAF) and have decided that further ethical review and approval is required before the commencement of a given Research Project.

Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1st September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.

Researchers in the following categories are to use this form:

1. The project is to be conducted by:
 - staff of the University of Birmingham; or
 - postgraduate research (PGR) students enrolled at the University of Birmingham (to be completed by the student's supervisor);
2. The project is to be conducted at the University of Birmingham by visiting researchers.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice.

NOTES:

- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.
- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the [Research Ethics Team](#).

Before submitting, please tick this box to confirm that you have consulted and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages
(<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)
- The University's Code of Practice for Research
(http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW	<i>OFFICE USE ONLY:</i> Application No: Date Received:
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1. TITLE OF PROJECT

Christian young men and sex education: their ordinary ethics in romantic relationships and sexuality

2. THIS PROJECT IS:

University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project

3. INVESTIGATORS

a) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: <small>Title / first name / family name</small>	Dr. Tonie Stolberg
Highest qualification & position	DPhil Lecturer
School/Department	Education
Telephone:	
Email address:	

Name: <small>Title / first name / family name</small>	Dr. Sarah Hall
Highest qualification & position	PhD, Lecturer
School/Department	Education
Telephone:	
Email address:	

b) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: <small>Title / first name / family name</small>	
Highest qualification & position	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

c) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student

Name of	Joshua Heyes	Student	
Course of	PhD Education	Email	
Principal	Tonie Stolberg		

Name of student:		Student No:	
Course of study:		Email	
Principal			

4. ESTIMATED START OF Date: **PROJECT**

ESTIMATED END OF Date: **PROJECT**

5. FUNDING

List the funding sources (including internal sources) and give the status of each source.

1.2 Funding Body	1.2.1 <i>Approved/Pending /To be submitted</i>
ESRC	Approved

If you are requesting a quick turnaround on your application, please explain the reasons below (including funding-related deadlines). You should be aware that whilst effort will be made in cases of genuine urgency, it will not always be possible for the Ethics Committees to meet such requests.

6. SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.

Purpose

- Offer a new understanding of how Christian young men aged 16-18 are making sense out of romantic relationships and sexuality by using narrative research methods to examine their ethics in practice.
- Make an original contribution to academic and political debates about sexuality education by addressing a gap in the literature concerning religious young people's experiences.
- Show how the secular assumptions of sex education programmes interact with the religious assumptions of Christian young people's sexual ethics in practice.
- Contribute to a growing public and academic awareness of the unique challenges of Christian young people in contemporary England vis a vis romantic relationships and sexuality.
- Contribute to the discussion about how statutory RSE in England might be made faith-sensitive and religion-appropriate.

Background rationale

The project began with an engagement with the academic literature and political debates around sex education, attending specifically to the place of religion in these discourses, which found that there were several concerns about a lack of understanding of young people's lived experiences in relation to the issues of how sex education should proceed. However, even where there was academic engagement with lived experience in this way, religious voices remained conspicuously absent. Further, in the few cases where religious voices were included, methods did not engage with the personal meanings of the young people's religious identity, beliefs and practices. Thus, this project was designed to engage with this lacuna. The recent announcement that relationships and sex education (RSE) be made statutory in England by 2019 has made this project particularly timely.

Main Research Issue

Christian young men's ordinary ethics in romantic relationships and sexuality.

Sub-questions

How do Christian young men describe their experiences of romantic relationships and sexuality?

What are the turning points in Christian young men's narratives of romantic relationships and sexuality?

How do Christian young men justify the decisions they make in romantic relationships and sexuality?

How do Christian young men make sense of their personal development in relation to romantic relationships and sexuality?

Expected outcomes

- Elicit debate and discussion about problematic secular assumptions to sex education and how these might be addressed.
- Impact on how statutory RSE in England can be made religiously appropriate.
- Understand how the approach can be extended to other religious perspectives.

7. CONDUCT OF PROJECT

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used

The theoretical framework underlying the research methodology is narrative theory. Narrative theory assumes that stories are one of the primary ways that we make sense of our lives.

Narrative research falls within the traditions of qualitative, interpretative social research. It provides methods that allow us to engage with people's personal narratives in order to understand their lived experience and its meanings. The data collection method to be used is narrative interviewing, which first aims to elicit personal stories in which the participant talks without interruption, and then moves to a semi-structured format, aiming to ask questions that interrogate that narrative, drawing out further detail and meaning. In fitting with the depth of analysis required for interpretative narrative research, the sample will be small (n=8). This limits the significance of the study findings in terms of generalizability. However, the small sample size is necessary given the sensitivity of the subject combined with a methodological approach prioritizing in-depth, contextual and holistic understandings of each individual case.

Narrative analysis methods examine the processes by which people bring together disparate memories, reflections, opinions, beliefs, arguments, justifications etc to create meaningful narratives. The data collected will focus on the way that specific 'turning points' in narratives of relationships and sexuality reveal the 'ordinary ethics' of Christian young men. Following the process of recruitment, focus group and orientation meeting (see below), two audio recorded interviews will be undertaken with each participant:

First Recorded Interview

Focusing on their experiences with romantic relationships and sexuality.

Prompt question: "I would like you to tell me your story in relation to romantic relationships and sexuality, perhaps starting from the point at which you first began to think of yourself as a Christian, up until today. Take as much time as you need, I'm just going to listen to you initially. I will be taking a few notes so that when you've finished telling me your story I can come back and ask any questions I want to ask."

Follow up questions: Elicit further narrative detail and new narratives connected to first story.

Second Recorded Interview

Based on top three most significant challenges identified by each individual participant during orientation meeting (see below).

Prompt Questions: "Tell me about a challenge that you have faced, or are facing, in the

8. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS?

Yes

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

If you have answered NO please go to Section 18. If you have answered YES to this question please complete all the following sections.

9. PARTICIPANTS AS THE SUBJECTS OF THE RESEARCH

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

Sample size: n=8

Age of participants: 16-18

Gender of participants: Male

Location: Focus groups will take place at various church youth groups around the midlands. Orientation meetings will take place in a coffee shop, again in various locations. First interviews will take place in an appropriate public location such as a church building. Second interviews will take place in the same locations as the first interviews.

Affiliations: Participants will all be regular attendees at a Christian church youth group. It is expected that all participants will self-identify as Christians.

10. RECRUITMENT

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student).

Note: Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

There will be five stages to recruitment by the PGR:

1) Email to Christian church youth leaders asking for registrations of interest, using contact database supplied by the Youthscape Centre for Research (<https://www.youthscape.co.uk/research>).

2) Arrange and meet with youth leaders that express an interest in participating, to explain the project and negotiate access (**attached**).

3) For those groups agreeing to participate, the PGR will run an informal focus group for Christian young men age 16-18 as part of the youth group's normal, weekly youth provision. The focus group will be a discussion of their own challenges in relationships and sexuality, and will also be an opportunity for young people to register their interest in further participation, by providing their contact details and taking a letter with further information about the project (**attached**).

Prompt Question for focus group discussion: "What challenges are you facing in the area of relationships and sexuality?"

Follow up questions: Draw out detail and significance of challenges mentioned.

It is important to note that the focus group is *only part of the recruitment strategy* and any data collected from this (e.g. field notes) will be deleted and not be used as part of the study.

4) PGR to meet one-to-one, orientation meeting with any interested young people: to build rapport, explain the background to the project in more detail, and general orientation to the interview format; including an explanation of the kinds of questions they will be asked and what they will be expected to talk about (**attached**).

11. CONSENT

a) Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the consent.

Potential participants will be given three opportunities to hear and ask questions about the details of the project before data collection begins:

- 1) the initial focus groups
- 2) via email/text communication with PGR once initial interest has been shown
- 3) the orientation meetings

At each of these points the PGR will make clear the key aspects of the research process: such as anonymization, right to withdraw and the need for their full informed consent. Due to the extended time-scale over which it is envisaged the study will have to be undertaken, there will ample time for participants' questions to be addressed and so give their considered assent.

During the orientation meetings, the PGR will also review the participant information sheet in some detail, making clear important formal requirements such as ownership and use of data and rights to withdrawal, before asking them to sign the consent form (**attached**).

Note: Attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.

b) Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?

No

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this feedback.

N/A

12. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the research. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

Participants will be given the transcript of their own interviews.

Participants will also be sent an electronic copy of the interim report for Youthscape, due for completion by December 2018.

13. PARTICIPANT WITHDRAWAL

- a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw their data, both during the data collection, and for up to two weeks after the collection has finished. This will be outlined clearly on the participant information sheet, which will be explained point-by-point as part of the first one-to-one orientation meeting.

- b) Explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

During data collection: If participants withdraw during the data collection process, then if they wish, their data will be removed from the study.

After the data collection: Participants will be sent a transcript of their interview 1 week afterwards. They will then have another 1 week to read and consider whether they will be happy for their data to be used. After this, they will not be able to withdraw their data. This condition will be explained clear as part of the process of obtaining valid consent.

14. COMPENSATION

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

- i) Financial
Yes No

- ii) Non-financial Yes No

If **Yes** to **either** i) or ii) above, please provide details.

N/A

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

N/A

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

a) Will all participants be anonymous?

Yes No

b) Will all data be treated as confidential?

Yes No

Note: Participants' identity/data will be confidential if an assigned ID code or number is used, but it will not be anonymous. Anonymous data cannot be traced back to an individual participant.

Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Steps taken to ensure confidentiality:

Participant names, and any other personal names given in the interviews, will be anonymized with a pseudonym chosen by either the participant or PGR

Institutional (e.g. church, youth group) names will be anonymized.

Geographical areas and locations will be anonymized, though the reports will indicate that the research takes place in the Midlands region.

Because of the likelihood of youth leaders and perhaps peers reading the Youthscape research report, special care will be taken to remove or alter extraneous details not relevant to the analysis (such as references to hobbies or interests) that may lead to the identification of the individual.

Note that only the PGR will see the original transcripts before the process of anonymization. The full anonymized transcripts will only be read by the participant (and only their own transcript), the researcher and the supervisors.

If participant anonymity or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

N/A.

16. STORAGE, ACCESS AND DISPOSAL OF DATA

Describe what research data will be stored, where, for what period of time, the measures that will be put in place to ensure security of the data, who will have access to the data, and the method and timing of disposal of the data.

Data to be collected are the audio recordings of the two interview sessions for each participant, and the transcriptions of these recordings. While the project is ongoing, data will be stored on the hard-drive of a password protected computer.

Following the University of Birmingham's code of practice for research, data will be preserved and accessible in an online data storage service for ten years following the conclusion of the research project.

17. OTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED? e.g. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks or NHS R&D approvals.

YES NO NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, please specify.

The PGR will need to apply for a DBS check as part of their work with the church youth groups in collaboration with Youthscape.

18. SIGNIFICANCE/BENEFITS

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

This research will be a significant and original contribution to the understanding of young Christian lives in contemporary Britain.

The small sample and in-depth nature of the interviewing and analysis process makes this an innovative and powerful methodological approach that has great potential for use beyond this study.

This research will contribute towards the development of faith-sensitive RSE (see above) in the UK through its rich and in-depth data and data analysis/interpretation, by fostering a more engaged understanding of religious young people's relational and sexual sense-making.

This research will be of personal benefit to the participants in giving them time and space to reflect and process their religious and relationship development and growth, giving ample opportunity for increased self-understanding.

19. RISKS

a) Outline any potential risks to **INDIVIDUALS**, including research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap

There is the possibility that the interview process may raise issues that participants find uncomfortable or distressing, as the project asks them to engage with potentially upsetting and difficult memories or current situations. The PGR will make it clear to the participants during the orientation interview as part of the process of consent, the kinds of things that may be discussed, giving them plenty of time to consider whether they would be happy to share personal information of this nature. Further, the PGR will have a sheet of national or local helplines/websites offering support to young people that reflect the possible issues that might be raised.

There is the possibility that concerning information could be disclosed in the course of the

b) Outline any potential risks to **THE ENVIRONMENT and/or SOCIETY** and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.

N/A

20. ARE THERE ANY OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE RESEARCH?

Yes No

If yes, please specify

There is a possibility, due to the religious setting and context of this research, that participants will understand this research as part of their religious development. The PGR will make it clear to participants that they are a researcher interested in them and their experiences, and is not present in the capacity of a youth leader/Christian pastor. However, it will be noted in youth leader recruitment letter that the researcher is also an experienced youth worker. If required, further clarification will be given during the communication with youth leaders that he is not operating in a pastoral capacity.

21. EXPERT REVIEWER/OPINION

You may be asked to nominate an expert reviewer for certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

1.3 Name
1.4 Contact details (including email address)
Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability

22. CHECKLIST

Please mark if the study involves any of the following:

- Vulnerable groups, such as children and young people aged under 18 years, those with learning disability, or cognitive impairments
- Research that induces or results in or causes anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, or poses a risk of harm to participants (which is more than is expected from everyday life)
- Risk to the personal safety of the researcher
- Deception or research that is conducted without full and informed consent of the participants at time study is carried out
- Administration of a chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants.
- Production and/or use of genetically modified plants or microbes
- Results that may have an adverse impact on the environment or food safety
- Results that may be used to develop chemical or biological weapons

Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

	ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
Recruitment advertisement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participant information sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consent form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interview Schedule	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.
- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

Name of principal investigator/project supervisor:

Date:

Tonie Stolberg
25/01/2018

Please now save your completed form, print a copy for your records, and then email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

1.2 Letter confirming full ethical approval

Dear Dr Stolberg and Dr Hall

Re: “Christian young men and sex education: their ordinary ethics in romantic relationships and sexuality”

Application for Ethical Review ERN_17-1180

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee’s attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University’s Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University’s ethics webpages (available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx>) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx>) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University’s guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University’s H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards

Susan Cottam

Research Ethics Officer

Research Support Group

C Block Dome

Aston Webb Building

University of Birmingham

Edgbaston B15 2TT

Tel: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Web: <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/RSS/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/index.aspx>

Please remember to submit a new [Self-Assessment Form](#) for each new project.

You can also email our team mailbox ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk with any queries relating to the University's ethics process.

Click [Research Governance](#) for further details regarding the University's Research Governance and Clinical Trials Insurance processes, or email researchgovernance@contacts.bham.ac.uk with any queries relating to research governance.

Notice of Confidentiality:

The contents of this email may be privileged and are confidential. It may not be disclosed to or used by anyone other than the addressee, nor copied in any way. If received in error please notify the sender and then delete it from your system. Should you communicate with me by email, you consent to the University of Birmingham monitoring and reading any such correspondence.

2 Recruitment materials

2.1 Website content for 'The yourstory project'

Home

Welcome to the yourstory project website. Here you'll find information about the project, updates and contact details.

The yourstory project is a research study, undertaken in partnership with the Youthscape Centre for Research and as part of a PhD at the University of Birmingham School of Education. It aims to improve our understanding of Christian young men's lives by providing a listening, judgement free space for them to tell their stories of romantic relationships and sexuality. We are working with Christian church youth groups of diverse denominations to see how Christian young men from different contexts and backgrounds are navigating the complex and difficult issues related to their faith and their sexual/relational lives.

The research involves young people participating in two separate audio-recorded interviews. The first interview focuses on supporting the young person in telling their story in as much detail as they are comfortable with. The second interview is more conversational, picking up on key parts of the first interview to gain further understanding. Please take a look at the different sections of this site for more information on the project and why you should consider participating.

This project is open to all Christian church youth groups attended by any number of Christian young men aged 16-18.

Why Participate?

Support young people's reflection

Christian young men rarely get the chance for in-depth reflection on their faith and sexuality/relationships. Being able to reflect in a non-judgemental and listening environment with anonymity is an opportunity to support their own growth and development in this area, and we expect the research to be a beneficial experience for them as individuals.

Support UK Youth Leaders

Issues of faith and sexuality and relationships are challenging issues faced by youth leaders. This research aims to support youth leaders by using the knowledge and understanding gained to inform practice. This will be done through an accessible and practical report and recommendations that will be produced in collaboration with Youthscape and circulated to Youthscape's wider network of youth leaders.

Support UK Schools

As well as supporting churches and youth leaders, the knowledge and understanding gained from this project will help inform the practice of faith-sensitive school-based relationships and sex education. This will be done through articles and reports published as part of the PhD work, influencing educational policy and practice.

The Risks...

This research potentially touches on personally difficult and sensitive issues, and it is possible that young people will talk about things they have not told anyone before. While the research itself is completely confidential, we will be checking with young people that there is someone they feel they can talk to, if they want to 'debrief' after the interview. This may, or may not include their own youth workers/youth groups or others in a church context. Any disclosures relating to a risk of significant harm would be dealt with according to our ethical protocol (put online or lay out the key info on another page).

We will work closely with you as leaders to make sure that the research is conducted in line with your churches values and approach to youth work, and that young people participating are made aware of any support they can access following the research.

What Will Happen?

Recruitment

An important principle underlying this project is that it is undertaken in partnership with you as a youth leader. As such, recruiting participants from your youth group could take a number of forms, and will be agreed in discussion following what you think would be most appropriate and effective. However, in my experience one of the best ways is for me to run a discussion for any young men aged 16-18 that focuses on issues related to faith, relationships, and sexuality, which also gives me a chance to introduce the research. Young people can then register their interest by leaving their contact details with me and taking a participant information sheet.

After this, I will arrange to meet up one-to-one with any interested participants to explain more about the research and to answer any questions they might have. Hopefully at this stage they would make a final decision whether they wish to give their consent to participate or if they are not interested.

The Interviews

In the first interview I will begin by asking the young person to tell their story of relationships and sexuality, in their own words, taking as much time as they need. As they speak I make notes of some of the key words and phrases they use. These form the basis of the second part of the interview, where I ask for more narrative detail to their story using their own key phrases.

The second interview is more conversational, and is based on a brief analysis of the first interview transcript where the most important themes are identified and their importance, relevance and meaning discussed in more detail.

Follow-up

If any sensitive or difficult things have been brought up, appropriate sources of support can be identified. I will have an info sheet with phone numbers/website on it laying out access to support, and I will check at the end of interview whether the young person feels they want to debrief, who they might want to do that, and whether they would like me to help them make that first contact.

Following the interview, I will send an anonymized transcript of both interviews to the participants to check they are happy that it is accurate. Participants have four weeks to notify me if they wish to withdraw their data from the study, after which they will be unable to do so.

Who is the Researcher?

Josh Heyes is an academic researcher and experienced youth worker. His first degree from Nottingham University was in philosophy and theology. He left uni to spend a year in the Cotswolds pioneering youth and children's work as a Scripture Union intern. He then returned to Nottingham, leading a youth outreach project on a deprived estate while undertaking further study in theology. Since then he has been busy getting married, having a baby, and starting his PhD in Education while focusing on research and youth work with Christian young men. He even finds time to play hockey and jazz saxophone...

MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT

We have called this project 'yourstory' because we want to centralize the experiences of the young people themselves, as told in their own words. Narrative research methods avoid a 'questionnaire' style approach to interviewing where the researcher sets the agenda of what is talked about, and instead centre the young persons story, with the researcher facilitating further detail.

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research council under Grant number x

This research has gained ethical approval from the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Committee, available on request.

This research project is supervised by Dr Tonie Stolberg [REDACTED] and Dr Sarah Hall [REDACTED]

2.2 Recruitment email to youth groups via Youthscape database

Dear Youth Leader,

Some time ago you expressed interest in being part of the work of Youthscape by participating in research that helps to give young people the best social, emotional and spiritual landscape on which to build their lives and achieve their potential.

The Youthscape Centre for Research have agreed to support a research project and you now have an opportunity to participate in this study which is entitled: **Christian young men's experiences of romantic relationships and sexuality**

Sex and relationships are some of the most difficult and complex aspects of young people's faith development. **The goal of the research is to better understand this complexity**; especially how young people are making sense of the many conflicting messages they are receiving about the meaning of relationships and sexuality.

The study is for **Christian young men aged 16-18**, and will involve them participating in **audio recorded interviews**. In these interviews, they will be encouraged to talk about their experiences of romantic relationships and sexuality; in particular the challenges they have faced and how they have drawn on their faith in those situations.

The project is conducted by Josh Heyes, an experienced youth worker and PhD researcher funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and Dr. Tonie Stolberg, Project Supervisor at the University of Birmingham's School of Education.

The research findings will be used as part of a Youthscape report on young people's dating and discipleship. They will also be used as part of a larger PhD project examining the relationship between faith and school based sex and relationships education. Other youth groups are also being contacted and the research will include a range of young people's experiences from different denominations and backgrounds.

If you would be interested in participating, please RSVP as soon as is convenient to Josh directly on [REDACTED]. We understand that this research engages with a potentially sensitive and difficult subject, so if you have any questions about the project, please do not hesitate to ask. The research has earned ethical approval from the University of Birmingham.

Yours,

Lucie Shuker

Director of Youthscape Centre of Research

2.3 *Direct recruitment email to youth groups*

We need your help with new research on how Christian young men navigate issues related to faith and sex/relationships.

Dear Youth Leader,

I am getting in touch to invite you to participate in an exciting research project developed in partnership with the Youthscape Centre for Research and as part of a PhD at the University of Birmingham: **'the yourstory project'**.

Relationships and sexuality are some of the most difficult and complex aspects of young people's faith development. **The goal of the research is to better understand this complexity**, especially how Christian young men are making sense of the many conflicting messages they are receiving. Listening to and understanding young people's experiences will help inform effective ministry in this important area of discipleship.

The study is for **Christian young men aged 16-18** and will involve them participating in **two audio recorded interviews**. These interviews aim to create a listening and non-judgemental space for them to tell their story.

The Youthscape Centre for Research exists to develop new research evidence that can inform practice. **Findings from this project will contribute to the development of a practical and accessible report** helping youth workers engage with young people.

The research will be conducted by myself (Josh), an experienced youth worker and PhD researcher. The project has been approved by the University of Birmingham ethics committee.

I am looking for youth-workers who would be interested in hosting a discussion, and giving their young men the opportunity to take part in the research.

If you would be interested in participating, **please RSVP to this email address** as soon as possible. The next step will be meeting up to discuss the research and to ask any questions you might have.

Please take a look at [the project website](#) which contains more detail about the research.

I hope you will be interested in being a part of this important and exciting project!

Yours,

Josh Heyes

2.4 Recruitment session notes

Hi everyone my name is Josh... researcher and youth worker... thanks for coming today... hope you get something...

Wondering why you're here... I'm travelling around the country to different... meeting guys like you...

I'm looking for people to tell their story as part of a research project on romantic relationships... yourstoryproject

Now I'll tell you in a bit... first my story

Me

I always found this area of my faith difficult and complicated... never felt like I figured it out as a teenager

Started to do youth work... other guys were struggling... wanted to support them

This project is about that... I want to understand better the issues that you guys face so youth workers and schools can support you better

So that's a bit about why I'm here. But before I say any more I want to hear a bit about the issues you face...

Discussion

I'm going to tell you a quick story in a minute so we can have a discussion but first I want to give you a definition of what I mean by romantic relationships and sexuality. By romantic relationships I do mean the obvious dating/boyfriend girlfriend relationships, but I also mean experiences of attraction towards people, or people being attracted towards you, being rejected, rejecting other people: I want to include all these different experiences in this definition.

And by sexuality I do mean all the physical aspects – from kissing all the way to having sex, but also sexual feelings, your own ideas about what is good or bad sexually speaking, what it means, your own preferences: again I want to be as inclusive as possible in my definition of anything to do with sexuality.

So now onto that story:

Luke is a 17 year old guy who lives on the outskirts of a big city in England. He has 2 brothers and a sister and likes doing all the things that 17 year old guys like doing – going out with his friends, playing video games, sport and music. His parents are Christians and he enjoys going to church and the church youth group and has friends there, though he doesn't have many Christian friends at school. He would definitely call himself a Christian and tries to live his life in a way pleasing to God.

Now I want to ask you a question: what sorts of challenges do you think Luke faces in the area of sexuality and relationships as a Christian?

Review

Expand each point

Continue

So I said at the start this was about you telling your story. What I'm looking for is people willing to tell their own stories, in their own words of their experience of sexuality and relationships.

Some here thinking fine... others difficult... tough relationship, no relationship... confused over things mentioned...

Some thinking who is this man and why all personal?

But no matter where you are at... your story is of great value.

You might not feel you have much... no relationship... not done well in this area...

But wherever you are at, your story is powerful... others can benefit hugely from hearing it...

I know from experience when people tell stories... power to change their own life and others lives

A big part of this project is that your story can help youth leaders better understand what its like to be a Christian guy facing the challenges you do... many younger than you...

But not just about others... I never had a chance to reflect, to look back and see how shaped... you can do just that... very beneficial.

Participating

Probably lots of questions about participating... not a list of questions or tick-box.... Two interviews, different days, 1 hour, non-judgemental and listening space to talk about your experiences

Might sound daunting! ... guys I have interviewed have got a lot out of it... not going to tell you what you should or shouldn't have done... here to listen and help you tell your story.

Anonymization... untraceable... completely safe and non-judgemental space

Final pitch

Some thinking wow, yes... some unsure... some thinking weirdo, get me out of here. Each one of these is fine!

If have even small interest... leave details... not signing up for anything... means I can contact you by text ... if you then choose to participate great but then might decide no – OK.

Really excited about this project and you guys being a part of it, don't miss out...

Thanks for time and attention... let you go... details sheet over there.

2.5 Participant information sheet

Dear Potential Participant,

Thanks for being interested in this project!

Your story is valuable. It is unique to you, but many other people are currently facing the same challenges in the area of relationships and sexuality. Telling your story is a great opportunity to reflect on your experiences and understand your own personal journey. **Telling your story can also help others** to understand what it is like to deal with these difficult and complex issues. The yourstory project will bring different people's experiences together to help schools, parents and churches **understand and better support Christian young men** like you.

Over the next few months I will be interviewing Christian young men aged 16-18 from churches all over the country, asking them about **their faith journey, their experiences of relationships and sexuality**, and some of the **challenges they are facing** in these areas. This is an invitation for you to be a part of this, **an invitation to tell your story and make your voice heard.**

Participating in the project will involve **meeting up on two different occasions.** First, I will be in touch via phone or email to answer any questions you have and make sure you are happy to meet. The two meetings will involve **audio recorded interviews** (the main part of the project) that put your story centre stage. Each will probably last about **45-60 minutes**, but this is flexible.

No-one else apart from me will hear the audio recordings and they will be stored securely on a password protected computer. **Your interview will then be anonymized**, which means I will remove anything that might reveal your identity - obviously your name, but also the name of your church, the location, and things like that. I will be doing an **in-depth analysis** of the stories that you have told. I might use quotes from your interviews in things I write like **reports and academic papers.**

Your story is valuable - telling it can bring great benefit both to yourself and to others. I hope you will still be interested in participating, but if you don't like the sound of it, **please feel completely free to opt out at this stage** – there is no pressure whatsoever.

If you have any questions at all please feel free to contact me via phone ([REDACTED]), text, or email: [REDACTED] If you've left your details with me, I'll be getting in touch at some point in the next few days to find out if you are still interested and to arrange the first meet-up.

Looking forward to meeting you!

Josh Heyes (Researcher)

2.6 *Participant consent form*

Full Information Sheet – Consent

One of the most important aspects of this research is that it is done with your **full, informed consent**. Your taking part in the study is **voluntary**, and there will be **no penalty** of any kind if you no longer want to participate.

To remind you – this project aims to **collect your stories** about the challenges you face in the area of relationships and sexuality, and use them to understand how you (and other Christian young men) are making sense out of your experiences.

The project involves an **orientation meeting** (not audio recorded) explaining more about the research project, and **two separate audio recorded interviews** that will focus on your faith background, learning about relationships and sex, and some challenges you have faced/are facing.

I will then be conducting an **in-depth analysis** on all the data I have gathered, looking for similarities and differences between participants in order to build up a bigger picture.

Once you give your consent by signing this form, this does not mean you are 'locked in'. **You have the full right to withdraw from the research** at any point during the orientation and interview process, and there will be no penalty should you wish to do so.

Some of the topics of discussion may be sensitive, personal, difficult, or just awkward. You have the full right to 'pass' on any question or topic area and should not feel like you have to talk about anything that you do not want to talk about.

However, your stories will be potentially very beneficial in helping youth leaders support Christian young people better, through improving our understanding of the complexity of relationships and sexuality in your own and others' experiences.

I will send you the **full transcription** of your interview **1 week after**, for you to check you are happy for this data to be used.

You can withdraw at any stage. I will permanently delete all the data I have collected about you (unless you are happy for me to keep it) – audio recordings, interview transcripts, etc and your information will not be used in the project.

Please be aware that **you will not be able to withdraw your consent and your data** after 2 weeks following the final recorded interview.

No one will hear the recorded interviews, and the interview transcriptions will be fully anonymized. Your data will be analysed and extracts used in the **project report** for Youthscape, my own **PhD thesis**, and potentially in **future academic publications**.

As part of my agreement with the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council, which is funding this research, I will be **depositing the interview transcripts** in a secure, online data repository three months after the end of the research.

Signed..... Print Name.....
Date.....

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University of Birmingham Research Archive
e-theses repository

Appendices 3 and 4 (pages 338 - 566) have been redacted from this thesis.