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Understanding Sexual Consent

A Participatory Approach with Young People

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*Thesis submitted for PhD examination at the University of Sussex
August 2018*

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Summary

Understanding Sexual Consent: A participatory approach with young people

This research aims to co-produce an account of consent that is congruent with young people's everyday lives and which will enhance educational agendas for consent education. By combining participatory research with feminist youth work and informal education methods the research has generated data across seven different educational settings with diverse groups of young people and practitioners with different professional backgrounds. In line with participatory action research principals the research questions, methods and outputs have been developed in collaboration with educators and young people. A total of 103 young people age 13-25 contributed directly to the research by taking part in group work, interactive activities and creative research processes.

This study finds that young people speak about sexual consent and violation along a spectrum; avoiding labelling things 'rape' unless there was overt violence or if overt rejection was expressed. The research also confirms previous research (Holland et al. 1998; Carmody, 2015) on the persistence of heteronormative and gendered double standards and stereotyping in what young people expect from, and how they judge, sexual encounters. Age and experience are important in shaping how young people engage with some of the more complex elements of sexual negotiation. The personal and professional background of educators is also central to how they approach the challenge of teaching sexual consent as are the settings in which education takes place.

Confirming the findings of other recent studies (Coy et al. 2013, Brady et al. 2017) the study shows consent to be a complex concept with a range of different and sometimes unhelpful meanings - yet goes further in offering an alternative model of teaching and talking about sexual negotiation. Framing consent as a binary that involves getting and giving a 'yes' or a 'no' is not sufficient for teaching young people about the situated realities of sexual negotiation in different contexts. Talking and teaching about the grey areas may seem a difficult task, but this research argues that this is essential. The overall argument of the thesis is that exposing awkwardness, embracing ambiguity, and acknowledging ambivalence, are key components for enabling

conversations and learning about sexual negotiation in a way that might nurture a shift in sexual cultures of communication.

The thesis concludes with a set of recommendations for practice including the use of specialist educators, moving beyond a focus on legality and binary notions of consent to explore sexual negotiation and communication and the necessity of addressing gendered norms of sexual agency and pleasure. The doctoral research was co-funded by Brook (The UK's largest sexual health and wellbeing charity for young people) and the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth at the University of Sussex.

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Elsie at work. By Endre Herczeg

Frankly this whole thing has been a team effort and if it wasn't for a fabulous network of friends and family to keep me grounded I don't think I'd have pulled it off.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 How this thesis came about: 10 years in sex education

As a young person, I grew up in an area of the UK that had some of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the country. As such, my experience of sex education, and my access to sexual health provision was bolstered and informed by ‘New Labour’s’ teenage pregnancy strategy. My sex education, compared to many, was good. However, it was risk-based and preventative. There was lots of talk and teaching about reproduction, STIs, condoms and the pill, but not much else.

At 15 a friend and I did work experience with the local Youth Service and joined in with the piloting phase for a Sexual Health Roadshow project. We threw sticky willies around the room as an ice breaking exercise, blew up condoms, and learned even more about contraception. We also found out a little bit about our rights to confidentiality as young people if, and when we wanted to access contraception without our parents knowing. Conversations with educators about pleasure and what we, as young women, might actually *want* or *enjoy* were still off the radar.

‘Contraception, contraception, contraception’ seemed to be the mantra of my sex and relationships education (SRE) in both formal and informal spaces. It seemed to work. All of my friends, at the time, knew where and how to access contraception if we needed it and my school year was one of the first for years not to have a pregnant student. Looking back, I cannot remember ever being explicitly taught that sex could or should be pleasurable. My experience of SRE was, as Michelle Fine (1988) would say: missing a fundamental discourse of desire. We were told what was ‘wrong’ – getting pregnant or an STI – but there was no consideration of how we would know what was ‘right’. The idea of ‘waiting for Mr Right’ or ‘just say no’ had just about faded from the educational messages I got during the last few years of formal education. I knew that it was *ok* to have sex but that you should not have sex if you did not want to and that it was wrong to pressure someone into having sex, but the term ‘consent’ would have been alien to me back then.

Fast forward 10 years and I am going into schools and youth clubs to talk to young people and pilot activities about the recently popular topic of *sexual consent*. Since leaving my school in the

North-East, I have developed and honed my skills and experience in youth work, group work, and research. I have worked in HIV/AIDS support and awareness projects in India; I have delivered sexual health outreach as part of targeted youth services in the UK; I have worked with survivors of sexual violence; and had my own personal experiences in both the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ when it comes to sex and relationships.

During my undergraduate in Sociology I came around to the idea that I probably was a feminist and that gender probably was a social construct. I slowly became a more open and active feminist and developed a vocabulary around gender, inequality and sexual pleasure and violence amongst other things. My Masters research, building on my undergraduate dissertation, sought to understand methods of sex education that might address issues of heteronormativity, risk-centeredness and consider the potential for teaching about consent in a sex positive way, i.e. framing it as a process that can enable more positive, pleasurable and ethical sexual interaction rather than as a necessity to avoid the legal ramifications of a non-consensual encounter.

When a studentship advert was forwarded to me with an accompanying message about how I might be able to develop my Masters research further with the guidance and support of those offering the position, I tentatively took the bait. I wrote my application with a project about young people’s sexual health and wellbeing in mind, but with no clear research plan and no clear research questions. Just an enthusiasm to continue learning, and to include young people in this process where possible. I was 23 at the time and keen to emphasise my ‘young personness’ and to develop a ‘youth led’ project. I wanted to do some research that would be interesting and, ideally, useful for the people involved.

I was awarded the studentship, and after some negotiation, additional support was secured from the young people’s sexual health charity, Brook Young People (Brook hereafter¹). As I note in my acknowledgements, this research would not have been possible without the support of Brook and the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) at the University of Sussex. The co-funded and collaborative nature of the research depended on Rachel Thomson’s strong links with Brook and her support for innovative and practice-based research. Together Brook and CIRCY provided me with resources, connections and space for thinking *and* doing. They seemed willing to support my initially enthusiastic and iterative

¹ See Appendix A for a brief overview of Brook

approach to this research and so I started. Firstly by meeting with Brook's CEO and then quickly linked up with and worked alongside the participation groups (P+) and young volunteers at Brook to develop a plan. This was based on what *they* thought was important and needed improving in sexual health and wellbeing education and provision.

Together the P+ group and I noted that recent revelations of child sexual exploitation, adult concerns around 'sexting' and increased awareness about sexual violence had resulted in renewed attention to teaching and talking about consent. Yet the campaigns, education and information available on the topic of consent centre around the legalities of consent, in relation specifically to rape - something that we thought hinders, rather than aids young people to develop their sexual communication. Thus, the topic of 'consent' was chosen as a key focus for the research and I could develop the research accordingly.

Reason and Bradbury note that 'participation is not just a method or process but that it is political' (2006:10). Throughout the thesis I draw on the language, principles and politics of Youth Work, Feminism and Participatory Action Research (PAR) to explain and make meaning of my research encounters. My early work with the participation team and young people at Brook was what Saskia Sassen would refer to as a phase 'before the method' (Sassen, 2013) and was both the spring board and grounding reference point for this research. Throughout the research I have sought young people's input in different ways and listened to, and where possible implemented, their feedback and suggestions. I have consistently referred to and taken my learning with them into the field with other groups of young people and practitioners.

Brook and CIRCY's support and guidance, and my subsequent interaction with young people has resulted in an innovative multimodal study. A study that has comprised of participatory practices in research and education in the form of social action projects, creative activities and illuminating conversations. As a result of this I find myself continually learning new things and developing fresh insight into the challenges and possibilities of sex education. During this doctorate, I have entered my second decade of work in sex education. As Smith et al. (2010:) note participatory approaches are both "inspiring and daunting" (407) and there have been moments where I have been both excited by young people's ideas, and anxious about how to enact them. This has been challenging in many ways and yet rewarding. It has made me aware of the active and immediate power of research and I look forward to developing my research, knowledge and practice in the field.

The research process that I will narrate in the following chapters was the outcome of multiple collaborative relationships. However the research story that unfolds is *mine*. I draw from participatory, feminist and auto-ethnographic traditions to provide context and background for how and why certain activities or forms of analysis occurred (Ellis et al. 2011). Youth workers in the In Defence of Youth Work association also note the “essential significance of the youth workers themselves, whose outlook, integrity and autonomy is at the heart of fashioning a serious yet humorous, improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice with young people.” (Davies, 2009). I hope this humour, planning, improvisation and controlled risk taking is visible throughout the thesis. The remainder of this introductory chapter provides a summary of the research. It then outlines and defines some of the terms that will be key throughout the thesis, and finally gives an overview of the structure and what is to come.

1.2 Thesis summary

This Doctoral research was developed collaboratively with young people in response to a collective concern that education about sexual consent needs improving and making more relevant to the lived experiences of younger people. As I will outline in my literature review, most education and campaigns on this topic begin with risk and centre on the legalities of consent representing polarised examples of sexual violation or pleasure. These can be difficult to relate to people’s everyday experiences. Much research on school sex education suggests students report an ongoing dissatisfaction and disconnect with the content developed by adults, often as a result of their concerns (Hughes, 1999; MacDowell and Mitchell, 2006; UKYP, 2013; Wellings and Johnson, 2013). In response to this, Brook has developed a ‘sex positive’ approach to educational provision and campaigns, acknowledging that “a more positive and holistic model of sexual health ... would produce more favourable and gender equitable sexual health outcomes for young people” (McGeeney, 2015:1). Given this sex positive starting point for Brook, and in response to more extreme and thus problematic representations of sexual violation and risk, this research seeks to comprehend and foreground young people’s everyday understandings and experiences of sexual negotiation.

Working through the participation and education teams at Brook, and piloting activities and discussions with groups in Brighton, I have been able to gather data from seven diverse sites. Data has been generated in a range of ways and documented in a variety of media. The research, as I outlined in the introduction, has been participatory from its conception, and uses feminism,

social pedagogy, youth work and participatory action research to inform the epistemological starting point. This has provided me with a rich tool kit for research and practice.

‘Starting where young people are at’ (Davies, 2009) can be understood as the epistemological imperative, which defines the ethical and analytic terrain for the research (Batsleer, 2010a). I view and interact with young people as social agents in and of their own right. I work with the categories and assumptions presented by young people, often noting my reactions and struggles with these, and the learning that we engaged with as a result of these conflicts and pleasures. This approach has resulted in stimulating and exploratory conversations, a variety of project activities and outputs from and with those I worked with. During my practice, I have been able to embrace and explore incongruities between knowledge and practice both in terms of teaching and ‘doing’, rather than simply giving, consent.

During the research I have worked alongside 12 practitioners and directly with 103 young people, aged 13-25, to explore new, engaging ways of teaching and talking about consent. Due to the diversity of the groups, I have encountered different sexual cultures that are shaped by intersections of age, class, culture, race, geographic location and so on. I have also been able to understand the experiences of educators and young people in relation to consent education. As I will argue in this thesis the concerns and constraints that educators experience when teaching mirror the frustration and detachment many young people experience when presented with binary and legal discourses about consent.

The Research questions this research has developed from were as follows:

‘How do young people define ‘consent to sexual activity’ as a concept?’;

‘How do young people negotiate sex and consent?’;

‘What might be involved in an expanded model of consent?’

There was also an interest in how educational definitions and teaching practice relate to young people’s definitions of consent.

Despite the diversity of my participants, there was surprising consistency in the ways in which they initially constructed and spoke about sexual consent, which I characterise as ‘abstract’, (meaning that it was discussed in theory rather than through examples) and ‘binary’ (where something either was, or was not, consensual). By approaching sexual consent from a variety

of angles and considering the experiences of teaching, learning, advocating for and doing consent, this research explores what is 'sayable' about sex and consent by and for different people in different spaces. Recognising the often limited vocabulary people have to draw on when talking about sex, desire and the body, I encouraged exploratory talk (Mercer and Hodgkinson, 2008) through the use of creative research methods. By using tools such as body mapping, continuum and scenario activities I have critically engaged with consent as both a concept and process. Together participants and I have deconstructed common understandings of consent and worked collectively to articulate the nuances of sexual negotiation.

By attempting to avoid static definitions and notions of how to 'do consent properly' I have garnered some thought-provoking and at times contradictory data. I have conceptualised these in terms of ambiguity and awkwardness, suggesting the productivity of understanding sexual negotiation and consent as enactments and achievements that are never complete. The first two empirical chapters 'teaching' and 'learning' clearly reflect the ways that institutions are concerned with non-ambiguous 'absolute' definitions of consent. While the final chapter reflects the lived experiences of attempting to make sense of ambiguity with reference to the more institutionalised and static definitions of consent that are produced through legal frame works and educational agendas in schools, youth clubs and campaigns. Awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence recur as themes that are explored throughout the analysis chapters, and I move towards an argument for acknowledging and embracing ambiguity and awkwardness as inherent and potentially generative aspects of sexual interaction.

In addition to thinking about ambiguous and awkward communication, I show that depictions of consent and negotiation are often highly gendered, something that intersects with class, race, age, disability and ethnicity. In particular, I identify the significance of age and experience as key factors for shaping competent sexual communication and negotiation. I also take time to focus on the ways in which religious and peer cultures can be in tension. I observe that young people's attitudes, agency and interactions are always mediated by the spaces they inhabit and the peer groups they socialize in, thus affecting the scale and scope of their (in)actions. This mediation is at its most constricting during school years, where interaction is often highly public and thus consent, for younger people, needs to be considered in the context of both public and private negotiations.

While I have been able to explore and develop different ways of conceptualising and teaching about consent, the processes that have allowed me to do this have not always been easy. This

research has involved challenges and conflicts between the expectations of different 'stakeholders'. There have been moments in this research where practice has not been as participatory as it could be, and yet other moments where the participatory nature of the work has forced me to explore what I might ordinarily avoid. Research ethics have come into tension at times with the ethics of participation and youth work, and I have had to reflect critically on my roles of researcher, educator and participant and the extent to which I 'bring myself' into the research. The topic, age of participants and more iterative approach to this research mean that this work can be classified as 'high risk' in terms of the categories often employed by research ethics governance. This encouraged me to develop methods of controlled risk taking that balance safeguarding and rights to participation throughout this work. The risks I have taken are due to the privileges afforded by research funding and my association with the well-respected organisation 'Brook'.

Talking and teaching about the 'grey areas' between rape and consent can be a risky and difficult task, one which many schools, teachers and youth practitioners may, understandably, be wary of. Some practitioners may not have the space, support, or confidence to actively problematize binary and legal elements of consent, nor the competence to respond to the questions and awkwardness often present in a sexual health session. It may feel safer to provide a list of 'do's and don'ts'. Yet, like Moira Carmody (2015) I have found that engaging with young people's uncertainty and awkwardness, about wanting or being ready for sex, and answering their questions in a frank and 'adult' way, is far more fruitful and can provoke reflections and transformations in the way people consider, and later enact/embodiment sexual ethics and communication.

At its heart, this thesis demonstrates the generative qualities of conversations about consent which focus less on the legal binary aspects of consent in favour of exploring the complexities of sexual negotiation. I have found, and can illustrate, a disjuncture between common educational and policy discourse about consent and the ways in which it is negotiated and enacted in everyday (sexual) encounters. I have been able to move away from polarised explanations of sex, and sexual violence by defining, deconstructing and then developing an expanded model of a consent using a continuum. By embracing a broader, more youth-centred and less legalistic vocabulary for speaking about and labelling sexual encounters, I have developed an expanded model of consent that includes the significance of ambiguity and awkwardness in young people's sexual experiences and cultures. I argue that in order to cultivate more open sexual communication we must enrich our vocabularies of sex, desire, the body and boundaries to ones

in which we actively acknowledge and address the competing discourses at play in conversations about 'sex' and the complexities of embodied practices and communication. Practitioners need a range of support to develop the confidence and competence to enact controlled risk-taking in pedagogic spaces. This will enable them to support critical thinking and enable young people to develop a more full understanding of sexual ethics and boundaries. Work presented in this thesis has contributed to the development of innovative, digital teaching and learning resources which aim to do just this.

The research proposal that gained ethical approval was a project which sought to understand and utilise participation structures, practices and their impact at Brook through a case study participation project on consent. Yet plans changed in such a way that that the focus and findings are more centred on consent education. The changes to the study, that are detailed in Chapter Four fortunately, enabled me to work with a more diverse range of participants, gain insight into different sexual cultures and to observe different teaching practices.

The findings from this exploration (which include the processes of knowledge production) reflect practices and concerns that are common across Education, Social Work, Youth Work, Sociology, and Childhood and Youth studies. In particular, the ways that teaching and talking about a less binary conception of consent can contribute to, or complicate safeguarding agendas². The research has been timely given the current socio-political climate and a recent shift in awareness and speaking out about sexual violence. SRE is due to become mandatory in schools from September 2019. Therefore, policy makers and educational professionals are paying some attention to issues that relate to childhood sexuality, sexual consent and are considering refreshing SRE curricula. This work is part of a wider body of arguments, campaigns and scholarship calling for a societal acceptance of childhood and youth sexuality, and in doing so recognises that sexuality needs nurturing with more holistic SRE.

² Throughout this thesis I use the term safeguarding to reference practice and policies for preventing harm to children and vulnerable adults. Child protection is part of the safeguarding process and I often use these terms interchangeably. In both instances I draw from the definitions set up in the 'Working together to safeguard children (2018)' which summarises safeguarding as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's health and development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes (HMG, 2018:7)

As well as having scope for informing policy and practice and enhancing the disciplines and professions of social work and education, this research contributes methodological innovation in the interrelated disciplines of Sociology, and Childhood and Youth studies. The research practice and outputs have modelled collaborative, youth-centred research. They highlight the opportunities afforded when plans are developed in conjunction with participants. By contesting notions of consent, ethics and risk, I have enriched a body of scholarship and activism which seeks to de-centre adult agendas for prevention and protection, and foreground children and young people's rights to provision, services, ethics and policies which serve them.

1.3 Talking about/researching sex and bodies

In doing this work I, like many scholars, have experienced a lack of adequate language to talk sociologically, and interpersonally, about embodied experiences and to analyse conversations about sexual practices and negotiation. Janet Holland and colleagues have previously noted that many, young people in particular, are linguistically ill equipped to speak about the body (1994;1998). If and when, people can and do talk of the body, bodies or sex, the available discourses are often either euphemistic, romantic, or highly medicalised (Holland et al. 1998). I found this to be the case in many of my conversations. Sometimes participants and I spoke about sex and sex acts in a disembodied way, or chose certain words over others when describing parts of the body, or even labelling certain encounters. As I depict in the methods chapter, some of the creative methods I used, allowed different conversations and representations to occur.

While doing this research, I found myself reaching for analytical tools including 'discourse', 'scripts', 'practice' and 'performativity', all of which have helped me articulate the complex and interwoven elements of sexual negotiation captured in the multimedia data. Yet, as the thesis progressed I became frustrated with the terminologies through which I framed the research. My attempts to make sense of the data demanded tools that would help me think about embodiment, feelings and flows of often wordless practices. Rather than rejecting my old tools I added to my toolkit, enabling me to think about situations in a range of ways and from different perspectives. The following section presents five of the key terms and tools that I have employed throughout this work outlining my shift from the language of discourse and scripts that characterises much of the tradition of critical sexuality studies conducted in the 1980's – 2000's, to the use of more practice-based and situated theories.

1.3.1 *From discourse to practice: an overview of analytical terms and tools*

Foucault's theories of 'power/knowledge' and 'regimes of truth', particularly in his work about sexuality (Foucault, 1981), have become central to the ways in which many scholars conceptualise sex, sexuality and gendered power relations, and provide a critical way of thinking about youth sexuality (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Carmody, 2015). Foucault's work on ethical sexual subjectivities encourages scholars to observe how people can resist the power/knowledge discourses (Rabinow, 1997) that construct and constrain what it means to 'be sexual'. In using a Foucauldian and post-structural feminist approach, it has not been my intention to find what is true or false about consent, but to recognise *why* there are different rules, understandings and practices in operation. Thus, I have actively paid attention to, and at times questioned, the language, symbols and ideas that constitute 'normal' and 'deviant' sex, according to participants' contributions. I have taken a socio-historical approach to understanding where a discourse of sexual consent originated and how it has come to operate in contemporary society. This has enabled me to see which discourses resonate with and permeate the youth cultures and sexual practices I have investigated during this research.

Despite my use of more creative research methods and attempts to acknowledge and foreground more embodied and experiential elements of sexual consent and education, the data I have captured has ultimately shown what is 'sayable' about sex and consent in public and group spaces. There are discourses, practices and affective responses that are difficult to vocalise and articulate well through talk and it has become clear that it is difficult to represent what a body knows, because our language is limited, and many people are un-practised at noticing and identifying the material body in everyday practices and decision-making processes.

In response to this I identify and use the term 'talk' as an alternative to the concept of discourse. While I can track, and notice the discourses at play during discussions, the space of the 'focus group' limits what people say (Kitzinger, 1994). Talk is often mediated and managed according to the group dynamics, the topic of discussion and the environment in which it occurs. So, when I speak in later chapters of 'talk', I refer specifically about what is said and deemed by the speaker 'sayable' in that situated research moment. Thus raising questions about how certain forms of sexuality and consent are constituted in discourse, but also practice.

Bridging the conceptual space between discourse and practice, I also mobilise a language of performativity throughout this work. Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity (2006; 2011) are a useful and compelling way of thinking about gender and the ways in which we perform and reproduce certain roles within society. This theory sits well with discourse as Butler contributes to shifts in thinking that allow us to think about and see how discourse can be lived out, and consolidated or re-constructed through everyday practices. Thinking with performativity, in conjunction with theories of gendered and sexual 'scripts' (Gangon and Simon, 1974), has encouraged me to look beyond what is said, and observe physical interactions and consider the context of my research encounters. I have tried to notice how what is being said or embodied and by whom reinforces, or resists, certain expectations about what it means to be a sexual woman or man.

Following performativity, the term 'practice' is used throughout the thesis; I describe my research practice and I speak about consent and sex as a practice. It is important to avoid a Cartesian understanding of people being 'mind and body' and acknowledge the affective and multisensory experience of sexual practices. Given this, the term 'practice' has been useful to employ in moments when I imagine an embodied process; the 'doing' of something, and therefore the material body is central.

Theories of practice have been useful to help me articulate further what a practice, or the doing of something, may consist of. In particular it helps me to think about the competences that people require in order to embody and live out certain ways of doing and being. Reckwitz suggests that practices consist of interdependencies between "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (2002:249). Shove et al. (2012) build on, or rather simplify this, to contribute to a 'practice theory'. They put forward a scheme based on the interdependence of three elements: materials, competences and meanings. I find their terminology maps onto the ways of constructing and considering consent that I develop through this research. Yet each term/element encompasses what Shove et al. might term a 'bundle' of smaller elements. These elements I find link to scripts, performativity and discourse, as people are in the habit of performing and re-producing what it is to be a woman or a man and, as practice theory reminds us, habits are hard to recognise and to break out of. Similarly, it can be difficult to access alternative discourses and symbols of resistance if you do not encounter them.

Being sensitive to practice and paying attention to the mediated nature of talk produced in research activities has encouraged me to recognise 'awkwardness', something that comes up consistently throughout this research. Initially I struggled to make sense of this finding via tools of discourse and performativity which emphasise compliance and 'fit'. In later chapters I enhanced the argument that contemporary culture is increasingly awkward; we live in an 'age of awkwardness' which is the result of historic cultural shifts away from clear, normative and hegemonic values and expectations. The category of awkwardness comes up as a practice that does not 'fit' the assumed flow of competent social interaction. In the final analysis chapter, I introduce the work of Adam Kotsko (2010) which has provided me with a language to theorise awkwardness. This has helped me understand the generative potential of acknowledging and working through awkwardness in intimate encounters and also to consider how awkwardness can be linked to resistance and provide space for new and competing discourse and practice to develop. In earlier chapters I use the term descriptively, as many of my participants did, however in later chapters I seek to theorise awkwardness showing how valuable it may be as a way into articulating the flows, blocks and incongruities of embodied practices.

1.4 The thesis structure

Having introduced and summarised the thesis I conclude this introductory chapter with an overview of what is to come, detailing the structure and key elements of the following chapters. Each chapter addresses a different element of the research process. You will notice 'me' in the narrative, however the tone and form with which I write changes at times according to the content and the function of the chapter. Reflexivity has been central to my research practice. As many researchers highlight, the line between insider/outsider, participant/researcher, observer/participant can become blurred over the course of a longer and participatory projects (McLeod and Thomson, 2009; Cammarota and Fine, 2008; MacLure, 2013). I address the use of self further in the methodology. However, in starting this introduction with my story of sex education, and speaking in the first person throughout the thesis I do not seek to make my experience the main focus. Rather, I use my personal reflections in a way that adds context and useful layers to the story being told about participants and methods, recognizing that the same event would be told differently by other people involved (McLeod and Yates, 1997; Tullis-Owen et al. 2009; Ellis, 2011). I outline each chapter as follows.

Chapter Two provides a socio-historic context to the thesis. This chapter sets the scene by chronologically outlining how policy, activism, and legal frameworks have produced our current understanding of, and concerns about consent. I consider how consent has been constructed and became part of sexual lexicon in the UK over the last 50 years, focussing on three key moments that can be linked to shifts and modification in legislation, terminology and practices. I summarise the crucial role of feminist scholarship and activism from the 1980's through to the present day, noting shifts in focus and developments in policy and practice as a result of this. Drawing on this evidence, I show how we have reached a new critical moment for consent, arguing that there is a need for more youth-centred and 'sex positive' research in this area.

Chapter Three is a thematic literature review which builds on the story of consent in the previous chapter. Here I outline the intellectual landscape and highlight work around the themes of: heteronormativity; power and pressure; age and competence; and the role of SRE. In order to frame contemporary social, political and academic interest in sexual violence and exploitation, I highlight the need for a less binary and more applied understanding of sexual consent, better sex education and support for teachers – a task that helps me to frame this study. The literature review notes a general lack of research focusing specifically on consent and young people, which is not the bi-product of research focusing on sexual violence. This is a gap my research seeks to fill, aiming to put everyday, 'mundane' experiences of sex and consent at the centre of research, rather than focusing on polarised representations of sexual violence or pleasure.

Chapter Four explains how the research project evolved to be participatory and youth centred. Here I outline the foundations of my methodological approach with an overview of the theories which informed the choice of methods. The story of my research unfolds in three parts. The first section 'before the method' describes the piloting and project development in conjunction with Brook's youth participation group. The second section provides an account of the youth projects in a school and youth club; which provided a substantive amount of data. The final section covers the data collection with practitioners within Brook, and also reflecting on other practices I observed across the research sites. I summarise the challenges and opportunities of my iterative and participatory research experience working across several sites, with a diverse range of young people, and practitioners who perform a variety of sex education roles. Here I critically consider the ethics of participation, research consent and anonymity over the course of what became a multifaceted venture in research, youth work and educational development.

Chapter Five is the first of three empirical chapters and considers the process of teaching about consent as part of a wider educational agenda, both in formal and informal spaces. Here I focus on data gathered from educators; a focus group with four Brook Education Workers; observations of educational practitioners in different settings; conversations with teachers and youth workers; and ethnographic reflections of my experience of 'teaching'. I consider the role of the sex 'educator' and the often fluid, precarious and demanding nature of this work. Most educators I encountered aimed to "get young people thinking" rather than provide a list of 'do's and don'ts', yet it became clear that this can be an uneasy balancing act. I highlight how uncomfortable teaching about sexual consent can be – something that is revisited in Chapter Eight. I conclude Chapter Five by considering how an educators professional and personal background and identity affects their perceived and actual confidence and competence to provoke young people into developing a more nuanced understanding of sexual negotiation.

Chapter Six focuses on learning, as a way to investigate the ways in which sexual consent is commonly constructed. This chapter draws on data from different activities and diverse groups of young participants, providing a reflexive account and critical analysis of our learning from and with each other. By highlighting the binary and abstract nature of our attempts to define consent, the chapter provides examples of how the process and practice of sexual negotiation can be understood better through activities that encourage the deconstruction of consent. I develop a continuum of consent that represents the varied yet consistent ways in which the young people I worked with spoke about the topic and might label certain encounters as consensual or not. Thinking through the limitations of the term, I explore the possibilities for reimagining consent as a product of competent and agentic sexual negotiation. In this chapter, it becomes clear that social class, religion, ethnicity, education and other factors are important in shaping whether and how consent can be talked about. I also show that experience is a vital variable in how people are able to think, talk about and practice sexual negotiation over time and in different contexts.

Chapter Seven, builds on the themes and findings of Chapter Five and Six by digging into the significance of awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence in everyday sexual encounters. A key finding from the data was that consent, or the process of explicit sexual negotiation, was consistently described and experienced as "awkward". Using empirical data and drawing heavily on the work of Adam Kotsko this chapter takes a more conceptual turn and posits the role of awkwardness as a relational experience. Here I acknowledge the complex and embodied nature of sexual negotiation and foreground some of the difficulties people can encounter when

attempting to articulate and explain these experiences. I consider the generative potential of teaching and talking about awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence and the ways in which this may enhance people's competence for future sexual negotiation.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by summarising the preceding chapters and drawing together key findings from the empirical chapters. Highlighting the significance of experience and deconstruction as an educational tool this chapter turns to consider the future of consent education. I discuss how the findings expose a need for consent education to acknowledge and explore awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence; address hetero-patriarchal norms and expectations when it comes to sex; and move beyond the binary. In light of the recent amendment to the 2017 Children and Social Work Bill to make SRE statutory in schools from 2019 the conclusion provides a set of recommendations for teaching about sexual consent. I acknowledge the difficulties that teachers may have in letting go of the certainty and security of legal and binary definitions of consent, and present arguments and practical suggestions for opening conversations that consider the complex realities of sexual negotiation. SRE seeks to help young people develop sexual competence and talking about grey areas allows for a much richer understanding of competence that is not simply about risk aversion, but which also makes ambiguity and awkwardness part of the story and things to be worked through rather than avoided.

Chapter 2: Getting Consent On The Agenda: A Socio-Historic Context

Contemporary debates around sexual consent rely on and reframe the discussions, challenges and contestations of the past. Therefore, this chapter seeks to set the scene and provide a recent history of consent before providing a thematic literature review in the following chapter. Here I will focus on how feminist activism and scholarship have played a key role over the last 50 years in producing consent as a category of popular understanding, ensuring it is recognised and understood as a human right and indicator of autonomous and ethical sexual practice. I will also outline how the public framing of sexual consent moved from campaigns to reveal sex as something that is 'consentable', to an agenda focused on the equalising of consent across the hetero/homo boundary, to a situation where consent has become a key component of the criminalising of certain sexual practices. Although I make some reference to the legal standard of consent, and the definition of rape according to the Sexual Offences Act, I aim to avoid framing and speaking about consent by starting with, or predominantly referencing, the law. Instead I start with the voices of young people to show the contested nature of sexual consent in contemporary society.

2.1 Setting the scene

In the time it has taken to conduct, analyse and write up this doctoral research, consent has become a more prominent and key concern in popular culture. Since September 2014 when I gained funding for the project, there has been an eruption of television and radio shows, regular news items, awareness raising campaigns both on and offline, shifts in laws, policy and practice pertaining to consent and sex and relationships education. Some of these programmes and news items have provided useful stimulus for discussion with participants. For example, the quotations below from the 2015 BBC 3 Documentary 'Sex on trial is this rape?' allude to the complexities, contradictions and assumptions that characterise many (young) people's understandings about sex, consent and rape in contemporary society. The discourse of consent is present in the vocabulary of these young people, but it is understood and interpreted differently by the participants.

"Some girls don't wanna say no as they don't want to be seen as a prude. So that's like really hard hitting because you should be able to say no and not care what other people think about it - but then at the same time, boys are like oh you're just playing hard to get when really you're like no – I don't want to and boys think it's a game" (Girl)

"She didn't push him off, she didn't say no and I'm not being funny but if I had a guy putting his dick in my mouth I'd say no if i didn't want it there" (Boy)

"Submission isn't a sign of consent it's just a sign of weakness and that's perfectly fine, you're allowed to be weak..." (Girl)

(Participants aged 16-18 in BBC 3 discussion show 'Sex on trial, is this rape?', 2015)

The scenario that the young people were discussing categorically fulfils the current legal definition of 'rape', because consent was neither sought nor given, and yet there is ambiguity and unease around how to speak about and label such an occurrence.

How consent is understood, and demonstrated, both in terms of 'giving it' and 'getting it' is, as I will show, often complex, context-specific and gendered. The young people in this BBC show were given the opportunity to consider the extent to which consent was or was not present, and whether A (Tom) could reasonably believe that B (Gemma) consented, and therefore if the scenario should be labelled rape, or not.

The 2003 Sexual Offences Act defines rape as:

(1) a person (a) commits an offence if—

(a) he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (b) with his penis,

(b) b does not consent to the penetration, and

(c) a does not reasonably believe that b consents.

(2) whether a belief is reasonable is to be determined having regard to all the circumstances, including any steps a has taken to ascertain whether b consents.

Despite shortcomings the show provided a good example of how lay understandings of consent do not always match the legal definitions of consent and rape. The former, which are often much more nuanced, take into account broader social and societal, as well as interpersonal, pressures.

The scenario, discussions and facts that are presented in the documentary suggest that consent is commonly viewed in negative terms and is firmly rooted in understandings of rape and sexual violence, rather than viewed as a concept or act in and of its own right that might be part of a

more positive sexual experience. It could be argued that programmes, discussions and campaigns that are produced now reflect a change in the way we are viewing sex, rape and in particular young people's sexuality. How consent is understood, who is viewed as competent, and at an appropriate age to give it, are key to developing a more complex understanding of sexual consent.

As I complete this thesis, movements in the form of #MeToo, and #Timesup suggest that issues of consent, sexual harassment and gender inequality are being held firmly in the public and political eye. Campaigns for SRE have been successful and SRE is to be mandatory in schools from September 2019 (Greening, 2017). A key focus of the curriculum will be consent (Greening, 2017). We are living through what I will later describe as an 'age of affirmative consent' and along with that are experiencing backlashes, and hard-line attitudes regarding what counts as acceptable and consensual sexual behaviour and what does not.

2.2 Where to start? A recent history of consent

In chronological terms I could have started my literature review with the 2003 Sexual Offence Act (SOA), given that this legislation frames and informs much of the work, teaching and research in the UK about consent, sexual violence, sexual health and 'sexual citizenship'. Starting here, however would take for granted that consent exists, is known, knowable and doable. The 2003 SOA was the product of shifts in how sex, gender and equality were viewed and played out in policy and the politics of everyday life throughout the previous 50 years. I have inherited a common-sense understanding of consent, like the young people in the BBC documentary, that is rooted in the practices, policies and changes of the recent past without being aware of what actually occurred in those moments. Melanie Beres (2007) provides a comprehensive overview of how academic work addresses sexual consent and she has noted there is no consistent definition, rather the concept is generally taken up "spontaneously". In her work she notes more needs to be done to critically reflect on the cultural, historical and social forces that produce different meanings of consent (Beres, 2007:95). Thus, I have attempted to 'go back' and trace the history of consent, and throughout the thesis I pay attention to social and cultural context.

I have struggled to frame and talk about the history of consent without being an historian and giving an overly detailed account of the 20th century. As such, I have chosen to outline three key moments that can be directly related to the modification and development of discourses,

policies and practices of sexual consent in the last 35 to 40 years. The moments have also been the focus of empirical and theoretical work around sexual consent relevant to the literature review. Moment one is the longest of the three as it lays the foundations for the changes and shifts outlined in the following two sections.

These key moments are:

- the late 80's early 90's in which a rights discourse around consent gained traction;
- the early 2000's as consent was legislated within the 2003 Sexual Offences Act, equalising the age of consent regardless of gender and sexuality;
- and 2011 with the revelation of widespread and institutional child sexual exploitation.

2.2.1 Moment 1: Producing consent

Social historians such as Jeffrey Weeks, Lucy Bland and Lucy Robinson have pointed to the 60's, 70's and 80's as a period of cultural and sexual liberalisation in which feminist, anti-racist and gay liberation movements began to have an impact on social and political rights, education and health discourses. Jeffrey Weeks terms this progress towards liberalisation a move from a culture of restraint to a culture of consent (2007:105). The more 'traditional' model of sexual restraint was one in which people, mostly women, used restraint (saying or performing 'no') to manage sexual activity, reproduction and respectability. When the contraceptive pill became publicly available to all women, regardless of marital status in 1967, sex could be more confidently and practically separated from reproduction and also marriage (Weeks, 2007). This led to a more individualistic, tolerant, experimental and open sexual culture than could have been imagined just a generation earlier (Weeks, 2007:62-63).

The 1980's is popularly understood as a moment of political rupture in both the UK and USA during which narratives of progress in sexual and gender liberation came into conflict with conservative sentiments and moral panics (Weeks, 2007; Sharpe and Thomson, 2005). Named at the time and soon after as a 'backlash' (Faludi, 1991) against progress this decade (which included activism around gay rights, HIV/AIDS, children's rights and rape) is understood retrospectively as a moment in which previously 'private' or closeted sexual activities became

publicly understood in new ways, partly through ‘controversy’³ (Weeks, 2007; Herdt, 2009). Another big moment here was that reproductive rights began to emerge within Human Rights documentation from the late 1960’s acknowledging that families should have some control over the spacing and pacing of child birth (The Proclamation of Teheran, 1968). Here I will focus specifically on two areas of activity and research, first, radical feminist activism around the naturalising of force within heterosexuality and second, activism around the capacity for under 16’s to consent for themselves.

Denaturalising hetero-sex: making consent visible

Throughout the 80’s feminists worked to ensure that sexual and reproductive rights, for women in particular, were recognised. Although it had become more acceptable to live and have children with a partner before, or without marrying, the figure of the single mother was demonised (Weeks, 2007) and women’s sexual activity was subject to judgement and medicalisation (Jackson, 1999). During this period feminist activism began to focus on sexual agency and autonomy, ‘producing’ consent and denaturalising the hetero-patriarchal power relations which normalised pressure, force and male dominance in hetero-sex and relationships. There were arguments at the time, which still resonate today, that hetero-sex is ‘generally dominated by the social construction of men’s sexual needs’ and therefore women’s capacity to consent is based on male dominance (Holland et al. 1993:23; Moore and Reynolds, 2004:29).

One key term in this period was ‘the gendered double standard’ which complicated liberal understandings of how sexual and reproductive rights and freedoms were viewed and represented at the time. Heterosexual relationships became the focus of critical enquiry within radical feminist circles and were deconstructed to reveal male pressure as a norm and submission a signifier of femininity (Jackson, 1999; Kelly and Radford, 1990; Ruben, 1984; Muehlenhard and McCoy, 1991). Many feminist activists and academics worked to highlight this structural institutional violence which allowed women to be the objects of sexual desire, with activism focused both on definitions of rape and around positive notions of consent associated with bringing female sexual agency into public discourse (Ruben, 1984; Holland et al. 1998; Lear, 1995). Key examples of this naturalisation in British law included the legal impossibility of rape within marriage and the failure of the law to recognize that a woman could be a sexual actor.

³ See accounts of Operation Spanner, and later reference to the Gillick V West Norfolk case.

“The law assumed male desire and aggressive sexual agency, in contrast to female purity, lack of desire, passivity and submission” (Waites, 2004:7).

Liz Kelly is a prominent feminist academic whose work with colleagues in the 80’s and early 90’s has contributed to our contemporary understandings of sexual violence. She was part of a wider movement to reframe sexual violence and acknowledge the hetero-patriarchal power inequalities that ‘male-streamed’ women’s experiences of oppression and subordination. Kelly and Radford’s 1990 paper “‘Nothing really happened’: the invalidation of women’s experiences of sexual violence’ argued that women in particular are systematically encouraged to downplay violence and pressure and as such, coercive behaviour is often categorised as ‘normal’. Thus, the campaigns to produce and enshrine an understanding of affirmative consent in law was an uphill battle to break the silences and de-normalise pressure and coercion (Weeks, 2007; Lear 1995; Gilbert, 2017).

In 1991, after much work from feminist activists and academics, there was a shift in the way sexual consent was understood and rape within marriage was legally recognised. This legislation was based on an understanding of consent as a positive or affirmative act based on the necessity for wanting or desiring sex in the moment, rather than on assumptions and expectations (Moor and Reynolds, 2004; Gilbert, 2017). This was a key moment in the story of consent, and also for women’s rights more broadly. This legislation created a new legal reference point for the prevention of violence against women and girls.

Denaturalising hetero-sex: heteronormativity in policy

Although the campaign to establish wider recognition of bodily autonomy, reproductive choice and women’s rights to choose to engage in sex was predominantly successful during this time there was inherent heteronormativity in the policy discussions and the subsequent sexual health provision and (lack of) content and style of sex education that was delivered throughout this period (Thomson, 1995). While feminist movements were working to have consent in sex recognised, the gay liberation movements campaigning for positive recognition and equality were coming up against institutional exclusion, stigma and the social, emotional and medical impact of HIV/AIDs (Correa, Petchesky, and Parker 2008; Weeks, 2007). Sexual health rights had been rolled into reproductive rights excluding LGBT communities from representation (Correa, Petchesky, and Parker 2008). Moreover, the assumed heteronormativity of legislations and policy meant that consent was constructed differently in heterosexual and homosexual sex,

creating a peculiar situation in which consent was not recognised in lesbian relationships according to law, due to a reductive understanding of 'sex', as being penetrative (Ruben, 1984).

As the HIV/AIDs epidemic became internationally recognised within and beyond the gay 'population', a new agenda for sexual health provision and sex education emerged focussing on risky sexual practices rather than assumed sexual identities⁴. The UK launched a huge public health campaign in 1986 and 'sexual health' emerged as an issue which needed addressing both clinically and educationally (Weeks, 2007; Correa, Petchesky, and Parker, 2008). Multiple policy changes occurred during this period however the introduction of Section 28 Act⁵ 1988 stands out among the rest, as it made it an offence for any local authority, and therefore any school, to 'promote homosexuality' as 'acceptable' or 'pretended family relationship' within schools (Crown Copyright, 1988). Moral panics over homosexuality, youth sexuality and education provided cover for the dismantling of local education authorities and the undermining of teachers' professionalism in relation to sex and relationship education, presenting teachers as 'potential corrupters of young people' (Thomson, 1995:285).

The sexual politics of this period are complicated, characterised both by public health pragmatism and moral conservatism (Thomson, 1994). As Jeffry Weeks observes, the progress of sexual liberalisation seems to work on the principle that for every two steps forward, there will be one step back (Weeks, 2007). While a significant amount of work was done to promote individual sexual freedoms in the form of reproductive rights and access to services and contraception for adults, there continued to be inequalities in how these new found 'freedoms' were experienced across gender, sexuality, race, class, religion and age (Waites, 2004; Weeks, 2007). This was a time where arguments from conservative groups wanting to promote the protection of children and childhood innocence, were in tension with more liberal secular discourses of enabling and encouraging children's learning, participation and autonomy in society. This is a tension that continues and which characterises many debates around protection and agency that use a rights based framework (Graf and Schweiger, 2017). Discussions about sex education and child and youth sexuality brought these competing

⁴ In 1987, the WHO launched The Global Program on AIDS to raise awareness; generate evidence-based policies; provide technical and financial support to countries; conduct research; promote participation by NGOs; and promote the rights of people living with HIV. (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2012)

⁵ Section 28 of the local government act 1988 made it an offence for any local authority, and therefore implied any school, to 'promote homosexuality' as an 'acceptable' 'lifestyle' within schools (Crown Copyright, 1988).

discourses into the limelight together to create more awareness of the child as an independent rights-bearing subject whose voice and needs needed attending to independently and sometimes contrary to the rights of their parents/carers.

Consenting children: sexuality, consent and confidentiality

Rachel Thomson has argued that the two most significant pieces of legislation which affected sex education and sexual health provision during this period were Section 28 of the Local Government Act (as discussed above) and the Gillick ruling on contraceptive advice (1995). Like the implementation of Section 28 the Gillick case drew on public, and in particular parental fears about youth sexuality in a changing society (Thomson, 1995; De Cruz, 1987).

The Gillick vs West Norfolk case in the UK, which started in 1982, encapsulated the tensions of the moment in relation to changing sexual practices, individualism, public health and children's rights. Victoria Gillick took her local health authority and the Department of Health to court to stop doctors from giving contraceptive advice or treatment to her daughter(s), who were under 16 at the time, without parental consent. The court, and subsequent appeals⁶, ruled in favour of the state, recognising that young people under 16 are "capable of making a reasonable assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the treatment proposed, so the consent, if given, can be properly and fairly described as true consent" (Gillick v West Norfolk, 1984). This was a significant step forward for how young women were able to manage their own sexuality and reproductive rights in the UK (De Cruz, 1987).

The Gillick ruling may have been provoked by conservative attempts to assert parental authority and thus negate the possibility of consent, but resulted in the statement of an explicit methodology for evaluating consent⁷. Drawing on ideas of competency from medical ethics, the ruling was also in keeping with a growing commitment to children's citizenship as expressed in

⁶ Lord Scarman's ruling in 1986 established the 'Gillick principle', and was "*the beginning not the conclusion*" of developments, debates and negotiations around children's rights, parent's rights and the duty of doctors and the state in relation to medical treatment and sexual activity (De Cruz 1987).

⁷ 'Gillick Competency' and 'Fraser guidelines' help practitioners to make judgements about a young person's capacity to 'make their own decisions and to understand the implications of those decisions' (NSPCC, 2015), and thus their capacity to give 'informed consent' to, a medical procedure, treatment and sexual activity.

the UNCRC which was formalised in 1989 and embodied in the UK Children's Act, 1988 'best interests of the child' principle.

The UK signed the UNCRC in 1990, and it came into UK law in 1992. The UNCRC holds within it elements of conservative and liberal protectionism that can at times be viewed as contradictory. In relation to childhood and youth sexuality, children have the right to services, education and confidentiality and to protection from sexual abuse. The Declaration of Human Rights Article relating to sexual and reproductive rights states that people should be able to make their own decisions regarding their body. It is a human right to get accurate information about these issues; access sexual and reproductive health services including contraception; choose if, when and who to marry; decide whether to have children and how many. Many of these rights are reflected in the UNCRC. However, the extent to which children and young people are given autonomy in these decisions depends on the level of maturity and competence they are viewed to possess, and often their geographic, cultural and economic positioning.

The Gillick case exemplified many of these tensions and debates about children's rights. Much of the debate about sex education and children's participation in society more broadly was about balancing liberal progression and creating scaffolding for it, while at the same time managing conservative concerns about the speed of change and loss of control over society, including children and young people's sexual and social behaviours. The more liberal views aim to inform and educate children and young people to be able to protect themselves, whereas more conservative agendas of protection would seek to limit children's access or exposure to potential risks. There is a lack of clarity in the convention and Children's Act which means that it has not been possible to use UNCRC to challenge parental right of withdrawal from sex education. It is the more liberal body of arguments that this thesis will contribute to.

2.2.2 Moment 2: 2003 SOA and the call for equality at 16

The promotion of Human Rights and children's rights discourses throughout the 90's was associated with greater awareness of diversity and minority participation within British society. The European Convention on Human Rights (1950) provided a baseline from which minority groups could highlight and challenge discrimination and moves for equality could be demanded. This facilitated campaigns for equality with respect to sexual orientation, and LGBT activists were able to root their advocacy in a discourse of rights (Waites, 2004; Correa et al. 2008). Regarding

consent there was a call for 'equality at 16' which had historically been the legal age of sexual consent for men and women to have sex since the 19th Century. Homosexuality had been partially decriminalised in 1967, and the age of consent for men to have sex with men had been set at 21. In 1994 after much campaigning from LGBT activist and organisations such as Stonewall⁸, the UK parliament voted to lower the age for sex between men to 18 (Waites, 1995; Rayside, 1998). While this was a step forward there was a sustained campaign to have section 28 revoked and for the age of consent to be equal regardless of gender and sexuality. Following its election in 1997, the New Labour government facilitated a number of attempts to achieve equality, culminating in the government's own Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act in 2000 (Waites, 2004).

One result of this campaigning was the normalization of the idea that sex could and should be *wanted* by all parties involved. Where just a few decades earlier the notion that women had the right to consent to sex, and that it would be possible to have public debates about the age at which gay men could consent to sex would have been unimaginable, consent had become a key term around which both feminist and LGBT activists were mobilising in a push for recognition, equality and safety. There was recognition from the new Labour government that the then current SOA was full of anomalies and the Home Office proposed that the laws should be changed and clarified which culminated in legislation of the 2003 Sexual Offences Act (Cowling and Reynolds, 2004; Thomson, 2004).

The 2003 SOA was the product of a "wide ranging overhaul of laws on gay sex, rape, child prostitution, child abuse, incest and the treatment of sex offenders" (Thomson, 2004:134). Many of the changes and clarifications to the law were informed by the work of feminists, and LGBT activists and scholars, but also attended to the conservative and protectionist agendas which aimed to protect and maintain childhood 'innocence', and the rights of parents as much as possible. Although the age of consent at 16 may have "historically derived its rationale from forms of medical and psychological knowledge which are now discredited" (Waites, 2004:89), these assumptions informed a taken for granted 'protectionism' in LGBT arguments for consent at 16. The 2000 Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act was a moment in which the age of consent

⁸ The charity Stonewall was set up in 1989, initially in opposition to the introduction of Section 28, but also to fight prejudice against lesbians and gay men, and to promote equality. The charity is named after the Stonewall Inn in New York, the site of a gay bar which was constantly raided by police, sparking off the Stonewall riots of 1969. For more info see <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us>

across the board could have been reviewed, given the fact that an increasing number of young people were sexually active before the age of 16 (Johnson, 1994). Rachel Thomson and Mathew Waites who were both researching the legalities and young people's perspectives of the age of sexual consent around the time of the SOA amendment and the 2003 SOA noted, along with other scholars, that the call for 'equality at 16' homogenised discussions around the age of consent, effectively eclipsing gender and opportunities to constructively discuss propositions for a lower age of sexual consent.

The UK witnessed the steady ascendance of arguments in favour of, and political support for, 'equality at 16' (17 in Northern Ireland) which can usefully be interpreted as and analysed in terms of the ascendance of a new 'hegemony' in age of consent debates [...]

(Waites, 2004:80)

The argument from Stonewall and others was that 16 was an appropriate age of consent for hetero-sex and so should also be appropriate in same sex relations. Thus the call for equality limited the space for addressing the multiplicity of young people's agency and capacity for sexual decision making if under 16. It expressed in law the notion that 16 is the 'proper' age at which someone may be able to legitimately consent to, and engage in sex, despite the knowledge that the age of sexual debut in the UK falling (Johnson et al. 1994; Thomson, 2004), and that other countries within Western Europe commonly had a lower age of sexual consent, 14 or 15 (Waites, 2004), and were not seeing the same rates of STI's and pregnancy amongst its 'youth' population.

In addition to setting the legal age of consent at 16 there was some attention given to what might be considered 'tolerable' if young people were sexually active before this age, as research at the time suggested. It was deemed tolerable for young people between age 13 and 15 to be sexually active with peers of a similar age. This accepted that young people under 16 do have the capacity to give consent in contexts where issues of power may not be considered problematic. These are known as 'close in age exceptions' (Gilbert, 2017). The 1998 Sexual Offences Amendment Act set the age of consent at 18 in situations where there was likely to be an 'abuse of trust' or power in the form of a clear disparity of age, and or where the person is in a position of authority, like a teacher or social worker. This recognised that age and authority were factors that might affect the young person's freedom and capacity to give consent. As young people up to 18 are legally children they should be protected from unequal and

potentially exploitive relationships where abuses of trust may not be obvious. Similarly, with respect to child protection, it was legislated that children under 13 were incapable of consenting to any form of sexual activity, and therefore any sexual intercourse with a child under 13 (irrespective of gender) was to be treated as rape (Thomson, 2004:134; Waites, 2005). It was legislated that a “consent defence could not be used in cases involving a child under 13; here the principal of strict liability applies – if the act required for the offence are proven to have taken place, there is no defence” (Coy et al. 2013:79). So in instances where an adult had sex with a child, if they could reasonably prove that they believed the young person to be 16 then they may not be convicted of rape, however someone under 13 could not be held liable for lying about their age, or initiating sexual contact.

Moment two, then can be summarised by a focus on age and rights. In this section I have outlined how the ‘call for equality at 16’ eclipsed conversations about gendered power relations while also ensuring that youth sexuality was at least recognised and tolerated. In this moment age, not gender, became the focus for power differentials and this became institutionalised in child protection and Sexual Offences legislation and policy. Paradoxically the language of rights gets lost once equality is granted and, as moving into moment three, the focus is on prevention of unlawful sex rather than promotion of ethical sexual practice.

2.2.3 Moment 3: Exploitation and new technologies of (sexual) communication

Since 2009, and more concretely since 2011, there has been a resurgence in public and political anxiety about children and young people’s sexuality which has encouraged renewed debate and action relating to child protection, consent, and sexual violence. Clapton et al. (2012) note in their work on moral panics and social work that children are the subject of more anxiety now than ever before and that currently this anxiety is articulated in fears around the exploitation of children and young people, particularly involving their use of the internet, social media and explicit picture messaging (Clapton et al. 2012: 204; Clarke, 2018) as well as easy access to porn. Consequently there has been renewed focus on defining who counts as children, and how the state should protect their sexual innocence.

Over the last 20 years, there have been uneven lines of change where technologies have developed rapidly offering new ways of communicating, being sexual and blurring the lines between public and private. These advances have been taken up rapidly, and integrated into

the lives of younger generations in particular (Berriman and Thomson, 2015; boyd, 2014). Legal and curriculum discourses however appear to be somewhat out of sync with lived cultures – which themselves may be marginalised within institutional contexts (Clarke, 2018). Our current vocabulary for discussing sex, consent and violence, which is a result of previous campaigns and shifts outlined above, is for example rooted in face to face physical interaction.

A clear example of how new technologies have enabled new modes of sexuality and new anxieties is 'sexting'. This practice occurs across all age groups, yet there is more concern and more confusion regarding young people's practices, than those of adults (Clarke, 2018:137; Albury et al. 2013). The term 'sexting' has been coined and is predominantly used by adults, in curriculum and campaign discourses to discourage the practice, as "risky", unsafe. "Sext education" routinely lacks any critical or nuanced pedagogy promoting individual responsibility in favour of addressing "power, gender and consent [... and] the 'responsibility' to not distribute or redistribute private images without consent" (Clarke, 2018:123).

Contemporary research about 'sexting', image distribution and the line between porn and privacy (Clarke, 2018; Albury et al. 2013) suggest that many of the laws and practices for managing and intervening in sexual offences lack protocol on how to deal with digital and more public misconduct. The fear and anxiety about these issues within public and policy discourse has been directed at and heightened with regard to children and young people through education policy and campaigns that discredit the practices and often end up blaming the victim, without considering the extent to which picture messaging and new technologies are integrated into people's everyday lives (Clarke, 2018; Dobson and Ringrose, 2016; Albury et al. 2013). New technologies of communication have made the lines between private sexuality and communication, and public displays of intimacy or sexuality more porous making boundaries of consent more complex to negotiate (Berriman and Thomson, 2015). There are also concerns about how online spaces and new technologies provide new platforms and methods for grooming. However exploring this, and the influence of pornography on young people is not within the scope of this research.

In 2011, there was a series of high profile convictions and inquiries into child sexual exploitation and grooming in Rochdale, Rotherham, Derby and other areas of England. These investigations not only established that child sexual abuse was a phenomena that had not gone away, but also involved looking again at behaviour from the past that was either undetected or which may by contemporary standards be reclassified as abusive. For example, the public disclosure of Jimmy

Saville's career of sexual abuse led to more cases of celebrities exploiting young girls to be uncovered (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013). In most of these cases the 'victims' were white working-class girls and young women, identified as vulnerable due to their social environment. These revelations brought issues of consent and competence into the public eye with age and class complicating how police and support services responded to allegations.

Sex scandals often express wider social anxieties, specific to the time and place of their occurrence (Sharpe and Thomson, 2005; Weeks, 2007; Herdt, 2009; Whittington and Thomson, 2018). The media coverage and public controversy surrounding the Rochdale and Rotherham Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) inquiries highlighted the failure of the state and institutional systems to listen to the complaints of women and children, particularly those who are working class and are not considered legitimate 'victims'. In the case of Rotherham in particular the media has focused in on institutional racism, inequalities and poor performances of cultural relativism and sensitivity. Many newspapers and news segments have highlighted that Asian men have been grooming and seeking out young white girls, and suggested that the police and social workers were disinclined to take action because the victims were white and the perpetrators were of ethnic minorities (Easton, 2013). This ignores the fact that there are also a number of cases where young Asian women have been the victims of abuse by black, minority ethnic and white men. In the cases of high profile 'celebrity' exploitation all perpetrators have been white, wealthy and powerful thus silencing their victims, and the institutions they were affiliated with who wanted to avoid public 'scandal' (Greer and McLaughlin, 2013).

There has been recent work conducted into how perpetrators and victims are represented and perceived in the media and policy and how this has limited people's ability to recognise and name coercion and exploitation when it is occurring (Clapton et al. 2013). The recent BBC docu-drama 'Three Girls' depicts this well and also highlights the professional starting points of social work, youth work and the police force (BBC 1). This can be linked to the normalising of gendered inequality and sexual pressure which feminists worked to unveil and problematize throughout the 80's. I will revisit this in relation to #MeToo when I conclude this section.



Figure 1 BBC drama 'Three Girls'

A key argument that has emerged from these contemporary debates is that the models of sexual consent that are used by professionals are not fit for purpose. Leading CSE researcher Jenny Pearce has argued that the reason young women and girls are seen to be implicated in the own exploitation is because of limited and misguided understandings of sexual consent. She suggests that evaluations of who is considered to be a legitimate child victim are based not only on age but also ideas of competence, vulnerability and agency that are read through the lens of social class (Pearce, 2013). Pearce has argued that the Gillick principle allows for practitioners to disproportionately acknowledge children and young people's sexual agency and competence and at best overlook, and at worst dismiss power and inequality.

In 2013 there was a motion to change the age of sexual consent in the UK, and to improve sexual health classes in schools to include mandatory sex and relationship education. This sparked national coverage and ongoing debates and worries about young people's access to porn as their main source of information about how to 'do' sex (BBC, 2013; Ellen, 2013; Ditum, 2017). In March 2015, at the end of their term the Coalition Government called an emergency summit on Preventing Child Sexual Exploitation at which David Cameron referred to sexual abuse as a "national threat". There has been intense public debate including official calls for "better policies [...] guidance, [...] training, [...] and [...] whistleblowing procedures" (Cameron, 2015). Although there has been a series of budget cuts since 2009, significant resources have been invested in researching and preventing the occurrence of CSE since 2011 and this has become the organising category towards which service and educational developments are orientated.

2.2.4 *Back to the present day*

If activism in the 80's and 90's was focused on 'producing consent' and promoting 'sexual health', and at the turn of the millennium on effecting 'equality', then contemporary agendas can be characterised as 'protectionist' and 'revisionist', guided by assumptions of failures to protect, both now and in the past. It is ironic that these concerns to protect arise at the same time as the proliferation of new mediated forms of sexual contact and representation which destabilise some of the basic categories at play in the story of consent, sex, competence and control. The current moral panic is highly mediated, accompanied by a torrent of coverage, campaigns, TV dramas and documentaries that have been aired about the interrelated topics of SRE, sexual abuse, exploitation, and consent. The quotes early in this chapter are examples of public representations of youth sexuality and a more public attempt to educate people about the issues of consent, coercion and rape. In addition to this TV documentary (which aims to explore the legalities and the grey area between rape and consent) there are a number of notable examples of public pedagogy (Biesta, 2013; Clarke, 2018). These come in the form of TV shows, news segments and advert campaigns which are part of a wider project to 'change the wallpaper' and highlight the prevalence of sexual violence and exploitation, particularly in relationships.

Key campaigns that I and participants in my study have used and referenced are: Channel 4's Disrespect no-body campaign⁹ which aims to highlight that "Healthy relationships are all about respecting each other. You should feel loved, safe and free to be yourself." (disrespectnobody.co.uk, 2016)¹⁰. Other examples are The Sussex police campaign to raise awareness of sexual exploitation, and the Metropolitan police's uptake of a viral blog about consent and tea as a tool for teaching about consent¹¹.

⁹ This is the most recent iteration of the 'this is abuse' government funded campaign which ran from 2010 to 2014 and was targeted at 13 to 18 year olds to depict different examples of abuse and violation and thus raise awareness of abuse, and what are now framed as issues of consent and exploitation. See <https://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk/> for more information.

¹⁰ The This is Abuse campaign launched In February 2010

¹¹ <http://metro.co.uk/2015/10/28/this-new-sexual-consent-and-tea-video-from-the-police-is-brilliant-5466392/>



Figure 3 Sussex police campaign



Figure 2 'Consent is like a cup of tea video' by Thames Valley police

In addition to these campaigns which focus on exploitation there has also been wider recognition of sexual violence and the issue of consent across all age groups. Notable examples include workshops and research in response to the sexual harassment and violence in higher education (Phipps and Young, 2015; NUS, 2010).

Sexism and sexual violence has been more publicly addressed outside educational establishments as well. #MeToo, originally started by black feminist Tirana Burke in 2007 but taken up by celebrities speaking out against Harvey Weinstein in 2017 (Hoby, 2017), is a recent campaign to break the silence and acknowledge the everyday experiences of sexual violence and harassment. The response to, and fast pace of, this campaign and movement suggest that a moment of revision, change and possible backlash is underway, which may in time lay the foundations for new social and sexual practices.

The campaigns, adverts, and TV shows outlined above, and the many others not referenced here, all tend to highlight the problem of 'poor SRE' and poor understandings of desire, consent

and coercion. They are intended to raise awareness of exploitation and abuse and encourage a better understanding of the importance of respect and consent. However they often present the issues within a limited framework of heteronormativity and through a binary view of consent as necessary for something to be legal. As Tanya Palmer points out “rape, and sexual violation are [still] often defined or recognised by an absence of consent” (Palmer, 2013; 2016) which, as will be shown later, is the way consent education is often framed.

Consent is no longer ‘naturalised’ as part of a hetero repertoire. Yet the critical gender politics that framed earlier debates have been eclipsed by protectionist discourses of safeguarding and a focus on age differences, vulnerability and abuse, arguably cemented by the convergence and consensus that 16 in some way constitutes a meaningful and equal age of consent. Typically, moral panics are fuelled by multiple concerns, and the current agenda is not only about exploited working class girls, but expresses fears concerning new technologies and the potential for new ways of being/doing sexual.

In the contemporary moment ‘consent’ is both a focus for activism and an emergent sexual politics which both constructs consent as an ideal, expanding notions of choice to become more reflexive and critical, yet which also counterposes this with more fatalistic notions of consent as an impossibility in the face of growing inequalities and intergenerational injustice. The ‘figure’ that animates the CSE agenda is that of the working class girl failed by the welfare state. This allows for public expression and representation of sexual abjection and exploitation. Yet closely aligned to this there is a middle class politics of consent that expresses frustration with the post-feminist settlement and looks to politicise and expand sexuality as a territory of sexual choice.

Chapter 3: Thematic Literature Review

Having told the story of consent, I now to return to some of the ideas that these moments of challenge and change gave rise to in terms of research and academic commentary. This thematic literature review draws on and revisits moments and literature outlined in the previous chapter. Academic literature has for the most part reflected what was going on, or about to occur at the time, with a wealth of publications occurring around 2003. In contrast to early periods of interest in consent more contemporary work about consent tends to be produced as a bi-product of CSE research and intervention projects, or in relation to universities, 'lad culture' and sexual violence (Brady et al. 2017). I have been able to access a number for very recent publications about consent which highlight the need for further research, and more engagement with the nuances of sexual negotiation, and the ways in which young people's sexual agency is scaffolded and restricted. Empirical work by Geraldine Brady and her team on 'Where's my Line' (Brady et al. 2017), and more conceptual work by Jen Gilbert reflecting on changes to SRE education in Canada (Gilbert, 2017) have been a welcome and affirmative addition to my reading list.

At the start of this research the most comprehensive, and recent, study on consent that I had access to was "'Sex without consent, I suppose that's rape: How young people in England understand consent' produced by Maddie Coy and colleagues (2013). This report was part of a research project funded by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) as part of an inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups. The findings from this work, and those outlined above will be referred to in detail later. However it is important to note that other than Coy and her teams' study, which developed as a secondary element of research into CSE, it has been difficult to find recent work that explicitly relates to how children and young people in the UK understand and enact consent in their everyday lives. Moira Carmody's work over the same period in Australia has focused on understanding and teaching 'sexual ethics' in schools (Carmody, 2009; Carmody and Ovenden, 2013; Carmody, 2015). Her theories and findings will be important when discussing sex education and consent. To find more critical work on consent it is necessary to look to research published around the turn of the millennium, which itself built on the work of radical feminists in the late 20th century (Cowling and Reynolds, 2004).

There was a significant amount of radical feminist work by feminist academics such as Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, Gayle Ruben, Nicola Gavey and Liz Kelly throughout the 80's

and 90's which highlighted gendered inequality, sexual violence and exploitation and institutional heteronormativity or 'heteropatriarchy'. Their work and others contributed to the change in definitions of rape and the recognition of marital rape as highlighted in the previous chapter. The work of these feminists also created a foundation for a discourse of active or affirmative consent (Gilbert, 2017), which moved against the gendered ideas of constraint, sexual conquest and reluctance which characterised understandings of rape and sex through the 20th century (Home office, 2000). Through their work, and the work of activist groups and service providers "The problem of sexual non-consent – and so sexual consent – was pushed into legal and public domains" (Cowling and Reynolds, 2004:2).

Leading up to the 2003 SOA there was a renewed wave of work about consent in academia, feminist and women's groups, which focused on consent as a key concept. Mark Cowling and Paul Reynolds edited a collection of papers and essays into a book titled 'Making sense of sexual consent' which was published in 2004. The collection critically engages with the concept, considering the nuances, ambiguity and potential to view quality, communication and ethics of consent. This book has been a key text for developing my understanding of consent, and particularly in understanding the debates and discussions that were occurring about consent at the turn of the millennium. Paul Reynolds' work in particular was a key contribution to literature on consent as a topic in its own right which does not always have to be considered with reference to rape and sexual violence (2004:93-108). Rachel Thomson and Mathew Waites were also working on consent at this time, and their work has been key to understanding consent in relation to age, and in particular young people's understandings and experiences. I consider their contributions in more depth when I discuss age and competence.

The following draws on the academic literature above, and the work of others as I explore the themes of heteronormativity, power and pressure; age and competence; and the role of SRE. These themes are consistently present throughout the history and development of consent as outlined in Chapter Two.

3.1 Consent, heteronormativity, power and pressure

Much research on consent has noted that it is an inherently heterosexual and gendered term and that it is generally understood that women consent to the sexual desires and actions of men (Moore and Reynolds, 2004:29; Lear, 1995; Hall, 1998; Powell, 2010; Coy et al. 2013; Jackson, 1999; Home office, 2000; Carmody, 2009). In these narratives sex is generally viewed as

involving vaginal penetration and male ejaculation (Holland et al. 1998; Jackson, 1999). This is a product of structural heteronormativity throughout society, where heteronormativity might be viewed as “monogamous, marital, middle class, normatively gendered (and white) sexuality” (McNeill, 2013). The work of feminist and queer academics has consistently called into question the inevitability and ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality which “renders any alternative sexualities ‘other’ and marginal” and which is rooted in normatively/reductively gendered scripts, divisions and hierarchies (Jackson, 1999:163). It is important to consider consent through a feminist lens which critiques heterosexuality, power and pressure.

Many feminist writers discuss the power relations of heterosexual interactions. Some put forth arguments that all heterosexual relationships are rooted in patriarchy and that women may be ‘victims of male desire, acts and violence’ (MacKinnon, 1989:177; Carmody, 2004:53). Arguably, strong radical feminist positions that critique hetero-sex per se run the danger of rendering consent meaningless, negating women’s sexual agency, failing to acknowledge the diversity of women’s [and men’s] personal experiences and desires alongside culture, class, race, age, (dis)ability (Carmody, 2004:47-49; Butler, 2012). This failure has been criticised by other feminist writers who approach consent, sex and sexuality from an individualist perspective. Writers such as Rophie (1993) and Wolf (1993) responded to structuralist arguments by acknowledging and stressing the sexual agency and desires of women in society. They argue that some feminists have promoted the victimization of women, and that finding pleasure in hetero-sex is not a weakness or submission to patriarchy but is an assertion of women as sexual agents who are solely responsible for their own actions (Rophie, 1993; Wolf, 1993).

I agree with Moore and Reynolds (2004) who point out that each of the above arguments are ‘too static and one dimensional’ (36) and acknowledge a need to find a middle ground which considers the interplay between structure and agency when debating the power dynamics of consent in heterosexuality and more broadly. Foucault’s theories of power are useful here as they both remind us that power imbalances are inherent in all social interaction, and they provoke us to question understandings of these power relations (Ramazanglou, 1993). There are arguments that sex is ‘generally dominated by the social construction of men’s sexual needs’ and therefore women’s capacity to consent is based on male dominance (Holland et al. 1993:23, Moore and Reynolds, 2004:29). Accepting that men often have more power, or are positioned higher in the structures of power relating to sex and consent, does not mean that women are universally victims of male dominance, or that they have no agency (Carmody, 2004:53; Carmody and Carrington, 2000:346).

Moira Carmody's work encourages, as Calder suggests (2004), a move away from the idea that consent is always reactive and encourages young people to view and enact consent as a "*process* of mutual negotiation rather than a one-off agreement that may have been communicated verbally or non-verbally before sex began" (Carmody and Ovenden, 2013:802, original emphasis). Carmody's school based educational programme (2006; 2009;2013) draws heavily on Foucault's (1981) work on ethical sexual subjectivities to reshape gendered expectations of sex and consider how ethical sexual exploration can occur in heterosexual encounters. She argues that a "process of mutual concern is possible... through constant reflection and renegotiation with ourselves and others" (2013:796). She notes that all sexual encounters, "invite the possibility of ethical sexual behaviour" (2015:105). While this is a positive view of sex and consent, other studies, particularly those that are not intervention based, suggest that this view of consent or reflective and ethical sexual practice is far from the norm - something that will be addressed in later chapters.

A number of studies relating to sexual practice and consent claim that consent is often assumed unless there is obvious 'evidence to the contrary' (McGregor, 2004:104; Coy et al. 2013; Holland et al. 1994; Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1998; O'Sullivan and Allgeier, 1998; Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005). To assume consent is not meaningful; however, acknowledging the need for it and reacting to the expressions of another person is more considerate, active and ethical. This was the core argument of feminists who were cultivating a discourse of consent throughout the late 20th century. While in many ways the discourse of affirmative consent has taken hold in policy and educational discourse, it is clear that consent and ethical sexual practice is still constrained by inherent expectations and pressures of heteronormativity (Thomson, 2004:143). There is evidence that sexual practices and norms have changed rapidly in the last 30 years (Wellings et al. 2001; NATSAL, 2014), nevertheless, a gendered double standard of how people are judged and expected to behave still perpetuates throughout British society. It is arguable that new technologies may have intensified this process. Women's bodies and sexuality are under surveillance from the state in new ways, including medical and contraceptive interventions, self-surveillance and the enduring surveillance power of peers where categories of 'frigid' or a 'slut' continue to have power, (Powell, 2010; Carmody and Ovenden, 2012; Coy et al. 2013; Dobson and Ringrose, 2016).

Liz Kelly and Jill Radford's work in the early 90's and Liz Kelly's work on the continuum of sexual violence highlighted how hetero-patriarchy, perpetuates through society particularly noting the

silencing of experiential knowledge. Their work calls into question the inevitable and 'normal' experience of sexual violence that many women experience as part of their relationships. Kelly and Radford comment on the 'male streaming' of low level sexual violence and coercion, and remark that 'women are systematically encouraged to down play violence and pressure' (1990). They have argued that "much so called consensual heterosexual sex is coercive if not forced" (41). More recent work on sexual violence and exploitation echoes this, "societal attitudes about violence and sexual relationships suggest that exploitation and violence may be inherent and therefore expected as normal" (Pearce, 2013:53). People's reference points for labelling events as sexual violence are constrained by a focus on extreme representations of sexual violence and the law's binary distinctions that encounters are either rape, or not rape, consensual or non-consensual (Radford and Kelly, 1990; Butler, 2012). Later in the thesis I develop a continuum of sexual agency and consider some of the structural factors that affect, and the ways people might label, different sexual encounters, thinking about how terminology helps and hinders conversations, teaching and practices of consent.

Socio-legal scholar Tanya Palmer advocates that it is necessary to rethink consent and replace the current legal standard of 'consent' with a standard of 'freedom to negotiate' which looks at the context within which any agreement to have sex takes place (2013:5, 2017). This acknowledges the ambiguity of the concept of consent but also encourages communication by acknowledging that 'free agreement' (HMSO, 2003) can only occur if there is 'room to negotiate and say no' within each context (2013:3). The term 'negotiate' can be problematic too, however it implies a space for communication and discussion and moves away from the binaries in consent of 'yes' or 'no'. Coy et al. (2013) point out that both consent and coercion are slippery concepts, making drawing of such boundaries complex and even contradictory" (11). It is understandable that consent is a complex concept and process, and arguably one that is not understood enough despite its recent resurgence into educational discourses around sexual practice.

Coy et al. (2013) have noted that there needs to be more emphasis put on 'getting' rather than 'giving' consent. This is certainly the main focus of many campaigns and educational programmes pertaining to consent. More needs to be done to shift from a culture of non-consent and assumed or passive giving, to a culture of consent in which it is actively sought (Calder, 2004; Cahill, 2001; Butler, 2012; Brady et al. 2017).

Some authors argue that ideally people's sexual interactions should be based on the assumption that there is no consent unless there is a clear sign of affirmative consent (Malm, 1996 in McGregor 2004:105; Cahill, 2001; Gilbert, 2017). This is more in-line with the work of radical feminists outlined above. Although in theory this seems sensible, lived experience and the ambiguity of consent would suggest that even if people assumed there was no consent, what people interpret as affirmation will differ greatly as people rarely respond with 'clear sign[s]' of consent such as 'yes' or 'no' (Calder, 2004:61). Additionally, consent, or seeking it, is not really seen as 'sexy' (Carmody, 2004). This was confirmed by Cowling (2004) in his exploration of the Antioch College code of consent¹².

Judith Butler's reflections on sexual consent are thought provoking; she usefully highlights that the way consent is commonly understood is limited and problematic. She questions the idea of a "fully choosing subject whose sexual choices express a full understanding and a full sense of freedom" (2012:12). This is revisited in a discussion of ambivalence in Chapter Seven. In the same piece however, she draws our attention to the need to reconsider consent and agreement. And view a 'yes' as less an act of consent on a legal model than as "a way of lending oneself out for an experience about which one cannot say in advance will be good or bad" (2012:11). This line of thought will be picked up in the analysis and discussion.

3.1.1 What about young people?

Janet Holland and her colleagues' work on The Women Risk and AID's Project (WRAP) has been central to reframing how youth sexuality, heterosexuality, gender and power are played out in the everyday lives of young women and girls. Their work and findings which are presented at length in the book 'The Male In The Head' (1998), highlight the intersection of class, age and gender and the ways in which hetero-patriarchal power inequalities play out in young people's everyday lives and more specifically their intimate relationships. This text, and other

¹² This code was introduced at Antioch college in an attempt to clarify and emphasise the importance of consent in relationships between students. The code states that at every stage of sexual escalation in a relationship verbal consent must be established. So, for example one must ask before kissing and then ask again to escalate to touching through clothes, then again to removing clothes, to giving oral and then having penetrative sex and so on. Although the respondents in Cowling's research appreciated the importance of consent, they suggested that obtaining verbal consent every step of the way was cumbersome and at times unnecessary. There were suggestions that sometimes it is nice not to know what is going to happen next, and to be able to surprise someone. There was also some indignation that there was a common code that could be applied to every relationship (Cowling, 2004).

publications from the project are regarded as a key contribution to knowledge around (young) female sexuality. Although the project did not explicitly focus on consent and the law, it provided great insight and evidence into the restrictively gendered sexual scripts that young people embody throughout their relationships. The notion of consent here is understood through wanting or not wanting, and if and how it may be acceptable to acknowledge and articulate desire.

In their 1994 paper 'Power and Desire: The embodiment of female sexuality' Holland et al. noted that sex brings "material bodies directly into consciousness, and directly into social situations" (34). They work through the different ways in which female sexual desire is silenced and limited by a number of factors, including heteronormatively gendered expectations, double standards and a limited vocabulary for discussing sexual desire and pleasure. They argue that language limits the way in which we can talk about sex, and therefore consent, since our dominant culture has no 'acceptable' "ways of discussing sex which are not clinical, obscene or childish" (24). They maintain that "The available language is one couched in terms of relationships [...] or in euphemisms and obscurities [...] in which bodily sexual activities become veiled" (24).

Although the discourse of consent was gaining public attention at the time they were writing they found that there was a difference in young women's attitudes towards sex, consent and the expression of desire depending on their class and social background. Holland et al. outlined how many young women, but particularly those from working class backgrounds, seemed more likely to accept the power dynamics of their relationships and 'silence their own desires' (1994: 35) in favour of allowing male desires to have dominance in the sexual aspects of their relationships (33-35). More recent research suggest that young women often contest their positioning as sexually passive and are able to articulate sexual pleasures (Renold and Ringrose, 2008; Ovenden, 2011; Carmody and Ovenden, 2012). Yet it is clear that the articulation of desire is still subject to double standards and constrained by age, social class, education and structures of heteronormative inequalities.

Following the WRAP project Rachel Thomson, who was part of the team, later worked with colleagues on the 'The Youth values: Identity, diversity and social change research project' (RESPECT). They examined the values of 11-16 year olds in a variety of schools in different geographic and socio-economic locations throughout the UK; sex and consent was one of a range of topics that was covered. Waites (2004) acknowledged the project for producing some of the "first data of its kind" in relation to sex and consent and Rachel Thomson analysed and

published the data on attitudes towards age of consent laws (2004a). Her findings relating to timeliness, and 'being' ready for sex will be discussed later. She points out that until the 2003 SOA "legislation on the age of consent for heterosexual sex enshrined in law an asymmetrical and gendered notion of sex and sexual agency." She and other feminists have noted that even with the clarification and equalisation of age of consent laws the "'discourse of consent', which such legal formulations incite, continues to anchor and compound restrictively gendered sexual scripts (Gavey, 1993; Holland et al. 1998)" (Thomson, 2004a:134).

As shown above, there is a significant amount of work on consent that highlights its contested and at times ambiguous nature. Critical work on power complicates consent, and this is further complicated by addressing age and competence. Protecting children from sex has recently been prioritised through age of consent laws, new policy and legislation and through the formal and informal censorship and regulation of children's behaviours and access to sexual knowledge (Jackson, 2006; Gilbert, 2017). It is clear that censorship is not protection (Levine, 2002:19) and that the 'wilful maintenance of ignorance' and childhood 'innocence' (Robinson, 2012) contributes to their potential vulnerabilities and lack of competence in sexual decision making. The contested nature of consent outlined above is further complicated by considering how the law, and notions of age appropriateness and competence play into or are a result of hetero-patriarchal power structures.

3.2 Age and competence

I have already considered how consent may be constrained by heteronormative power inequality and pressure. Children and young peoples' rights, freedoms and capacity to consent can be further constrained through often being constructed as 'not yet citizens' (Moosa-Mitha 2005). They are viewed to be in need of discipline and protection by or from adults and the state (Bessant 2001; Carmody 2013). As argued by Correa, et al. (2008:179) in reference to Butler (2005) it is important to consider "whose lives count as lives in our moral universe?" (17). Children's sexuality and citizenship is often viewed as *becoming* and as such I would suggest that their sex lives often do not count. Kelly Robinson notes that the "relationship of childhood to sexuality is fraught with difficulties, controversies, and complexities; it is one openly and officially based on exclusion, with children constituted as requiring protection from sexuality, considered an 'adults' only' domain, dangerous to children" (Robinson, 2012:258).

Childhood sexuality is commonly framed as “problem behaviour” and a cause of adult concern (Waites, 2004; Robinson, 2012; Palmer et al. 2016). Mathew Waites has pointed out that “in drawing a line at 16 the law can be seen as defining the condition of those either side, both the child – in need of protection – and the adult – as having the right to consent” (1999). This binary understanding of children as in need of protection, and adults as sexual agents, persists today. It has been contested by recent revelations about CSE and the shortcomings of how this has been managed. In relation to this, Maddie Coy has posed the question “What process can occur in 24 hours that transforms something inherently exploitive into an issue of choice and consent?” (2016: 575). As I show in the following and later chapters it is important to focus on competence, as much, if not more than age.

Age of consent laws are one example of how different discourses and constructions of innocence and acceptability become entrenched within society and discipline the sexuality of youthful subjects. Jen Gilbert (2017) explores the question: ‘How does our turn to the law to ‘protect’ the sexual vulnerability of children inadvertently create new forms of subordination and inequity?’ (6). Likewise Mathew Waites (2005) has outlined how age of consent laws are not only a criminal justice issue, but also intimately tied to ideas about children’s rights and emerging citizenship (218-219). Judith Butler has spoken about this as the ‘silencing effects of the regulatory law’ with respect to sexual activity, noting that age of consent laws are ‘often occasions in which fears over emerging childhood sexuality are negotiated’ (2012:3). Building on the work of Gail Ruben (1984), Robinson also notes that laws, and fears around children’s sexuality and a need to ‘protect their childhood innocence’ leads to the invisibility of child sexuality, and thus the silencing of children to voice their opinions, experiences and fears in this area (2012).

“The law is especially ferocious in maintaining the boundary between childhood ‘innocence’ and ‘adult’ sexuality. Rather than recognizing the sexuality of the young, and attempting to provide for it in a caring and responsible manner, our culture denies and punishes erotic interest and activity by anyone under the local age of consent. The amount of law devoted to protecting young people from premature exposure to sexuality is breath-taking.”

(Ruben, 1984:18)

Although youth sexuality is commonly viewed as a problem, ‘under age’ sex, it is not entirely demonised and many countries have a ‘close in age exception’ to their legal age of consent (Gilbert, 2017:5). The UK law tolerates sexual activity between consenting teenagers based on the assumption that some young people between 13 and 15 may have the capacity and the

competence to understand the potential outcomes and risks of sex. This grey area, or place of flexibility, maps onto the outcomes and ruling of the Gillick case which, as outlined previously, legislated in favour of young people's rights and capacity to consent to contraception on the grounds that they are making an informed 'adult' decision about the medical risks and benefits of the contraception and also avoiding the risks associated with sex.

Given the medical context of the Gillick case the medical profession took a lead in considering how to define and understand consent (Pearce, 2013). This model has been folded into more contemporary definitions and ways of thinking about sexual consent and what qualities may be necessary for someone to be viewed as competent to give consent. One of the key problems here is that a medical and procedural logic that informs conceptions of consent, and thus competences to express consent, is not easily applied to the 'spontaneity' and complexity of in the moment sexual acts and negotiation (Butler, 2012; Gilbert, 2017; Carmody, 2005).

Many scholars have noted the reductive and binary nature of consent, highlight that the law is a 'blunt instrument', often criminalising acts on the basis of age, which is "not necessarily an adequate proxy for capacity and competence" (Gilbert, 2017:6). The UK's Fraser guidelines, that resulted from the Gillick ruling, do attend to this, and encourage practitioners not to view young people as an homogenous group whose 'childhood innocence' *needs* protecting and sexuality limiting, but rather to gauge individual young people's competence to practically and emotionally manage the safety, and potential consequences of sexual encounters. These guidelines have been both celebrated, and criticised since their creation, but are of specific relevance in the context of CSE.

Jenny Pearce notes that the "assessment of Gillick competencies against Fraser guidelines do not enable a critical appraisal of the social pressures and structures that might impact on the relationship between consent and abuse," (2013:58). This relates directly to Kelly's work on acknowledging how pressure and coercion have been normalised within heterosexual scripts. There have been concerns that practitioners using these guidelines do not identify early warning signs of abuse, exploitation and coercion (Coy et al. 2013; Pearce, 2013), perhaps in favour of 'hearing' the child's voice, and seeking out or supporting their competencies. This is a good example of where child protection and safeguarding agendas can be in tension with more liberal and public health agendas. That is not to say that liberal agendas do not see child protection as important, but rather that the mode of protection involves equipping children and young people with the knowledge and skills to care for themselves.

In terms of ‘hearing the child’s voice’ and supporting their competence there is a significant body of work which highlights youth sexuality and exploration as a normative part of childhood and youth transitions (Graff and Schweiger, 2017; Thomson, et al 2002; Allen, 2007; Diamond 2006; Tolman and McClelland, 2011; Ehrhardt, 1996). However, there is a fairly limited amount of research that explicitly seeks to understand how young people understand and navigate consent, competence and ‘readiness’ for sex. Coy et al’s report ‘Sex without consent I suppose that’s rape’, and Brady et al’s 2017 paper provide a contemporary overview of this reflecting many of the findings that Rachel Thomson presented in her paper “‘An adult thing’? Young people’s perspectives on heterosexual ages of consent” (2004a). The young people in all three of these studies noted that “most people don’t go by the law”, (2004a:137) while also supporting the legal age of 16, or in some cases, suggesting it be made higher.

Thomson highlights that young people were keen to clarify that that law was not the determining factor for when or how sex might be considered acceptable or legitimate. The law may be a resource for them to draw on, however it was clear from the participants that what was most important was that first sex, and sex more generally, only happened when someone was ‘ready’ - something that is reflected in Brady and Coy’s work also. This notion of being ‘ready’ or sex being ‘timely’ is “flexible enough to accommodate individual and gender differences” (2004:143). Many of my participants have presented similar opinions and I will consider Rachel’s findings relating to timeliness, and ‘being’ ready for sex in more depth in the empirical chapters.

Thomson’s work is particularly significant here as she notes the interplay between youth, competence and structural normalisation of heteronormative power inequalities outlined earlier. She notes that:

In a cultural context where sexual pressure is perceived to be the norm, where female sexual agency is difficult to articulate and where inequalities of power and experience characterise sexual relationships, it can be difficult to judge when a person is ‘ready’ for sex.

(2004:143)

3.2.1 Competence

One idea with promise for considering agency and sexual safety is sexual competence. It is clear from the work of Waites and Thomson that age, particularly for those over 13, is not the key component of whether a young person is deemed to be, or certainly considers themselves to be 'ready' for sex. Whether someone is 14, 16, 18, or 20 there are layers of inequality which will affect their 'sexual competence', their freedoms and capacity to consent. Timing, or 'timeliness' as Thomson (2004a) has put it, of first sexual intercourse is not judged on age so much as context and this is key when considering how context affects relationships, freedoms and readiness. A vocabulary of "sexual competence" has emerged as a way of understanding the complex and contextual factors shaping sexual safety and negotiation. However, as Pearce (2013) points out, conversations about competence have, in some instances, eclipsed conversations about sexual agency, especially with reference to children and young people.

In the UK 16 remains the average age of first sex (NATSAL, 2014¹³), however there is an overall trend that the age at first sex is declining and that people have more sexual partners throughout their lifetime (NATSAL, 2014). There are also suggestions that while young people may in some cases 'wait' until they are 16 to have sexual intercourse they have often experienced a variety of other sexual interaction before this time (Tolman and McClelland, 2011; Hirst, 2008; Palmer et al. 2016). The age of legal consent in a number of other European countries is lower, at 14 or 15 however the numbers of young people who have penetrative sex for the first time before they are aged 16 are similar to that of the UK (Waites, 2004). It is clear that sex during adolescence is common and not inherently negative or risky (Palmer, et al. 2016) and that age is not a determining factor for being 'ready' to have sex or for informed decision making.

Palmer and Colleagues working on the data from the latest survey in 2010 have noted that:

The case for a more nuanced measure of timing of sexual debut has been made on the grounds that the use of chronological age neglects individual differences in physical, social, and psychological maturity, and also cultural variation in social norms and

¹³ The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL) has been collecting data and charting the changes in sexual behaviours and attitudes since 1990, with data reflecting changes over the last over the last 30 years. This survey gives statistical evidence to support Week's observations that the UK is becoming more sexually liberal with time and that interventions such as free access to contraception and teenage pregnancy strategies are having an impact on the youth population.

legislation governing timing of sexual initiation (Hawes, Wellings and Stephenson, 2010). In recognition of this, an attempt was made in the second British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL-2) to broaden the criteria by which the appropriateness of timing of onset of sexual activity is measured (Wellings et al., 2001) and to bring them more in line with the broad definition of sexual health endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2006). On a priori grounds that first intercourse should be safe, consensual, an autonomous decision, and optimally timed, a combined variable was constructed using answers to four corresponding survey questions and given the working label of sexual competence.

(2016:1-2)

The way in which sexual competence has been framed by NATSAL II (Wellings et al. 2001), and subsequently in NATSAL III for ‘continuity’ (Palmer et al. 2016) considers the ‘circumstances surrounding first intercourse’. A person is deemed competent to have engaged in sex if the following four criteria are met:

1. *absence of regret,*
2. *willingness (not under duress),*
3. *autonomy of decision (a natural follow on in the relationship, being in love, curiosity), as opposed to non-autonomous (being drunk or peer pressure), and*
4. *reliable use of contraception.*

These four elements of “competent” sexual practice were seen as key for minimising the risks associated with (underage) sex. Julia Hirst critiques these criteria suggesting that the work of Roger Ingham and colleagues in the late 90’s (Ingham, 1998) gives a more complex view of competence. She notes that pleasure is not considered by Welling’s typology of competence, but that it could be implicit in the other categories of regret or willingness (Hirst, 2008).

Whether or not the NATSAL definition of competence is employed it is important to consider what other factors need to be present for someone to be ‘ready’ for sex. It is clear that age is not the only or most important factor in determining whether someone should be able to give consent to sex and be considered competent. For young people to be considered competent there are a number of things they need to know in order to make educated and autonomous decisions about having both medically and morally ‘safe’ sex. It is important to enhance and encourage young people’s capacity, capability or competencies as part of a wider project that encompasses the needs of child protection and viewing children and young people as citizens. Brooks’ recent briefing paper on SRE notes that “there is still much more that needs to be done

to truly equip children and young people with the skills and confidence to manage their sexual health and wellbeing” (Brook, 2015:7). With this in mind the final section of the literature review considers how SRE and sexual health services for children and young people have been, and are, important for developing young people’s knowledge and building their capacity to understand and to enter into sexual relations that will be a positive experience for all involved.

3.3 The role of sex and relationships education

The work outlined above highlights the need to educate children and young people, rather than criminalise youth sexuality. The significance of education for enabling and nurturing the development of sexual competence is hugely important, yet the ways that schools and educators are able, and feel able, to do this vary. The question of how education disciplines and manages the sexuality of its students is also of significance here. The following provides a short overview of literature pertaining to sex education and its role in education for consent.

There are important debates and questions concerning the extent to which Sex education provides critical spaces and promotes sexual citizenship of young people. For a contemporary collection of work on critical pedagogy in sexuality education see Sanjakdar and Yip’s new edited volume (2018). They introduce the collection, which reflects research and practice across several countries, by noting that:

Discourse and decision about sexuality education, and the meanings built into school based sexuality education curriculum are constructed by tradition, by unquestioned values and by implicit assumptions about sexuality. [...] A hegemonic, assimilationist culture shaping sexuality education today has found its way in the classroom, setting the agenda with respect to what is deemed culturally reasonable, realistic or normal, reaching so deeply into unconscious levels of thought as powerful methods of legitimacy, conformity and social control

(Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018:5).

SRE and sexual health services for children and young people have, in the UK, generally been developed and delivered in response to public health concerns and as such the content and focus of SRE tends to reflect the moral panic and adult concerns about young people’s health and behaviour. Pam Alldred and Mirriam David have previously criticised the UK’s SRE guidance for prioritising parents’ concerns and expectations and marginalising young people and their experiences and concerns in sex education (2007). This criticism has been echoed in research

and campaigns that call for more youth centred and sex positive education (Brook, 2015; Flicker and Guta, 2007; Carmody, 2009).

A UNESCO report in 2009 highlighted:

Few young people receive adequate preparation for their sexual lives. This leaves them potentially vulnerable to coercion, abuse and exploitation, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Many young people approach adulthood faced with conflicting and confusing messages about sexuality and gender. This is often exacerbated by embarrassment, silence, and disapproval of open discussion of sexual matters by adults, including parents and teachers, at the very time when it is most needed.

(UNESCO, 2009:2).

The report extract above reflects what is commonly considered a 'sex negative', or 'risk centred' starting point to education and provision. In response to this kind of experience, research and campaigns have called for a more 'sex positive' approach to SRE. This can be thought of as education that actively and productively addresses children and young people's sexual citizenship and provides spaces for critical reflection and acknowledgment of young people's sexual agency. Robinson and Carmody both argue that access to sexual knowledge and to open honest discussions around sexuality are critical to young people's health and wellbeing throughout their lives, and that sex education can provide the "foundations of a sustainable culture of sexual ethics and respectful relationships in society more broadly" (Carmody, 2009; Robinson, 2012:259).

National and regional sexual health guidance documents in the United Kingdom generally draw on the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) definition:

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

(WHO, 2006)

Despite this there is a general consensus in contemporary literature and educational guidance that sex education focuses too much on risk and protection, rather than the emotional and social aspects outlined above. It is suggested that 'better' SRE would focus more on the complex and

emotional aspects of relationships and sexuality (Whittington and Thomson, 2018; Hughes, et al. 1999; Ofsted, 2013; Hirst 2008, McGeeny, 2013; NCB, 2014; UKYP 2007; Brook et al 2014; Brook and FPA, 2013; Bates, 2014) of which consent is an important and difficult topic. There is also a question about who can and does deliver this education and what their frame of reference is regarding the educational relationships they engage in (Aldred, 2018).

SRE, both formal and informal, plays an important role in a wider public health project which seeks to encourage safe and positive sexual lifestyles. There is, as I have outlined, currently an enormous amount of anxiety about preserving and protecting childhood innocence and enhancing a better understanding of sexual consent. The Conservative Party in the UK included reference to this in their 2010 Manifesto pledging that “To help stop sexual violence before it occurs, we will ensure that school curriculum includes teaching young people about sexual consent”. If anything, over the course of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government, and now the Conservative government, provision for SRE became a low priority, subject to the effects of budget cuts and the academisation of schools. In response to this there have been campaigns calling for SRE to be put back on the agenda, and to be mandatory across all schools.

The new legislation to make SRE mandatory in September 2019 suggests that this has been responded to positively, however the process will be slow and the extent to which it will positively filter into all schools it as yet unknown. Jackson and Scott noted in 2004 that SRE is of variable quality throughout the UK and that is it often weakest where it is most needed; namely in terms of provision for vulnerable young people (2004:235; Weeks, 2007:152). More recent work, such as the report by Coy et al, (2013) and findings from a recent Ofsted report (2013) echo this.

Young people gain and develop their knowledge and opinions about sexual health, contraception, consent and respect within relationships¹⁴ from a variety of sources. These include, but are not exclusive to, personal experience, family and community values, religion, media, education, pornography and public campaigns (Lear, 1995; Marston et al. 2004; Lader, 2009; Stone and Ingham, 2006; Sirianganathan et al. 2010; Brook 2014; Young, 2018). These

¹⁴ This can be anything from how they consider or negotiate ‘one night stands’, casual sex with one or multiple partners, and the development of a long term monogamous relationship. For me it also relates to developing one’s personal relationship with sex, not just in the context of another.

messages, expectations and societal pressures can be varied and conflicting making it particularly difficult for young people to negotiate relationships, sex, consent and the use of contraception (MacDowell and Mitchell, 2006; Stone and Ingham, 2006; Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2012; Bates, 2014). Much educational or 'moral' based information highlights the discourses of risk, modesty and heteronormativity (Fine, 1988; Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2012; McNeill, 2013).

A strong and consistent message about the positives, pleasures and practicalities of negotiating 'good sex' seem to be missing in educational discourse (Brook, 2014; Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2012; McGeeny, 2013). This may stem from the competing discourses which view young people as both agentic, and sexual whilst simultaneously asexual and in need of protection (Thomson, 2004b:35). The latter discourse informs a commonly held view that informing, or talking to, young people about sex will encourage them to become sexually active at an 'inappropriate' age (Ingham and Mayhew, 2006:21; Thomson, 2004a&b). Contrary to this, although still very much informed by discourses of risk and protection, recent Ofsted inspections have found that, despite progress across the country, SRE needs improving in one third of UK schools. They are clear that a lack of quality SRE leaves pupils vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (Ofsted, 2013).

Carmody and Ovenden (2012) point out that a key challenge for people who work to educate children and young people about the practical and medical, as well as the emotional aspects of sexual health, relationships and wellbeing is making it engaging and meaningful to them. Pam Alldred's recent chapter discusses the approaches of different sex education professionals and highlights the significance of who is able and competent to have conversations and deliver education about sexual health and wellbeing more broadly. The role, as well as the practices and possibilities for different professionals tasked with educating about sexual health and wellbeing differ considerably. By comparing the perspectives that different practitioners bring to their work, Alldred concludes that youth workers are often uniquely placed to have more open and youth centered conversations about sex and sexuality, than teachers and health professionals (Alldred, 2018). While the professional role of people who deliver sex education matters, Mary-Jane Kehiliy's work advocates it is important to find out about how different styles of teaching are received by young people. Her 2002 paper notes how different modes of address from different teaching staff are responded to by students in a school – something that it is important to consider when delivering SRE and using sex positive messages. Similarly, Kehiliy (2002) and Young (2018) have pointed to the ways in which young people respond to more and less formal

modes of teaching and the significance of peer culture for policing sexual practices. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Five and the concluding discussion.

3.3.1 *Consent education*

Given the revelation of CSE, worries about ‘sexting’ and the continued presence of sexual violence in society, consent has become a key topic of focus for SRE, citizenship classes and campaigns. Consent in the form of open communication about desires, is certainly central to what might be viewed as ethical sexual practice. How this topic is covered in schools varies, but generally it seems to be approached with a simplistic and binary representation of consent as a ‘yes’/‘no’ with a focus on the law (Whittington and Thomson, 2018; Gilbert, 2017; Carmody, 2004).

In 2014 Brook, the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum collaborated on the production of ‘Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) for the 21st Century: Supplementary advice and guidance to the sex and relationship education guidance DfE’. A key piece of advice that they offer suggests that:

Pupils should be taught all aspects of the law and sexual consent – notably, that in the law on sexual offences, the onus is on getting rather than giving consent. As a principle, SRE should promote equality in relationships and emphasise the importance of seeking and gaining mutual consent through positive and active communication, and go beyond teaching how to say ‘no’.

(Brook et al. 2014:9)

This advice is consistent with other recent publications by public health bodies; charities and centres that work to end violence against women and children; sexual and reproductive health organisations; and youth agencies and advocacy groups. However, when it comes to teaching about sex and consent, teachers often lack the resources, time, confidence and competence to deliver what might be considered meaningful consent education. Thus SRE, especially in formal settings, often draws on legal definitions, biological facts and other areas that it is possible to be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ about. A commonly cited reason for presenting consent as a binary issue that is simple and unnecessary to unpack, is fear of disclosures and presenting inconsistent messages (NCB, 2014; Sex Education Forum, 2014; Carmody, 2009).

It is important that research regarding teaching and talking about sexual consent acknowledges the difficulties involved and the potentially unsettling nature of this work. “Asking ourselves and young people what we think consent means is revealing... however it is also key to enabling children and young people to navigate relationships” (NCB, 2014:2). As with many issues pertaining to SRE there is a balancing act to be performed between protection and participation. The question is how this can be done, and by whom, in a way that productively attends to participation and capacity building without dispensing with protection, and vice versa.

Findings from a Sex Education Forum survey in 2013 suggest that “young people knew basic legal facts about consent to sex but were much less sure about how to deal with the complexity of real life situations and where and how to get help if they needed it” (Brook et al. 2014: 18). This is also reflected in the works of Coy et al. (2013:12) and Brady et al. (2017). These findings are significant in relation to the role of SRE for building young people’s sexual competence and their capacities to consent to sex. If and when education about consent is more formally delivered, it seems to be done in a way that is difficult to apply to the lives and lifestyles of young people. It is also important as it shows how understandings of consent are often limited and framed within the contexts of sexual violence, rather than in a more positive way: “young people can describe what consent means in theory but real life contexts make a significant difference to their perceptions of what non-consensual sex looks like” (Coy et al. 2013:10).

The NCB report Coy and colleagues produced in light of their research gave six recommendations which would improve young people’s understanding of and engagement in ethical sexual practice, particularly with reference to understanding the processes of consent and coercion. Of these six, three in particular stand out as ways of encouraging a better culture of consent and communication.

- i. *Local action is required for all schools and education providers to ensure that there are opportunities for young people to explore the meaning of consent in the context of relationships and sex education. Five aspects should be core to all discussions in educational or youth work settings:*
 - a. *that getting is as important as giving*
 - b. *applying ideas about consent to real life situations*
 - c. *the gendered double standard positive and active communication that goes beyond expecting partners to ‘say no’*
 - d. *challenging victim blaming.*

- ii. *Targeted sessions should take place with younger teenagers about the boundaries between consent and coercion to ensure they understand what it means to get and give consent.*
- iii. *Education and youth settings need to develop policies and practices that enable young people to critically explore gender - what it is to be male and female – and pressures or expectations to act in certain ways that potentially cause harm to others or oneself.*

(Coy et al. 2013:13).

The implications of the above recommendations, and the studies I have drawn on throughout this chapter, highlight the need for schools to teach and talk more openly about sex and consent. It is important to support young people to develop the capacity and knowledge to make decisions about sex and their bodies and as such it is essential to support critical and public pedagogy which calls into question certain norms, traditions and expectations and responds to the experiences and curiosity of younger people (Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018; Biesta, 2005 and 2015; Clarke, 2018). Yet it is also important to recognise the challenges of overcoming legitimate concerns about disclosures, time constraints and age appropriateness that many teachers encounter in school based SRE, and to think critically about how SRE, in attempting to prepare young people for sexual citizenship, produces self-governing, disciplined subjects (Gilbert, 2017:5).

3.4 Conclusion

As detailed in this chapter, there are strong arguments for a more nuanced understanding of consent. The collected works outlined problematize the notion that sexual consent is simply a matter of ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and that sex is not either *wanted* or *unwanted* (Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005). Teaching consent as a yes/no matter is problematic and unrealistic and also limits the space for active learning and participation. “It is important that the ‘docility of education’ is unsettled and that it takes up projects that are founded in contention, a refusal to tidy categories that allow debate and encompass practices of possibility and impossibility” (Britzman, 1998:77; Robinson 2012:270). Ideally the role of sex education would encourage a greater awareness of self, and sensitivity to the needs of others (Carmody and Ovenden, 2012) while developing new knowledge and questioning hetero-patriarchal norms.

Sex education as it is currently delivered in the UK is increasingly constrained by budget cuts and a focus on testing knowledge relegating SRE to one off lessons, outsourcing the teaching and particularly focusing on risks and not pleasure and communication (Christie, 2016; Alldred and

David, 2007; McGeeney, 2013; Alldred, 2018). In order to cultivate a culture of consent in which (young) people can ethically explore sexual practices, rather than control and constrain their sexuality it is important that sex education does not present issues in a binary and that it encourages a culture of open communication promoting rights and ways of thinking about ethics rather than presenting a series of do's and don'ts (Beres, 2007; Carmody, 2015).

As outlined in Chapter Two the contemporary moment of moral panic is arguably a moment of rupture in how sex, consent and coercion are being viewed and framed. Presently public discourses surrounding young people's sexuality are acutely focused on risk, safety and exploitation (Clapton et al. 2012). This is not unjustified given the revelation of historic and institutional sexual violations. However, this intense focus on extreme examples of sexual violence obscures a focus on everyday sexual wellbeing which has previously been associated with ideas of sexual agency and competence where young people are informed enough to make 'safe' decisions and to seek out support where needed. Rather than focusing on the complexities of everyday sexual encounters and exploration, the current backdrop for discussing consent magnifies the 'spectacular' by focusing on the extremes of sexting, grooming and exploitation. Thus, it is important that more is done to contribute to a body of work which challenges reactionary policies and a focus on extremes.

The key literature presented above draws on work from decades of scholarship around childhood and youth sexuality, contemporary histories of sex and sexuality, critical research and campaigns regarding SRE and the law. The studies referenced have utilised a variety of research methods with participants who are both contributors to and recipients of various kinds of sexuality education. Given the key moments and themes that were in this and the preceding chapter there is a need to critically and publicly address constructions of sexual consent and if and how they are of relevance to young people today. Ultimately, it is important that educational provision and also research that seeks to evaluate and informs SRE practices are youth centred (Flicker and Guta, 2007; Aggleton and Campbell, 2000). There is a significant body of scholarly and policy writing which calls for young people to be more actively involved in research that is about, or which may affect them (Powell and Smith, 2009; Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Skelton, 2008). More institutions and governing bodies are acknowledging that "Listening to youths' concerns is [...] critical to both understanding and participating in social change" (Cahill 2007a:297, Heath et al. 2009). Thus, it is important that this research project focuses explicitly on everyday practices of sexual consent using methods that are youth centred and critical.

Chapter 4: Using Participatory Processes to Research Sexual Consent

The literature review has established the need for research and educational practices about sexual consent to be youth centred and to actively explore the nuances and grey areas of sexual negotiation. The policy statements and public discourses of consent outlined in the previous chapters suggest there is a general public and political belief that teaching about consent can be a way of safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation and sexual violence. As pointed out by Lee & Renzetti (1990:252) we cannot safeguard people by avoiding sensitive or controversial research. The National Children's Bureau note that "Asking ourselves and young people what we think consent means is revealing" (2014:2) and I have certainly found this to be the case. However, worries about disclosures should not stop people teaching and talking about consent (NCB, 2014:12) in an open and exploratory way, breaking the act of silence that contributes to the perpetuation of sexual violence (Fenton et al. 2014). Given the current socio-political interest in consent it has been timely to conduct research that can contribute to agendas in SRE and which attends to the gaps in literature outlined previously. Thus I entered this research project with an ethical commitment to critical pedagogy, youth centred participatory practice and with an intention to focus on the mundane and everyday, rather than the extreme.

This chapter provides a retrospective and reflexive account of the research process. I begin by positioning the project in the abstract and outlining a network of research and practice traditions that contribute to my ways of thinking and doing. I then provide an overview of the chosen research methods before detailing how they were put into practice. After this more abstract introduction to the methods, I describe the phases of data generation and move on to reflect on some of the ethical considerations involved in this kind of work. I conclude the chapter with a brief overview of my analysis and explanation of how data will be presented in the empirical chapters.

The research was a collaborative project with Brook, aimed at using the organisation as a route for better understanding how young people understand consent and to inform the development of youth lead resources. The project took place over a period of organisational change and funding constraint – meaning that the research had to adapt to a rapidly changing set of relationships and environments. As a result, my approach moved from a focus on youth

participation within the organisation to a more keen focus on consent and education. Nevertheless, the primary aim of using creative and action research approaches to address core research questions was realised.

4.1 Locating the research

As demonstrated in the literature review recent research on sexual consent and young people has focused on sexual violation, and often comes as a by-product of research focussing on CSE or sexual violence. Much dialogue about consent and sex, particularly in relation to children and young people, occurs in the context of rights and safeguarding, and draws on discourses of participation and protection which have characterised many debates in childhood and youth studies over the last 30 years. Here I briefly outline the five disciplines which are part of my epistemological starting point. The work I highlight and the key values and focuses of each field have proved integral to the design, adaptation and execution of the research. Although I write about each distinctly, there are synergies and useful overlaps making them easy for me to employ together.

4.1.1 *Childhood and youth studies*

Throughout this research I draw on the theoretical and conceptual notions of childhood championed in the 'new' sociology of childhood. I build on the approaches outlined in James and Prout's edited volume (1997), and work by scholars such as Jo Moran-Ellis (2013), to acknowledge and work in a way that highlights children and young people's agency and capacity to be social agents and actors in and of their own right. Throughout this project I recognise young people as sexual agents, with knowledge, opinions and experiences to contribute to discussions. Much of this research has placed me, as a researcher and youth worker, in a position where I have performed the well documented and delicate balancing act between protection and participation. This is the attempt to balance protecting young people from harm through exposure to distressing or age inappropriate concepts such as sex and violence, with the important aspect of enabling their learning and participation in conversations and decisions that will and do affect them. Work in the field of children's rights, safeguarding and sociology that conceptualises children and young people as social actors and agents has moved away from polarised conversations of protection and participation and towards theories and practice which view participation and education as a key part of protection (Stakstrud & Livingstone, 2009; Nolas, 2014). This is a key value for this research project and has encouraged me to propose and

practice methods of research and group work which encourage young people to participate in conversations and develop their understanding of sexual consent thus cultivating an awareness about sexual consent that may enable them to competently participate in or protect themselves from a range of sexual situations in the immediate or distant future.

4.1.2 Feminist scholarship and activism

This work is politically and epistemologically feminist. I have already outlined the significant role of feminist activism and scholarship for cultivating and shifting conversations about consent, bodily autonomy and women's pleasure. This research seeks to contribute to these debates and practices and follow a tradition of activism around breaking the silence and acknowledging that the personal is political (Cahill, 2007a; Batsleer, 2010b; Ringrose and Renold, 2014)

Feminist scholarship seeks to acknowledge that research about social phenomena cannot be politically neutral and thus openly confronts issues of bias, power and patriarchy (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). Later in this chapter I address my own role in the research, but for now, I note that taking a feminist approach involves naming and theorising the power relations of sexuality as patriarchal and male-dominated. As Janet Holland and colleagues have highlighted taking a feminist stance in research about sexuality provides a "distinct vantage point" from which to highlight and clarify some of the interconnected structures, discourses, institutions and experiences which are a result of and reproduce heteronormativity (1998:17).

Feminist scholarship, and activism has cultivated reflexive and reflective practice, which require the researcher to locate themselves in the research and also to consider power, inequality, patriarchy and gender as key experiences and practices of everyday life. In taking a postmodernist feminist approach I recognise that there is no one 'truth' and that a claim to neutral and objective truth has and continues to mask intersecting axes of oppression and local, cultural and political struggles (Ramazongulu and Holland, 2002; Richardson, 2001)

4.1.3 Participatory action research

The feminist tradition of activism, group work and a commitment to social justice in all areas of work provides fertile ground for participatory action research (PAR). I hold some discomfort with the application of PAR and acknowledge it is difficult to fulfil and practice every element of

it within the constraints of a doctoral project (Smith et al. 2010). Yet I find the language, processes and overarching ethos of PAR useful and pertinent to this area of work, particularly given the youth centred approach and the way this can attend to and resist some of the ethical governance procedures that do not necessarily serve participants first and foremost (Haney and Briton Lykes, 2009). PAR is driven by stakeholders and participants and “actively involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge” (Pain et al. 2011). Research and practice in sexual health and wellbeing has long been criticised for not including children and young people in its development (Flicker and Guta, 2007) and this has also called me to include and learn from young people as much as possible during this work.

At its core PAR is “collaborative research, education and action used to gather information to use for change on social or environmental issues” (Pain et al. 2011). The educational and action based processes of PAR has encouraged me to view this project as an opportunity for teaching and learning about sexual consent, where the distinction between teacher and learner becomes blurred through an exercise in collaboration and coproduction (Cahill, 2007a; Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Freire, 1996). In Chapter Six I outline how the research provided opportunities for participants and me to learn from, and challenge, one another.

4.1.4 *Youth work*

The previous three theoretical and practice areas outlined, for me, converge in the practice of Youth work. Childhood and youth studies, and feminist research provide a theoretical language for constructions of youth and gender. Youth work embodies these key theories through participatory, democratic and voluntarily projects and relationships (Batsleer, 2008; 2010a). It is also a practice that is deeply rooted in a commitment to politics, and ethics (Batsleer, 2010a&b; Davies, 2009). Youth workers seek not to prevent and provide but to *enable* young people, through association with others, to be political social actors and agents. In the UK youth work is a contested and volatile space, sometimes seen as practised and performed in a ‘gap’ between social work and education. In northern European countries, many of the principles of youth work are embodied in Social Pedagogy which is a theory and practice where ‘care and education meet’ (Cameron and Moss, 2011). During the thesis I will refer to youth work but there are concepts and terms in social pedagogy which are of value because they mirror and enhance elements of youth work and child centred practice.

Both action researchers and youth workers have a commitment to “conversations with young people which start from their concerns and within which both youth worker and young person are educated and out of which opportunities for new learning and experience can be created.” (Davies, 2009; Batsleer, 2010a). It was my intention that this research and action project provide opportunities for reciprocal learning. Like PAR, intersectional feminist and childhood scholarship, youth work recognises that young people are not a homogeneous group and that issues of class, race, gender, sexuality and disability are central to their experiences of life.

4.1.5 *Sexualities research*

Finally, I locate this research within the interdisciplinary field of sexualities research. A feminist standpoint requires me to pay attention to gender and power however I can apply this lens to research which does not explicitly seek to understand practise of gender and sexuality. Focusing on sexual consent, requires me to consider what constitutes ‘sex’. This is always an open and contested question, the answer to which is at once contradictory, fluid, fixed and rigid (Holland et al. 1998; Carmody, 2015). Thus, it must be deconstructed. Judith Butler notes “to deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question” (1992:15). By researching and, ultimately talking about ‘sex’ and ‘consent’ we (re)produce and establish what is ‘sayable’ and publicly accepted knowledge about sex.

Sexualities research such as Ken Plummer’s work on ‘telling sexual stories’ (1994) encourages me to recognise the significance, (academic, political and personal) of bringing people together to *talk* about and therefore bring into being ‘sex’. In telling stories about sex that has happened or that we imagine we create possibilities for what it means to ‘be sexual’. Drawing on research and theories from sexualities studies I recognise that this research, the findings and outputs, contribute to notions, and practices of ‘sex’ more broadly. The research conversations and thought processes captured in this project have, in moments, been a process of deconstruction, of queering and denaturalising notions of consent as binary, or sex as a specific set of acts. These conversations have also, at times reproduced more fixed and normative ideas about sex and gender – something explored in later chapters. Taking into account the importance of deconstructing and bringing into question overarching discourses, the research questions I outline below create space for inquisitive rather than dismissive deconstruction of consent.

4.2 Research methods

Over the course of this project I have utilised research methods and tools which allow me to observe and capture the processes and products of conversations and activities relating to the research agenda. The research questions and the detailed plan in the ethical review application¹⁵ have provided a key focus and direction for the research design and methods while also leaving room to adapt and respond to the groups I worked with in line with participatory principles (Chambers, 2004; Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Coy et al, (2013) point out that “few UK researchers have *explicitly* explored sexual consent *with* young people [and that] it is especially topical to do so when there is growing concern about the impact of pornography, sexualised pop culture and technology on young people’s social and sexual landscapes” (2013:9, my emphasis). Like much research cited in the previous chapter, Coy et al’s work was developed and analysed solely by adult researchers and arguably informed by current discourses of risk which do not interrogate the ‘grey areas’ of consent which fall outside the explicit question of ‘yes or no’. Thus it is important for research on consent to relate to the everyday lives of young people. Participatory and creative approaches are likely to enable a more critical and youth centred approach to research as they do not require spontaneous responses to questionnaires, focus group and interview questions designed by adults, and could generate knowledge that can enhance discourses of sexual consent to reflect contemporary sexual cultures (Weeks 2007). The following section outlines three key methods of enquiry employed throughout the research which seeks to generate new knowledge about everyday understandings of consent. More detail about specific activities are listed in Appendix C and, illustrated in the story of the research phases and throughout the empirical chapters.

4.2.1 *Ethnographic methods, participant observation and field notes*

Ethnography is the long-established study and practice of spending time with people and communities to develop intimate familiarity with a given subject. This is achieved through in-depth observation, attention to pluralistic forms of communication, sharing space and interacting with the everyday lives of these groups (Herzfeld, 2010). Thus, becoming embedded within the participation team, and later the education team at Brook, allowed opportunities to

¹⁵ See Appendix B for copy of ethical review application

observe, participate in and experience everyday occurrences within, and as a result of, the organisation.

Ethnography, like PAR often involves a range of methods. Over the course of this research I have consistently practiced participant observation across the various sites I accessed in a research role. A well-documented ambiguity of role often occurs during participant observation methods. As Julie McLeod and Rachel Thomson have highlighted, the position of the researcher is constantly in 'tension between distance and immersion, objectivity and subjectivity' (2009:83). Thus, what it means to 'observe' is not fixed. Over the course of the research I have inhabited all roles along Gold's continuum of involvement (1958) and I certainly experienced fluid and at times unexpected shifts between higher and lower levels of participation in the groups I was 'observing'.

On the 'extreme' end, my embeddedness at Brook and the support and space that they gave me to independently run sessions and initiate project work meant that at times I was 'complete participant'; treated like staff, experiencing what it means to practice and deliver participation opportunities and educational sessions. I also gained support and funding for an O2 social action project¹⁶ in the same way any young volunteer associated with Brook might. During participation sessions and some of the school sessions I was participant-as-observer joining in with discussions, and contributing to sessions while also recording and reflecting on what I was seeing and experiencing. In these spaces, I was not a student, youth volunteer nor practitioner. At events, such as the school conference and at the youth club during sessions where I was not running the film project I was observer-as-participant. Here I spent time 'hanging out'; observing the practices, relationships and environment around me, with my research agenda in mind, but not actively intervening or initiating any conversations or activities.

At the youth club it was during these less structured visits that young people and youth workers would come and talk to me (one to one or in small groups), about sex and relationships, university and independent living. In these moments, I engaged actively in conversation with both a youth work and research 'hat' on. As Shaw suggests 'listening to people on their own terms' (2007:188) before engaging in interviews or other more formal methods of enquiry can

¹⁶ O2 offer rounds of funding for 13-25 year olds to help "bring ideas to life, using tech for social good and encouraging innovation". Throughout the year different calls for applications open around key themes and campaigns. Brook supported me to access this fund. More info about the application can be found in Appendix D

enable participants to become more relaxed and develop trust with the researcher. I found that these conversations were often more personal, and some young people would actively seek me out, but not participate in the group sessions. These were the conversations that I often recounted and reflected on in my field notes as they provided a reference point for what these young people thought was 'ok' to say publicly and what needed to be kept more private.

Field notes (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995) were a key mode of recording and documenting research encounters in detail. This involved producing a written account of what I had seen, heard and experienced during each research session (Jorgenson, 1989). The research diary that I kept provided a space for reflection, and recording things that I had not, or could not capture in the moment through audio or visual recording. As well as describing the who, what, when, where and why of each session my field notes were part of an on-going analysis contingent with participant observation. Writing-as-processing (Richardson, 2001) allowed me to enter subsequent encounters with more awareness of my own role and constructions of consent or participation. This enabled me to ask questions that were more relevant to the group, but also confidently reflect on and challenge some of the discourses participants were presenting to me.

Keeping a written account of fieldwork experiences is a traditional mode of ethnographic research, however there has been a move towards multimodal documentation in an attempt to capture the liveliness and sensual aspects of research encounters and environments (Nolas and Varvantakis, Under Review). Over the course of the research I took photos and audio visual recordings to capture the environment and some of the group dynamics. However, as I expand on later in this chapter, I have encountered tensions in the use and presentation of data and outputs which render anonymity impossible. With discussion and permission from the young people (and in some cases consent from their parents) I have been able to use this data and documentation of the research process publicly.

4.2.2 Creative methods

In keeping with the practices of PAR and youth work, I opted to use creative and visual methods for three key reasons. The first is that creative methods allow for a more 'embodied and visual methodology' enabling the researcher to observe and foreground the processing and development of ideas in a way more traditional research methods do not create space for (Thomson and Holland, 2005). The second reason is that creative methods can be more inclusive

and easily adapted to the age and ability of participants. They can allow participants to work at their own pace, rather than trying to keep up with conversations or feeling awkward about the 'pregnant silences' that are thought to be out of place in group interviews (Prosse, 2007:24 in Heath et al. 2009:122). There are also arguments that creative methods encourage a more relaxed atmosphere (Punch, 2002) and enable the researcher and participants to connect through a common activity. I used mind mapping, body mapping, cake decorating and interactive games and can confirm this was the case. Finally, in keeping with multi-modal ethnography and as an aid to data generation these methods have tangible outputs that can be reflected on much later in the research process (Heath et al. 2009:123).

Throughout the research I have regularly used mind mapping and 'thought showers' as a starter activity in groups. These techniques mean that the researcher can avoid imposing their own categories and language onto the participants (Punch, 2002). The diagrams and pictures from activities such as body mapping, definition and continuum exercises are a raw data source (Heath et al. 2009:122). Yet they also become artefacts and stimulus for group discussion, encouraging us to explore the differences in language and opinion used by different members of the groups. It is data from these activities and subsequent discussion which provide the base of discussions in chapter Six about how people commonly construct consent.

When planning the research, I anticipated that certain elements of consent and sex may be difficult for some people to engage with or verbalise. As I acknowledged in the ethical review, sex and consent can be emotive, awkward and potentially risky subjects to discuss, especially for younger people. Although this research does not seek to find out about individuals' experiences of sex and consent, I did not want to silence anyone who might want to contribute from their personal experience. Many researchers faced with exploring potentially emotional or contentious topics have utilised creative methods to give participants the opportunity to express feelings or ideas that may be difficult to verbalise and provide an important opportunity for distancing. Talking about, or to, something more abstract can be easier and less emotional than directly discussing themselves (Frost, 2003:126). To this end, over the course of the research I developed a body mapping exercise for use with two groups, and co-created scenarios for discussion with others¹⁷.

¹⁷ See Appendix E for the scenarios that were developed

Unlike body mapping that has been used in development and health research (Bambanani, 2012) the body mapping I developed is not a personal body map. Each body was given a character or scenario which was used to elicit written, drawn and verbal responses of what thoughts, feelings (emotional and physical), and actions may occur for each body in the different scenarios. Similarly, in the scenarios developed we paid attention to ambiguity, gendered scripts and power where appropriate. These methods allowed for detailed consideration of a variety of factors, and an opportunity to acknowledge and locate the role of the body, affect and emotion in different encounters. Ultimately these more creative methods encouraged participants to *work through* thoughts about consent and the body rather than expecting people to spontaneously have something to say about a subject that is linguistically, culturally and emotionally difficult to talk about (Holland et al. 1998; Frost, 2003). These methods are also contingent with critical and public pedagogy which strive for democratic participation and encourage young people to engage in more critical thought (Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018). Upon completion of these creative tasks I was able to capture discussion about the process and new ideas in the style of a focus group or discussion, as well as write ethnographic notes.

4.2.3 Discussion groups, workshops and focus groups

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this research has brought people together to ‘talk’ about consent, sex and sexuality. Although one-to-one interviews are often championed as a way of gaining in depth and personal accounts of sensitive topics (Gill, et al. 2008; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Kitzinger, 1994) the feminist, youth work and PAR agendas of this project compelled me to conduct the research in a public or group oriented way (PSP.org, 2017; Banks et al. 2011) . It was my intention to create ‘temporary publics’ (Nolas, 2015) as spaces to actively and more openly engage with, talk about and reflect on the topic of consent in collective ways.

Focus groups, used in insolation from other methods, can mean that participants worry about the judgement of others, and may therefore feel they have to be ‘politically correct’ in their responses to a given topic (Robinson, 1999; Kitzinger, 1994). In some respects, this can give the researcher insight into what is considered ‘sayable’, and what the most available discourses are, in certain groups and cultures. However, it also limits the researcher’s insight into everyday, unmediated practices and opinions.

During this research, I have experienced some of these mediated and ‘politically correct’ contributions to group discussions. However the creative practices above, and my active group facilitation, including friendly challenges, have allowed me to encourage and capture a kind of ‘thinking out loud’. Capturing this thinking has been a key aim of the research and also provides space for some intervention and teaching (PSP.org, 2017; Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Chapter Three noted the importance of practicing critical and public pedagogies for sexuality education as this can promote critical thought. It is important to note that one of the roles I had during this research project was what might be termed a ‘critical pedagogue’. The majority of the group discussions I organised, and in some cases captured by audio recording, were run in the form of workshops, or activity based discussion, actively enhancing the possibilities for research conversations to be ‘learning moments’ (Biesta, 2015).

The aim of interactive and creative activities was to encourage reflection and contributions, enabling people to articulate and analyse their own, and each other’s, ideas “in their own terms” (Cornwall 2003:1328). Although I encouraged everyone to contribute, and would at times offer an alternative opinion to encourage critical and more nuanced reflection, this was, where possible, done in a way that did not put any one person in the ‘lime light’ (Hennessy and Heary, 2009).

4.3 The research journey: Phase 1-3

In total, I worked directly with 103 young people aged 13-25 from a diverse range of backgrounds. I also worked alongside and gained data from 12 practitioners working at Brook and associated youth clubs and schools. The research deliberately worked with a wide range of groups in order to explore how differences of age, class, ethnicity and sexuality might inform the way people think and talk about consent. Thus, the following chapters refer to seven different sites, and 9 groups which are briefly introduced in the table below. The methods used with each group are outlined in detail in Appendix C and will be described as I introduce each phase of the research.

Table 1 Summary of research sites

Site	Description	Participant ages
1. Brook participation team	<p>Here I worked with three groups of young people to plan and pilot the research.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brook's participation group – Young folk interested in sexual health and wellbeing who volunteer their time to feed into and be consulted about Brook's strategies and projects. 2. Brook's sex positive campaign group – a group of young people who campaigning for sex positive sex education. 3. An NVQ group attending participation sessions as part of their course. <p>Data from these groups will be identified with: (P+)</p>	16-25
2. Arts venue	<p>Here I worked with 5 young women who had completed undergraduates in humanities and social sciences. This was a pilot group for body mapping workshops.</p> <p>Data from this site will be identified with: (BM)</p>	22-25
3. Brighton youth group	<p>This is an alternative youth group where I was able to run a workshop on consent and pilot some discussion activates.</p> <p>Data from this site will be identified with: (BTN)</p>	13-16
4. Secondary school	<p>This was a diverse all-girls secondary school in London where a year 11 citizenship class had chosen to do a project on consent.</p> <p>Data from this site will be identified with: (SCH)</p>	15-16
5. Youth club	<p>This was a vibrant and busy inner city youth club in London that drew a diverse attendance of young people aged 11+. Data from this site will be identified with: (YC) or (Film) for extracts from the film project interviews.</p>	13-18
6. Brook Education team.	<p>In addition to working with the participation teams at Brook, I also captured data from Brook educators through a week of shadowing and a focus group.</p> <p>Data from Brook staff working in an educator role will be identified with: (ED)</p>	
7. Willow House	<p>This is a research site I accessed while shadowing with the Education team. This was a sanctuary and supported living home for young people recently moved to the UK. At this site, I only captured data by field notes.</p> <p>All field note data will be identified with (FN).</p>	18

In the following chapter(s), as above, I have used pseudonyms for people and places, but have included photographic documentation, as well as field note extracts and occasional quotes to give more colour and context to research story. I provide details about each research site, the activities and the age and gender distribution of the groups I worked with as I introduce each phase of the research. I note some of the dilemmas and tensions I experienced whilst trying to embody a practice that encapsulated the ambitions of PAR, youth work, child centred and feminist research.

The research development and data generation elements of this research occurred between October 2014 and June 2016. While I worked across multiple sites and collected data in a variety of ways I have created a simplified model of the research process for clarity and ease of explanation. 'Recruitment' for each phase was established through Brook. Members of staff here became my gatekeepers and allies by mediating my access to groups and advocating for me and the research. The main criteria for participation were that there would be sufficient opportunity for collaborative group work and time for me to develop a working relationship with participants. Participatory research seeks to serve a community and it was import that any work I did would be of use to the people involved as well as for my research.

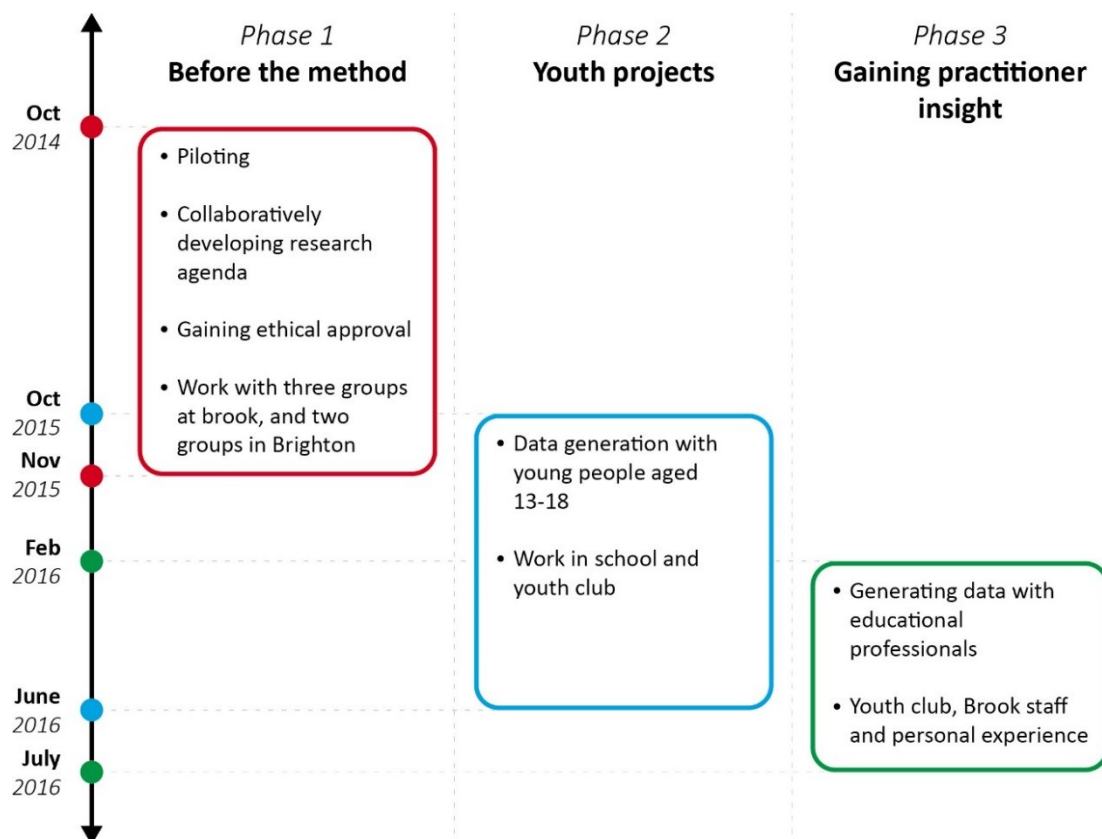


Figure 4 Breakdown of research phases

4.3.1 Phase 1: Before the method

Group	Dates of interaction	No. Participants	Age of YPs	Gender distribution of YPs
P Plus	Nov 2014 - June 2015	9 YPs 2 Participation staff	17-25	6 Women 3 Men
Sex Positive	22 nd Nov 2014	11 YPs 2 participation staff	18– 25	8 women 3 Men
Lamb College	Nov – December	8 YPs 1 Participation staff	16-17	2 Men 6 Women

Table 2 Participants in Phase 1

Given my epistemological and ontological starting points, and the findings and patterns in the literature review, this research design and questions have been developed with young people and were responsive to contemporary gaps in academic, practice and organisational knowledge.

I have characterised the period of time that I spent becoming embedded at Brook, getting to know staff, young people and their interests in Saskia Sassen's terms as 'before the method' (2013). This includes the creative, messy thinking and networking that is often not spoken about in papers and ethical applications. Sevasti-Melissa Nolas and colleagues have advocated this as a key element of the research design process (2014). This space 'before the method' can allow for some insight into what methods might actually be practical, and which questions realistically answerable in conducting a collaborative study. A number of scholars who have regularly used participatory and creative methods with young people, also advocate the importance of involving children and young people in the initial design of the research, even if those young people are not subsequently involved in the data generation (Alderson, 2004; Kirby, 2004; Thomson and Gunter, 2007; Holland et al, 2001).

Generally, it would be expected that a methodology, timetable and ethical application has been submitted and verified before access to institutions and young people is granted (Heath et al. 2009:64), which leaves little or no room for participant and stakeholder contribution. This is one such example of how PAR within the context of a doctoral study cannot always be entirely 'bottom up'. I have been fortunate in this project that a 'before the method' stage has been supported and encouraged by my funders and we discussed options for me to be 'present' and active in the organisation from the outset of this research collaboration. My practice background in youth work and my previous experience of research ethics gave them, and me, the confidence to do some scoping work before applying for ethical review. This has encouraged me to foreground the importance of situated and practice-based ethics, something I will speak to more in the ethics section.

My early interaction with the participation team, the youth participation group 'P+'¹⁸ and other groups associated with the participation team was integral to this stage of research development. While working with them it was quickly decided that 'consent' should be the key focus of my research and action. Over the five months I worked with them, the P+ members and participation staff collaborated with me to develop and pilot activities to get people thinking more about consent.

During this time, we piloted the following activities (which are detailed in Appendix F) with the groups:

- Mind mapping consent
- Individual body maps of the day
- Body Mapping
- Silent 'discussion'
- Critiquing and creating definitions of consent
- Creating a continuum of consent.
- Discussions based on scenarios
- Developing games and activities



Figure 5 Examples of mind mapping

¹⁸ P+ are a participation group at Brook made up of young people under the age of 25 who volunteer their time as a consultation group and are interested in steering the focus and services of Brook.

We decided the key aim for the research was to gain a better understanding of consent, and the following research questions for this project are the direct result of work with P+:

‘How do young people define ‘consent to sexual activity’ as a concept?’;

‘How do young people negotiate sex and consent?’;

‘What might be involved in an expanded model of consent?’

There was also an interest in how educational definitions and teaching practice relate to young people’s definitions of consent. This was expanded through later interactions with educational staff and forms the focus of the concluding chapter.

After working with the participation groups, it became clear that I was not accessing a very diverse group of young people and so decisions were made with the P+ group to actively seek out additional groups of younger people who might not be so ‘well informed’ about consent and sexual health more broadly. Together we developed a plan and applied for funding for a film project called ‘My Rules’ which would be done with younger participants¹⁹.



Figure 6 Examples of body mapping with P+

¹⁹ See overview of how My Rules was developed in Appendix G

Figure 7 Examples of mind mapping from Brighton youth group

4.3.3 Phase 2: Youth action projects

Table 4 Overview of Phase 2

Group	Dates of interaction	No. Participants	Age of YPs	Gender distribution
Girls School	October 2015 – Feb 2016	27 YP 1 Teacher	15-16	27 women
Youth Club	Jan 2016 - June 2016	22 YP 4 Youth workers 1 camera man	13-18	10 women 12 Men YW 3 women YW 1 man

When I could no longer be ‘hosted’ to do my research in the participation team at Brook due to organisational restructuring, I began work with the education team, who had longer established networks and more frequent access to a wide variety of younger young people.

While I felt positive about the new link and association with the education team I felt some tension about going into new groups with a pre-planned project that might not fit their agendas and interests. After some deliberation I chose to view the ‘my rules’ design as a ‘loose plan’ (Chambers, 2004), so as not to limit the ways in which I could interact with new groups. I had ‘rehearsed’ many activities and conversations while working with the participation team and piloting work in Brighton so this had prepared me well to improvise and respond in an ethical and competent way (Davies, 2009). As Robert Chambers notes “Optimal unpreparedness liberates a facilitator[...] to go with the flow [...] good workshops are more like a sea voyage than putting up a building. There is less a syllabus to tick off and more a direction to travel in and a process to experience” (2004:xiv). Rather than stick to the ‘my rules’ plan like glue, I used it to inform the practices, activities and collective outputs that I collaborated on with the next groups.

School Active Citizenship Project

I was invited to attend an all-girls comprehensive school in North London where a year 11 class had voted to do their GCSE active citizenship project on consent. The class teacher was seeking support from Brook for this work so it was agreed that I would come and deliver a ‘lesson’ on

consent in which I could introduce my action research and then work with small groups and observe and support lessons for research purposes. During the three months I spent working with this group I captured in depth small group discussions with 14 of the girls, and reflected on my experience of supporting the whole class and small groups to develop their campaign.



Figure 8 Poster for school consent conference

(Photo quality means image cannot be any bigger)

My last session with the school group was to attend the school-wide conference on consent that the class had planned in February. It was fascinating to see the outcome of their work and the ways in which the students chose to present consent to their peers. I knew from my sessions with them in small groups that many of them felt “weird and cringey” (field notes) about doing the conference worrying about seeming “too preachy” and feeling that “consent is not a cool topic” (field notes). Although we had had very nuanced discussions in our small groups, the messages they delivered in the conference were much more binary and one dimensional.

Youth Club Film Project

The final place I worked for an extended period was a youth club in central London. This club was a vibrant hub and open youth sessions were very well attended three nights a week. The original project plan had included funding for a film project and, whilst it had not felt appropriate to implement this in the school setting, it felt much more appropriate here. The club had a regular group of attenders and often ran short-term intervention and creative projects that were open to everyone.



Figure 9 Cake decoration activity during valentine's week

The youth leader at the club noted that my initial age range (14-25) was exclusive of many of the 13-year-old attendees who would benefit from involvement in the project and so a condition of my attendance at the youth club was to open the project up to them too. I did this, and retrospectively revised my ethical application to include 13 year olds and more open group work. This was in part to acknowledge that I had made a limiting (mis)judgment concerning 'age appropriateness' and capacity in the initial plan but also to ensure that I could ethically use some of the data that had been contributed by the 13-year olds²⁰.



Figure 13 Discussion group



Figure 13 Pizza for participants



Figure 13 Activity and info table during valentine's week



Figure 13 Film project. Young people in front and behind the camera

²⁰ See Appendix I for emails and confirmation of ethical review amendment

Over the course of my time here I was able to strike a good balance between ‘project leader’ and ‘approachable observer’. I spent the first few sessions hanging out, getting to know people and workers and establishing whether there was appetite for a project such as this. The participation team at Brook had put me in contact with a Masters student, Jay, who was seeking opportunities to film with or for Brook as part of his course work. This was well timed and meant that I did not have to worry about the technical side of filming and editing and was able to focus on facilitating sessions and gaining young people’s trust and consent to participation.

Nevertheless, I experienced several practice dilemmas and ethical tensions around the audio-visual recording, particularly around what this meant for anonymity, inclusion, and consent for research; something I expand on the following ethics section. There was also a tension between my interests, as a researcher and youth worker, in process and exploratory discussion; and Jay’s desire for quality, rehearsed and usable footage. It turns out that a noisy and animated discussion about consent does not make for a good quality short film! As such Jay and I, in conjunction with a group of the more regular participants, decided that we should do interviews of one or two people at a time to help get clear footage that could be cut together to represent a range of views. Ultimately this meant that the video project did not fulfil many of the criteria for being a ‘participatory film’ (see Johansson et al. 1999), yet we did make some effort to destabilise the researcher/researched binary and ensure that the participants could take part in the process of documentation if they wanted, by getting behind the camera, writing questions²¹ and interviewing one another (and me). The participants also gave feedback on the first cut.

We organised a screening of the final film at the youth club. An invitation was extended to P+ and to all the staff I had worked with during the research. The participation worker still in post attended, and around 25 young people from the club watched the film and enjoyed pizza afterwards. There was a spontaneous round of applause at the end and my field notes reflect a general air of satisfaction with the final film and their participation in it.

D came over at the end and said that it was a good project to be in, that we should show the film in schools and that he’s learnt loads about consent → then he gave me a hand shake and a really appreciated thank you – which feels like a huge deal from him!

(Field Notes)

²¹ See The questions developed in Appendix J. The film can be viewed on Youtube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBnDHEXMCGo>

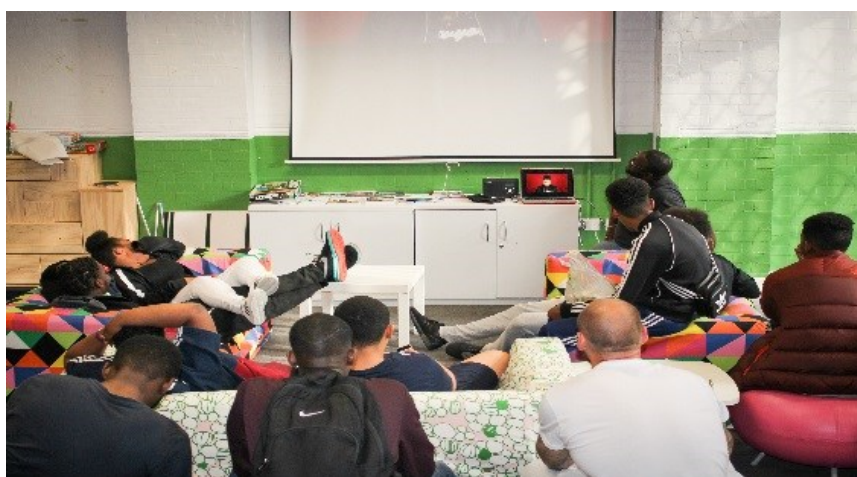


Figure 14 Photos from the film viewing

4.3.4 Phase 3: Practitioner insight

Table 5 Overview of phase three

Group	Dates of interaction	No. Participants	Age of YPs	Gender distribution
Education team	Oct 2015 – July 2016	8 Education workers 2 YPs on work experience	15 & 17	10 women 1 man
Willow House	Feb 2016	Education team lead Sexual Health Nurse 4 YPs	18	2 women 4 men

In addition to organising access to the school and the youth club, my main contact in the education team, Ally, invited me to shadow her for a week towards the end of my substantive data collection period. This coincided with ‘Valentines Week’ which is a significant date in the sexual health and wellbeing calendar. During this week I helter-skeltered along the continuum of participant observation. I was present in a borough office and introduced to several members of Ally’s team along with people who worked in the condom distribution, clinical and health promotion facets of the organisation. Here I observed the ways in which staff from different sections of the organisation interacted and worked. It was a significant moment to be observing this as many people knew they were on the verge of redundancies and restructuring. I had conversations with new and experienced educators about how they deliver sessions and teach about consent and I was able to draw on my own experience to ask questions about pedagogic practice in busy spaces.

I was invited to attend a training session with sessional education workers where I participated in their ‘trouble-shooting’ session about classroom and teacher management. I conducted a focus group with four of them on their experiences and reflections about teaching consent sessions in school. This provides much of the data used in Chapter Four.

Finally, I accompanied Ally and a sexual health nurse to a sanctuary and supported living home for young men deemed ‘at risk’. Most of the young men at this centre had come to the UK as unaccompanied minors and were now attending colleges or schools locally. The ‘package’

provided for them involved supporting these young men to access services and develop skills for independent living in the UK. Brook education and clinical staff visit the site and run sexual health drop in sessions using resources that are translated into a variety of languages. This session is a good example of my numerous experiences of moving from observer to participant without warning. Here I contributed both confidently and awkwardly to the session answering questions about sex and relationship in the UK, some in far more detail than I had expected. In this week with Ally I gained experience and data that has contributed significantly to the pedagogic focus of the research.

4.4 Research Ethics

My commitment to youth participation meant that an important and formative section of this research occurred before ethical approval was formally obtained. This was in part due to the collaborative and practice-based nature of the work and my commitment to ‘starting where young people are at’ but is also in response to the current culture of academia and ethical governance which “protects institutional power at the expense of community empowerment” (Malone et al. 2006:1915, cited in Banks et al. 2011:9). There are many ethical complexities involved with this kind of work and, as I will show, I have viewed these as central to my practice rather than problems to be avoided.

The variety of participants, activities, research sites, and the roles I have performed in different environments has required me to think carefully and be reflexive about my practice at all stages of the research. At the start of this chapter I located this project in a network of complementary traditions of research and practice. I draw on the arguments of Weston (2010) who notes that the role of ethics is not to moralise or provide rules but to:

[...]offer some tools for thinking about difficult matters[...] recognizing that the world is seldom so simple or clear cut. Struggle and uncertainty are part of ethics, as they are part of life.

(2010:8)

In terms of my research practice and ethical considerations PAR, Childhood and Youth Studies and Youth Work have been central to developing and doing this research in a way that attends to the everyday and research ethics and politics of intergenerational participation, feminist

activism and sexuality education. This research is focused on the struggles and uncertainties of everyday (sexual) consent and negotiation and thus the whole thesis is, in some ways, about ethics.

In research terms the potentially sensitive topic of study, the age and potential vulnerability of the participants and the public and group work nature of the project were three significant factors that meant this research was considered 'high risk' by ethical governance criteria. These concerns were attended to in detail in the ethical review application. Here I noted that PAR can be more 'ethical' and inclusive than 'traditional' research approaches and that I would take account of participant and researcher power relations, rights, responsibilities, and the role of all stakeholders (Banks 2011:6; Skelton, 2008). I recognised that plans are a necessary and useful safety net, however I wanted the space to adapt to the groups as this can help foster a more collective learning process and knowledge exchange (Chambers, 2004, Cammarota and Fine, 2008). Concerns and practicalities regarding protection and participation, safeguarding, informed consent and parental assent (Skelton, 2008; Powell and Smith, 2009; Kirk, 2007) were also priorities. In the application I highlighted how my professional experience, which I detail further in the 'reflexivity' section of this chapter, provided me with the competence to hold and respond to elements of this research that make it 'high risk'.

The research has exemplified controlled risk taking associated with Youth Work and PAR. Christensen and Mikkelsen note that "everyday life is characterised by uncertainty, a condition that brings the unexpected pleasures and pains that are integral to social life" (2008:2) and, as I will show in the following chapters, 'risky' and awkward conversations can be a resource for learning and developing competence. By taking a PAR approach I have been able to weigh up the relative risk and ethical considerations above against young people's rights to freedom, participation, and inclusion in matters that concern them. Thus, rather than shy away from the risks and uncertainties associated with talking about sex and consent with young people, the potential for challenging or awkward conversations and opportunities for personal reflection or disclosures, I developed activities and engaged in group work in a way that attends to both immediate and longer-term risks for both the individual and for society more widely (Banks et al. 2011; Weston, 2010).

A key concern for research ethics, and for this research is that of informed and freely given consent to participate in the study. This thesis deconstructs the notion of consent and questions the extent to which it can ever be freely given. My interaction with literature on sexual consent,

research consent and childhood and youth studies led me, like many scholars to question the possibility of ‘informed consent’, particularly in a project such as this where the participatory nature means that we cannot know what will develop over the course of the research. Here, I reflect on my process and practice of establishing research consent with a focus on the recruitment, consent and concerns about voluntary involvement in phase two. I have chosen this phase as I think it best illustrates the complex ethical knots and tensions that can be experienced when trying to balance participation, protection and various institutional policies and procedures.

4.4.1 Consent and Dissent

Within all forms of social science research ‘informed consent’ is considered a key element to ethical research participation (David et al. 2010). It is often established through the use of information sheets which outline the aims of a given research project, the criteria for participation and the potential positives and negatives that could result from participation. Consent is then given, or denied, according to this information, usually at the outset of a research relationship. Yet, the notion of ‘informed consent’ has also come under criticism for being too static when in practice it can be a complex and contestable element of the research process (Boddy and Oliver, 2010; Edwards and Alldred, 1999; David et al. 2010; Alderson and Morrow, 2004 and 2011). It is also important to note that sites of research, and methods of recruitment and data generation affect the possibility for consent to ever be fully informed or voluntary.

Given the participatory, and therefore semi-planned nature of the action projects it was not possible for me to provide enough information to participants for them to “‘know’ and ‘understand’ what they were ‘getting themselves into’” (David et al. 2010:348). Instead I took a more youth centered, reflexive and participatory approach to research consent where I acknowledged that consent is not a one-off event and that it needed to be negotiated and renegotiated over time, (Alderson, 2007; Morrow, 1999; Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Banks et al. 2011). This meant that I did not always seek formal written consent until later in research encounters – something I found both uncomfortable and rewarding in different moments. I did however, constantly expose the research process and check in with participants about their expectations, understandings of the research and reminding them that they could leave, or, at the least, disengage, at any time.

It should be mentioned here that before I accessed any groups I attended Brook safeguarding training. Thus, I was aware of their policies and procedures for child protection and disclosures and understood how they balance safeguarding with children and young people's rights to information, privacy and confidentiality²². Brook advocate for and utilise the concept of 'Gillick competency' throughout all of their work. In discussions with participation and education workers we established that a commitment to recognising children's developing competence, autonomy, rights to privacy and access to services and information outweighed a need to seek parental consent to participate in these educational research projects. This is something that could be considered controversial for research ethics, however it is a key facet of my youth work training. A commitment to PAR, youth work values, and attention to intergenerational inequality meant that, in line with Brooks practices and support, I felt that it was good to practice a model of consent that employed Gillick competence. Participants were additionally protected as the majority of the data would be easy to anonymise and was not explicitly seeking information about personal experiences.

In light of this decision and following more recent guidelines for research with children and young people, and participatory research (Edwards and Alldred, 1999; Boddy and Oliver, 2010; Alderson and Morrow, 2011) I tried, where possible to ensure that participation was optional, and people were able to dissent, and disengage, or even not engage at all when I was at various research sites. I was keen that the young participants' involvement with the research and action projects was free of the constraints of parental consent, and that the work was 'opt in' rather than 'opt out' – something that was not quite possible in the school setting. This also affected the mode of documentation employed throughout the work. In the early stages of research relationships I only documented activities with field notes and reflections or by photographing group outputs from discussion to maintain anonymity before consent was more formally negotiated. As my relationships with participants developed and a clearer sense of their consent to the process emerged I felt more able to document and attribute individual comments and views.

This section provides two examples which highlight the difficulty and tensions that that can be experienced when doing 'formal' but continuous consent. The first is consent in schools,

²² See Appendix K for certificate of Brook safeguarding training.

something that has been acknowledged as difficult and problematic by many scholars. The second example reflects on issues of consent and parental assent in instances where anonymity is not possible.

4.4.2 *Consent in the classroom: active and passive consent*

In the school the teacher was happy to act in loco-parentis and consented to the class being part of the research project. While in many ways this enabled me to privilege young people's consent over their parents' it led to some tensions around what it meant to consent and to participate in activities as part of a mandatory citizenship class. As many researchers collecting data in schools have noted, children and young people's "consent to research participation in this context can shade into coercion, and their participation becomes 'just another form of schoolwork' (Denscombe & Aubrook, 1992; Pole *et al.*, 1999)" (David *et al.* 2010:325; Morrow, 2008). Throughout my research at the school site in London I was acutely aware that in this setting (more than any of the others I worked in) attendance in the classes I was observing, delivering and supporting was not optional. It was here that I did my most 'formal' processes of consent, in line with traditional models of informed consent, presenting the research to them, inviting them to fill in the consent forms²³ if they wished, but making it clear it was optional.

In the first session at the school I openly acknowledged that the students were not consenting to being in the class, or to me being there – and so I gave them options to opt in or out of activities. I did not require them to complete a consent form if they did not want to and planned the session in a way that meant all data would be produced as a result of their voluntary engagement with group activities. Of the 27 students in attendance 18 consented to participate in the study and 9 chose not to, although their teacher did undermine this at some points, something that one group and I were able to discuss later.

Elsie: [...] right, cos I thought it was quite funny last week when, not last week the week before. When I came in and said you don't have to do the forms if you don't want to, and some of you didn't. and I was like cool, great. But then Miss was like 'I can make them do it, if you've asked them to do it I can make them do it' (laughter) and I was like no, no I don't need you to do it that's ok.

Adz: I think, well that's like forcing me into sex.

²³ See Appendix L for an example of the consent forms.

Nina: Yea where's the consent?

Elsie: Well that's what I said to you wasn't it, I know you're not here voluntarily, so I wanted to say you can say no to this and that's fine. But I guess it got me thinking about how often in school do you get the opportunity to say 'no'.

Adz: yea!

(School group 1, session 1)

Our conversations in the first week about how sexual consent had to be sought every time, and a commitment to viewing research consent as a continuous process inspired me to bring fresh consent forms each week - this provided opportunities for people to opt in and opt out of group work sessions more than they could in the classroom work, and it allowed some people to not come and do small group work, and for others, like Adz, to give consent once they felt more trusting and informed about the research and about me.

Elsie: So, you know last week when I brought in a consent forms [yea from most of them] and you all filled them in, actually I don't think you [Adz] did one did you

Adz: Na

Elsie: That's fine that you didn't, do you fancy doing one this week? Then I can record what we're talking about.

Adz: Er yea I don't mind.

Elsie: Yea? You don't have to. And also, I thought that, well you know that you did the definitions of consent last week, and some people thought that like consent is mutual; and lots of people said it's like retractable and that it has to be asked for every time.

Adz + Nina: Yea

Elsie: Well cos of that I thought that I should ask every time [They all laughed at this] to make sure that I am doing it properly. So, I brought in some extra ones this week for you're all to do again if you're willing [...]

In a session the following week, I brought the forms out again, this time the girls said they didn't feel that they needed to sign them, and I felt that they were getting in the way of our conversations – something that mirrors findings that 'consent' can disrupt the flow of sexual interaction. This happened in more than one group. I persisted each week and despite it feeling a little awkward I found the consent form a useful prop for thinking through the realities of formalising or making consent to sexual activity explicit.

In our third session together, I was able to ask Adz why they had not consented in the first session, something I had avoided doing because I felt it would undermine my statement that

they ‘can say no and not have to explain why’. She said she “wanted to see what would happen” and establish if it really would be ok to say ‘no’ (Adz, SCH). At the time this got me thinking about who can consent, but also about who can dissent. Adz was ‘cool’, and she clearly managed to toe the line between being sent out for bad behaviour and being viewed as a bit cheeky. But in the earlier session we had considered how schools do not model consent (something I explore in the next chapter), and it became clear that this was what she was testing and pushing back against. Her decision to give consent the following few times we worked together made me feel positive about my process and methods of consent, but also of inclusion. My field notes reflect on whether some of the ‘good girls’ felt unable to dissent and not fill in the consent form or attend the small group discussions. However some of them did opt out of the group work, again giving me confidence that they felt able to do so. Their dissent did feel more that they were exercising their option of dissenting from the expectations of their teacher. This is something I explore further when I discuss institutional contexts in the next chapter.

I took another group; one of the girls was clearly uncomfortable about attending the session. When I said that she didn't have to come, she seemed surprised but took the opportunity – despite her friends encouraging her - to stay in the main class. This gave me some confidence that the session in small groups were attended out of desire and that the consent the students gave was genuine.

(Field notes)

4.4.3 Consent on camera: anonymity and visibility

Throughout this work I have had to consider the ethics of identification and anonymity. Anonymity is not an issue related only to visual research methods (Wiles et al. 2012) but the tensions associated with participants being identifiable are further complicated when they are visibly recognisable, on film for example (Pink, 2013). The collaborative nature of the project means that Brook as an organisation could not be anonymised, nor could the Youth Club, but all other groups have been anonymised to some extent. The photos, videos and other visual data where participants are recognisable have been gathered and presented/published with their consent.

At the youth club it was much easier to run the research project in a way that was opt in, rather than opt out, and consent to participation in discussion was demonstrated by presence in the room. Despite this I continued to remind participants that I was a researcher and each week I

sought permission to record group conversations and take photos of activities and outputs. The film project at the youth club added another layer of complexity to my research in terms of consent and anonymity. The fact that I was capturing video data and intended to produce a video for public viewing felt very different from capturing disembodied talk on my phone, or digital recorder because the research process and participants were suddenly visible. Wiles et al. (2012), along with scholars such as Sarah Pink (2012, 2007), have documented the complex and situated ethics and practicalities of visual identification in research. They note “ongoing tensions between, on the one hand, research participants’ rights and researchers’ desire for participants to be *seen* as well as heard and, on the other hand, researchers’ real and perceived ethical responsibility to safeguard participants” (Wiles et al. 2012:41).

I certainly felt caught in this web of tension between what might be considered ‘best practice’ in research, youth work and the ethical publication of a video. The participants at the youth club, but also at other venues, wanted to be visible. Some were only involved in the research, such as the P+ group to have their say, and often it can feel more authentic when ‘their say’ is not mediated and masked by the researcher and processes of anonymisation (Banks 2001; Wiles et al. 2012). At the youth club the video was more a collaborative venture than a process of research documentation, something that is becoming more common in social research (Erickson, 2011; Wiles et al. 2012). Yet, the output, and the process of filming would become data by providing useful insight into what is considered acceptable to say about consent in public and what is not.

Before the film project began I discussed whether and when to seek parental consent for filming with the youth workers and colleagues at Brook. In the end I followed the process suggested by the youth workers but before anyone went on camera I went through a consent form with them and checked again (and again) if they were sure they wanted to be filmed and reiterated the potential consequences of the film going on YouTube and their lack of anonymity. I also gave them photo release forms²⁴ to take home to their parents – although none were returned. Ironically, the participants themselves captured and shared our activities along with other events in the youth club using Snapchat and other apps. The ability to document everyday life is quite literally everywhere and is part of young people’s everyday lives (Erikson, 2011; Thomson et al. 2018). The reality of what it means to have a digital presence and the fact that

²⁴ See Appendix M for copy of Photo release form. In the end I got permission by phone and logged it on a spreadsheet.

they may not have control over digital material once it is published is an everyday experience for them.

After filming there was footage from 12 people that was usable and fitted with Jay's 'vision' for the video. I therefore actively sought parental assent and permission to publish for these participants. I had always encouraged participants to take forms home and to talk to their parents about the project but the reality of something going 'online' made parental consent a necessity, despite being somewhat counter to youth work culture. Rather than use the youth club database to find contact numbers for the participants I spoke to each of them about the final film and asked firstly if they wanted to be in the final cut, and secondly if they could give me a contact number for a parent or carer so I could double check with them about the film going online. I got their consent to get consent.

This was a tricky stage, many of the participants agreed and gave me numbers to call. However, a few were annoyed that their parents had to be involved. When I called (and finally got through to) parents and carers I had a range of responses to the project. Some participants had told their parents lots about the project, these parents were more ready to give permission than those who knew less about it. A few parents asked to see the film first and came to the youth club to see it. It was understandably important to them that they saw how their child was being presented. However I was hugely concerned that someone would say no, and this would form the start of another ethical knot - deleting the person from the film, talking to them about it, and undermining my initial commitment to viewing them as competent to consent and giving them the opportunity to be seen *and* heard (Wiles et al.2012). In the end all parents gave permission for the film to be published online.

Despite gaining consent, from participants and later from their parents and carers to publish the video I held an ethical duty to consider the long-term and short-term risks of publication. This has involved 'giving careful consideration to the political, social and cultural contexts in which images may be viewed and interpreted (Pink, 2007)' (Wiles et al. 2012:42). As such I requested a further edit to the video where one participant's contribution could possibly be wrongly interpreted before publishing it. The video has been published on YouTube under a creative commons licence as part of a continued commitment to the ethics of action research and the intention that processes, and outputs from the project could contribute to consent education more broadly.

The film component of the research project provided many moments of learning. Throughout the process, I found that institutional procedures for managing and publishing photos and videos are inconsistent. I received different advice from the youth club, from Brook and from my University. Further work needs to be done to address how more public methods of research documentation destabilise traditional research processes and procedures and thus new guidelines and mechanisms of support are needed. Ultimately, I found that safeguarding and research ethics guidelines are out of sync with digital technology and the reality of everyday photo and video distribution.

4.5 Reflexivity

Creating space for adaptation has, been a real strength of this research and it has allowed me to work with a diverse range of young people on a variety of projects. However there have also been challenges. The most important methodological tool throughout the research process has been that of reflexivity. This chapter, and indeed the entire thesis showcases reflexive practice. Although the topic of consent, and general research aims have been developed collaboratively my choice of methods, theories and the way I have responded to and adapted the research with different groups is reflective of my own values as a researcher and practitioner. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that this research cannot be free of bias, particularly as it has had an overall aim to enable social change and transformation (Becker, 1967; Tierney, 1994; Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

Lauren Richardson reminds us that “People who write are always writing about their lives, even when they disguise this through the omniscient voice of science or scholarship” (2001:34). This project is not about *me*, although I was ‘technically’ a young person for much of the research and I have my own relevant life experiences relating to sexual consent and sex education. As a practitioner I have volunteered with rape crisis and support centres, I have been a sexual health youth worker delivering education and services to young people and I have also, at times, been tasked with outreach and generating youth participation and consultation. In particular training on how to respond to and hold disclosures that I gained while volunteering at Survivors Network²⁵; and safeguarding training at Brook that focussed on the ‘Sexual behaviours traffic

²⁵ A local rape crisis charity in Brighton

light tool'²⁶ enabled me to respond ethically and professionally to any discussion or disclosure about sexual practices. The traffic light tool is especially useful for establishing if young people's experiences and exploration should be considered harmful or whether they are part of a normal curiosity while developing sexual competence. These previous experiences and training gave me the knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake this research and manage the tensions between protection and participation, characterised within the consent dilemmas I outlined above. I also shared some of my own experiences of consent in research conversations - something I will return to in the empirical chapters. As Maggie MacLure has noted, the data and the researcher are minutely entangled and 'do not pre-exist one another' (2013:229). I now move onto reflect on my process of analysis, something that has been reflexive and, sometimes, necessarily messy (Cook, 2009).

4.6 Analysis

The methods outlined above clearly demonstrate the embodied process of data generation. Writing and drawing are all examples of how thought and feeling are brought into materiality through bodily action. Like the research methods, my methods of analysis have been informed by practices and principles of feminism, PAR, and youth work. In my attempts to 'start where young people are at' I have done the analysis in a way that attends to and foregrounds the categories, assumptions and tensions presented by participants. The analysis therefore has been driven by the research questions that were developed alongside the participation groups and grounded in the data produced in research encounters.

PAR seeks to include participants in all phases of research, and this is an area where my project is limited. While I have been able to practice participatory and collaborative processes for the planning and data generation phases this was not possible for the analysis, nor the writing phase. There has however been space for collaboratively developing resources and I may yet collaborate and co-author with participants and stakeholders in future work based on this research. In an ideal project I would have done some collective analysis, or at least gained feedback from my participants in order to address potential issues of power and representation (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:113). Due to Brook's changes in structure and staffing, and the transitory nature of young people's attendance in the groups I accessed, this has not been

²⁶ For further details see: <https://www.brook.org.uk/our-work/the-sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool>

possible. I am optimistic however, that methods which allowed me to capture a certain amount of 'thinking out loud', and to interrogate people's definitions and contributions during the research encounter mean that participants have already contributed to a level of analysis which has allowed me to more confidently address some of the ambiguities and tensions that are present within the data.

4.6.1 Doing the Analysis

This research process has produced a vast and varied amount of data ranging from field note reflections, to transcripts, videos, photographs, definitions and diagrams, all representing individual and collective processes. Both consent and participation are, like many embodied and relational experiences, active and evolving processes and as such holding them 'still' for analysis has proved difficult (Brown et al. 2011). What is exciting about this data, as I will show, is that it provides a complex and multi-dimensional insight into many of the issues that have been highlighted by studies in the literature review. The contested nature of consent and the complexity of it as a concept and a practice shines through (MacLure, 2013) in a way that would not be given space with more traditional interview techniques. By the time I had gathered and aggregated all of the data into a digital format I was almost overwhelmed by how to sort, manage and productively analyse the different media. As noted above I am in the data, and while the analysis was driven by and grounded in the words and contribution of young people, it is also driven by my experience and moments which stood out for me (MacLure, 2013).

Essentially, I conducted a thematic analysis. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) stated that "there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how researchers should go about conducting it" (2016: 404). However, this method of analysis has been discussed extensively by Braun and Clarke (2006) who define thematic analysis as a qualitative method that organises data in a way that allows for the identification and reporting of patterns and provides rich data. There were a number of clear themes that emerged: the consistent use of the term 'awkward', was one example and the fact that consent was 'ambiguous' or 'lacked clarity' was another. Many themes were strong and congruent across the data despite the different modes of capture. I was also able to map the themes onto the research questions and develop a grid to help with analysis. I have been able to address each research question with a variety of data and would argue that this supports the relevance of the themes that emerge.

Much of the data collected captured highly articulate and well thought through ideas of what consent means, and the processes of teaching and learning about it. Although I was quickly able to produce a map of data and highlight key themes the process of analysis and applying different lenses to the data has been a complex and at times unsettling task. “Producing knowledge through empirical research is not the same as acting as a conduit for the voices of others, or assuming that experience can speak for itself” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:116). The film that was made is an example of this as it simply captures ‘what young people think’. The process of academic analysis however requires me to draw on the theoretical tools outlined in my introduction and the methodological commitments of the disciplines I introduced at the start of this chapter.

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) point out that “data analysis are not simply neutral techniques because they carry the epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions of the researchers who developed them” (415). I have found myself shifting between epistemological starting points and applying theoretical lenses that help me to make sense of the data in different ways. It has sometimes, been difficult “translating embodied experience into language” (Brown et al. 2011:498) particularly when “translation can be considered as the process of constructing rather than conveying meaning” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:118). I have found myself wondering whether it is acceptable, as a feminist, to entertain the idea that non-consensual sex might not count as rape, and questioning how I can foreground the ideas and experiences of young people but also speak back to feminism in a way that attends to power and heteronormativity and explore this further in the following four chapters.

Following the analysis, which revealed how some of the messages and methods of teaching feed a binary view of consent by erring on the side of caution when it comes to balancing children and young people’s rights to protection and participation, I have divided the chapters into ‘teaching’ and then ‘learning’ as my thematic analysis. The first two empirical chapters capture and consider the processes of teaching and learning about consent. Both chapters problematize the notion that consent is static and consider what constrains and enables conversations which go beyond the binary. In Chapter Five I show the significance of institutional context and educators’ professional backgrounds and training. In the following chapter on ‘learning’ I begin by showing how young people reproduce some of the more binary and static ideas about consent that educators deliver. I show that consent is commonly constructed in legal and binary terms but that deconstructing can prove a useful tool for learning about consent in a more nuanced way. In Chapter Six I engage with ‘grey areas’ in a way that teachers may not often be

able to. This helps reveal how learning, as the acquisition of broad vocabulary for articulating desires and naming experiences, can help move conversations forward to consider the complexities of sexual negotiation and acknowledge the situated and contextual nature of encounters. Building from these chapters I then explore and analyse the ways in which awkwardness, ambivalence and ambiguity can usefully become part of our sexual lexicon and how awkwardness in particular may enable shifts in culture

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the participatory research design for this Doctoral project. Developed initially to understand the processes and practice of participation in the organisation Brook, it adapted to focus more on educational practices and common constructions of sexual consent. The research questions and methods have been developed through collaboration with young people and staff at Brook and this has ensured that the research focus, and subsequent findings and outcomes are of direct relevance to many groups of young people and educators.

The project has been relatively small scale and it is acknowledged that the findings may not be generalizable across all young people, or educators. However I did work directly with over 100 young people, have observed, shadowed and participated in conversations with Brook staff for 4 years of which I spent 9 months regularly working in a school and youth club, in addition to the piloting and ‘before the method’ work. Research encounters were captured in a variety of media and I have been able to use this data to produce accounts and analyse the processes, tensions and possibilities for teaching, learning and advocating for a more communicative culture of consent. Given this I am confident that the diversity of participants, and Brook’s uptake of many of the findings and recommendations in their educational programmes suggest the findings are of interest to a wider academic and practice community.

As a feminist, and participatory researcher I have paid attention to my position, authority and power. I have outlined a number of examples where ethics have come into question and have, on occasions found it difficult to disentangle myself from the research process and data the participants and I have produced. Thus, reflexive practice has been important to help create distancing strategies for analysing and critically reflecting on the process and findings (Nolas, 2011; Finlay, 1998). It also helps me to recognise that the “story produced” in my write up will be “incomplete” and the result of my own values and agendas, (McLeod and Yates, 1997: 26).

The following three chapters attend to different elements of consent and draw on a variety of theoretical and conceptual tools. They have been written in chronological order and are developmental. The title of each chapter 'Teaching', 'Learning' and 'Awkwardness' locate the processes that occur, and the scaffolding that is, or in some cases is not, in place to enable (young) people to understand and embody a certain ethic of care and consideration in relationships and intimate or sexual encounters.

Chapter 5: Teaching Consent, Toeing the Line

Over the course of this research, and particularly during the analysis, it became clear that a focus on the process and practice of teaching consent in educational settings would be necessary. A core aim of this research is to foreground young people's voices and experiences. In doing this, it is important to acknowledge the context of their experience: how and where they are being 'taught' and by whom. In this chapter I present observations and findings which relate to the tensions teachers embody in formal educational contexts as they attempt to balance the sometimes conflicting agendas of SRE including, for example, formal policy, social/cultural pressures, pornography, awareness of CSE, safeguarding and 'classroom control' with the needs and questions that are important to individual young people. The data generated with practitioners, and my ethnographic experience of 'teaching' provides a vantage point from which to understand how and why consent education seemingly reinforces legalistic and binary notions of consent at the expense of a more critical pedagogy, which poses questions and challenges young people to think about what consent means in practice. I will show that educators embody a difficult position in their practice where they must "mediate the line between formal policy agenda for sex education and the pupil cultures that it seeks to influence" (Thomson and Blake, 2002:191).

It has been difficult to define and separate 'teaching and learning' (Biesta, 2015) as they are not distinct practices. While the practitioners I worked with and observed were all responsible for educating young people about sexual consent, the approaches they took, their professional identity, work environments and relationship to young people differed considerably. Despite this they all fall into the category of 'teacher' because they provide information, they encourage and scaffold the learning of others and they 'call people into presence' to think through where they stand and what the topic under discussion means to them and why (Biesta, 2005). Thus, this chapter is entitled 'teaching consent', rather than 'education, (or facilitation) for learning consent'. This is to recognise the work and relationships that the practitioners do, even if they might not usually label themselves 'teacher'. Drawing on literature from social pedagogy, critical pedagogy and youth work the practitioners will be referred to by their professional titles, youth worker, education worker, teacher, nurse and so on, but I will consider them collectively as practitioners and pedagogues of sex education with differing skills and institutional constraints.

The majority of data this chapter draws on is from a focus group with four sessional education workers at Brook, field notes reflecting on teaching, running workshops and discussions, and observations of and conversations with education workers, youth workers and teachers in the field. The teaching referred to throughout has occurred in both formal and informal settings. This chapter relates and explores a number of practice dilemmas around the ambiguity of consent. In particular, it explores the perceived and actual risks associated with acknowledging ambiguities in settings where firm 'answers' are the norm and, indeed, where there are legal absolutes as well as factual, policy and societal priorities. A number of examples highlight the importance of experience and confidence in approaching SRE and in being aware of and managing the tensions between different policy and practice expectations in SRE and safeguarding more broadly.

5.1 Tensions in teaching

The literature review noted how sex education, and a focus on consent can be viewed as part of a wider project in safeguarding children and young people but also that there is a dissonance between protecting young people and encouraging them to explore and take risks that may provide learning opportunities (Gilbert, 2017).

Delivering education that informs and encourages young people to think more critically about sexual practice arms them with some of the skills and knowledge they may need to both keep themselves 'safe' and develop a positive sexuality (Greening, 2017). However there is clear societal discomfort and multiple tensions associated with acknowledging children and young people's sexuality, developing or otherwise, and it is commonly acknowledged that people avoid talking about sex, particularly intergenerationally (Robinson, 2012). It is unsurprising therefore, that many schoolteachers are not confident delivering basic information about sexual intercourse, let alone opening spaces for discussing the more complex and emotional sides of sex and relationships.

Today's recently qualified school teachers, youth workers and sexual health workers are largely of a generation that has experienced SRE at school and probably had more open conversations with family and friends about sexual matters. Mary-Jane Kehily suggests that experiences of SRE can inform future interest and pedagogic practice (2002) and this was reflected in the conversations I had with different practitioners. The younger educators in the study felt

motivated to deliver something better than they got ten, fifteen or twenty years ago. Despite this the young people I worked with commonly pointed to the ‘fact’ that their teachers were “awkward” (Willow, SCH) and clearly “embarrassed”(BTN) when delivering SRE. More often, however, they spoke of their school teachers making topics “dry” (Asmin and, Adz, SCH), or lacking in “real life” (Shanella, YC) relatability, by which I understood them to mean ‘de-contextualised’ or abstract.

However, the education workers I spoke with and my observations of workers in the field, coupled with the resources used to enable conversation and teaching about consent, seemed less dry, and much more interactive and thought provoking than these comments suggest. Brook education workers, unlike most school teachers have to be comfortable with, and are often very well practiced at talking about sex and relationships with groups of young people while promoting a “positive and safe message” (Sia, ED). Thus, the notion that teaching about sexual consent is ‘awkward’ did not come up so explicitly in my discussions with workers as it did with the young people. The theme of awkwardness is unpacked in Chapter Seven, which proposes that it can be productive to embrace awkwardness in order to expose and change norms and expectations. For now, the term is used descriptively to acknowledge the tensions of teaching SRE. These consist of, but are not limited to: anxiety around safeguarding; being ‘on message’; managing laughter and embarrassment in groups; exposing ambiguity and power and managing the expectations of others. Educators bring their own experience and knowledge of consent with them, and also have to hold and respond to the perceived, potential and actual knowledge and experience of others.

5.1.1 Classroom control

Brook’s aim in an educational session is to “start a conversation and get young people thinking” (Julie, ED) as much as, if not more than, it is to transmit information about risks, the possibilities for preventing these and signposting services. Harriet, a very experienced education worker, explained that as an external teacher is it important to “set the tone of a session” (Brook, FN). Kehily’s work on sex education reflects this noting that policy on SRE stresses the “importance of curriculum documents which strike the ‘right’ note” by balancing teaching approaches that focus on prevention and information (Kehily, 2002:230). The ‘tone’ of Brook sessions were described as ‘informal’ and ‘interactive’. Yet this style of teaching can sometimes create tensions between what external teachers view to be a ‘conducive’ learning environment for

exploring and talking about aspects of SRE and what behaviour and modes of learning school teachers expect in their classrooms and teaching sessions. This is a tension that I was able to experience first-hand during my research, as reflected in my field notes:

I encouraged the young people to work collaboratively on their tables and to talk about sexual consent with each other. I had provided some provocative, but also quite funny, stimulus for discussion and so anticipated and was willing to embrace some giggles at the very least, and possibly even some screams of laughter and shock from the students. The session was buzzing, and when it came to calling the whole class back together this took some time. In my view not a problem as my idea of a good session is one where I can see conversation happening and cogs turning. The classroom teacher and I in this instance could not have had more opposing ideas of what a good and productive activity looked (or rather sounded) like. 'Miss' stopped the whole class by shouting and said that she was "embarrassed" by their behaviour in front of an external guest. "There should not be so much shouting and giggling". In my opinion she 'killed the moment'. She made it awkward for me as a youth worker and informal educator, to pull the class back to seeing the topic as accessible and something that it is possible to talk about in a light hearted and open way as much as it is something that can be serious.

Like bell hooks, I and practitioner participants, found that 'excitement [...] was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process.' (hooks 1994:7). The Brook workers shared similar stories of unwelcome and awkward interventions by teachers in their school sessions. Sometimes teachers undermined the sex positive approach of Brook's work by challenging certain messages openly and with authority. In an earlier session all of the workers gave examples of times when teachers had shut down young people's questions or corrected their understandings' and definitions of more ambiguous or 'risky' acts and situations and "sucked the fun out" of learning (Natalie, ED).

The tension here is less to do with the content and subject matter and more to do with managing the anxieties of individual school teachers and the expectations of schools more widely. This is not to say all teachers and schools are anxious and intervene. Brook staff noted that teachers often take the opportunity to leave the classroom and get on with other things and are glad to hand over the responsibility of sex education to external workers as it relieves them of this 'difficult' task. This handover of responsibility, however, can also create a tension in terms of expectations about how much will be achieved. This was articulated by Julie who noted that time is always an issue and that as an individual delivering a one off session it can be difficult to provide a framework for critical thinking, attend to young people's questions and deliver key facts and important messages:

[...] So, it is about like being able to signpost people to organisations and let people know what organisations are near them and then also saying like this is, like continue thinking about this please, like I'm just, I'm here as one person as all of you as individuals work out what consent means to you. it's really debilitating to feel like a teacher is saying 'you'll do this in an hour right?'. Like 'you can get this job done', that's quite a lot of pressure. –

-- mmm [agreement from others]

The 'job' referred to is that of ensuring that the students understand sexual consent and that they will now be well informed about all aspects of sexual negotiation and will not need any future input from the teacher or school regarding their sexual development. The Brook sessions often cover a variety of topics "packed" into one session because they know this might be the students' "one and only SRE class that goes beyond STI and contraception education" (Alice, ED). Consent is a topic that has a whole session "but then lots of other sessions have consent in them too. Because I think that what loads of schools want is a little bit of that[...] It's a real buzz word" (Julie). Julie's reference to consent as a 'buzz word' refers to the current political and social anxiety about sexual exploitation, 'sexting' and the subsequent focus on sexual consent and the law.

Institutional and policy response to the intergenerational injustice exposed by the revelation of CSE has been to require delivery of SRE programmes and schools have taken on board a need to improve safeguarding and raise awareness about child sexual exploitation and consent. For example, the school research site was delivering education on consent as part of a wider Safeguarding in schools agenda. Yet, there is much to suggest that the balance between rights to protection and participation has not been recognised, leaving teachers feeling awkwardly placed and unsure about how far they can go in acknowledging and encouraging young people's sexual agency. This will be considered further later in the chapter.

Related to this, the most popular bookings Brook received from schools whilst I was researching (apart from contraception and STI sessions) are those which focus on CSE, Pornography and Consent²⁷. Consent is bundled with a group of 'problematic' topics about which young people need to be 'warned' and equipped to protect themselves (Greening, 2017). However, the ways in which it is taught can lead to static and abstract definitions rather than critical and grounded understandings of why it might be important and how to *do* it.

²⁷ Data from bookings info at Brook I was able to access while in attendances.

...sometimes they are like almost over taught it – and they can like it parrot off [what consent is], but they haven't actually learned any of it for themselves.

(Sia, ED)

How young people define and learn about consent will be discussed in Chapter Six. It is significant, however, that all of the Brook workers echoed Sia's reflection suggesting that the way consent is taught and presented to students is done in such a way that the topic has been 'ticked off' rather than to encourage a real understanding of it, or relate to the lived experiences of young people. This raises questions about the extent to which educators are supported, and given space within different institutions to practice critical pedagogy that would unpack and challenge simple definitions which can be viewed as 'risky'.

5.1.2 Getting 'too personal'

Another key component of classroom control and teaching consent that was discussed at length with educational practitioners was that of avoiding personal disclosures in classroom and group settings. It can be difficult to find an appropriate teaching style in different institutional contexts. There is a balance between informal, open teaching styles and then being seen as 'nosey' or losing respect (Kehily, 2002) as well as between encouraging reflection and discussion but not triggering upsetting or 'safeguarding' disclosures. This raises further questions about the extent to which educators are enabled to productively embrace the risks associated with opening up discussion and grounding it in examples and experience.

The Brook workers spoke about this in detail and noted how some workers have more formal classroom control 'tactics' and others were much more informal and 'soft' in their attitude to managing the students. There were references to needing to manage the space, and "avoid personal discussion" (Harriett, ED) so that they can manage any safeguarding issues that could arise during discussions. Once again, it was clear that finding a balance between opening a creative and critical space could be constrained by a concern about safeguarding and the limits of time.

So this is about prevention rather than like what to do. It's going to be about suggesting ways to talk about things in the future, rather than looking back at things that have already happened

(Natalie, ED).

This comment from Natalie was part of a longer reflection on how she saw sex education becoming more about avoiding situations than about how to manage those situations or thinking about experiences someone has already had. This could be viewed as an example of ‘defensive teaching’ as defined by Bonnie Trudell (1992; 1993). This involves the ‘teacher’ making ‘splits between ideals and practice’ (Kehily, 2002) focusing keenly on the ideal scenarios in order to control and avoid potentially uncomfortable moments such as awkward questions and disclosures. While the Brook staff tried not to focus only on ideal examples and ground some of the discussion in practice, this was difficult.

In order to consider what or how to do and talk about consensual sex in the future the workers often used discussion-based activities. Some of these activities were more creative and critical than others, but none were without their limits. The educators themselves recognised the limits of many activities noting that they were “quite formal” (Julie) and “clunky” (Natalie) and ultimately did not always have the intended learning outcome. Their discussion suggests they found the activities available to them consistently prioritised abstract and disembodied conversations about sexual consent, which were considered less risky, rather than providing more situated and embodied examples that would stimulate discussion but could potentially get “too personal” (Harriett, ED).

The ‘clunkiness’ referred to was apparent in other activities I observed, delivered and probably some that I developed. Some of the Brook activities are structured in order to avoid disclosures or sharing personal experiences. Whilst this is ‘safer’ from the workers’ point of view, it has the effect of decontextualising the discussion and avoiding the discussion of personal experience, which can be a valuable way of learning.

The space that teaching takes place in affects the extent to which practitioners feel able to stand aside from the formal ‘teacher’ role of delivering ‘right answers’ for students to ‘learn’. A number of researchers have argued that schools are hierarchically structured in such a way that teachers can only ‘approach issues of sexuality in a decontextualized manner’ (Kehily 2002:216; Holland et al. 1990; Thomson, 1994; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; McGeeney 2013). Brook workers spoke about how their delivery in schools differed from their delivery in other youth settings. I was able to observe Alice working in schools, youth clubs and sexual health drop-ins and could see that she adapted her delivery to suit the environment. The more formal the setting, the more structured sessions were, and there was a clear ‘learning outcome’ and

message for each session. At drop-ins, as I show later, there is more space to adapt and respond to the needs and questions of the young people accessing the service. Field notes reflected how I also adapted my working style according to the institutional setting.

I found myself feeling far more need to plan a clear 'message', to give definitions and relate in a more 'formal' manner when working in the classroom and doing whole class session than I did in small groups. My presentation was less formal and planned when working in the youth club (especially in sessions we did not film), as I felt that in these spaces it was much more acceptable for me to not know, to have a laugh and to get alongside the young people in their jokes and boundary pushing rather than implementing boundaries and correcting certain attitudes and behaviours which I felt more obliged to do in the formal classroom space.

This reflects Kehily's assertion that "the positionality of teachers as instructors/professional educators encourages the deployment of formal teaching methods based on a view of the teacher as holder-of-knowledge and *in control* in the classroom" (2002:216, original emphasis). I, and other educators I worked with conformed to more formal educational expectations, despite prior training and commitment to more youth centred and critical pedagogies. There is a real question about whether schools, with their hierarchical and one-directional agenda can ever be spaces for critical pedagogies of sex education which I will explore further in the next section.

5.1.3 Teaching consent and dissent

Brook workers, as I have noted, were confident teaching about sex and relationships, yet there were moments of discomfort and awkwardness in the research conversations. Some exasperated, awkward and uncomfortable laughter came up when we acknowledged the dissonance of teaching about consent more holistically in a school setting where the students experience few opportunities to assert their agency. This reflects research that explores how children's rights are enabled and constrained in school settings (Mayall, 1994; David et al. 2010; Graff and Schweiger, 2017).

[...] we talked about this the other day that brings up a whole load of really complicated questions that erm that I, within a professional role within a school, find quite challenging to balance. Because they could be like – well I didn't consent for my teacher to do this, I didn't consent to my parents to do that. And like yea, that is true. [Nervous laughter from the others]

(Natalie, ED)

The practitioner group acknowledged that in their view to ‘do consent properly’ could be quite disruptive as it opens up ideas of choice and agency - which they thought could be positive, showing young people “you have way more agency than you think” (Sia, ED).

This conversation complements a conversation I captured with one of the school groups where we acknowledged the hypocrisy of teaching about consent in school spaces that do not enable or celebrate dissent and different kinds of ‘no saying’. The students asked “yea, where is the consent [in school]?” (Adz, SCH) and identified numerous examples of ways they felt they are not afforded choice, or autonomy – “like we just know like that we have to do, what we are told...” (Charlie, SCH). Their issues included having to ask permission to go to the toilet; intergenerational hierarchy (not being able to say no, or question things without getting into trouble); and lack of space to negotiate and influence the educational content you receive (unable to say ‘that wasn’t very interesting’ or ‘this isn’t effective’ to teachers).

I think that’s one of the reasons that so many people don’t like school [pause] you really want to just ask, like ‘why do I need to do this?’ and you can’t

(Sarah, SCH)

This last comment highlights the lack of agency the group felt. They agreed that often the only way they can express ‘no’ is to ‘break the rules’ and be seen as ‘naughty’. There is no positive way for them to give feedback, but if they are being seen as ‘naughty’ this feedback is not listened to.

Both of these conversations, and reflections presented in the methods chapter, expose the school setting as a space that enables and sustains compliance and obedience at the expense of nurturing the positive outcomes of transgression and resistance. Mayall, in 1994, noted that the ‘institution as a whole sets standards of normality and development that cannot be questioned by the pupils’ (3). It highlights the power of schools, and educators to reinforce or challenge legal, medical and moral ideas about youth sexuality. Concerns about safeguarding and parental complaint are two well documented reasons as to why more schools and teachers do not take the ‘risks’ associated with a more feminist or sex positive model of critical SRE (Lees, 1993; Kehily, 2002; Alldred and David, 2007; Alldred, 2018). Despite the Brook workers’ independence from schools and their commitment to sex positive education they still have to work within the framework of schools to maintain positive relationships to continue to have access to young people. Thus raising questions about how policy shifts might encourage more critical pedagogy,

and actively address some of the hierarchy and problematic reproduction of conservative and heteronormative values about sex relationships.

5.2 Embracing ambiguity: teaching beyond the binary

As illustrated above, teaching about consent and engaging with the topic more broadly is not necessarily viewed as difficult or embarrassing by people who are employed to do so on a regular basis. Managing time, groups, and delivery can be tough, but most workers are able to accomplish this and work through the potential tensions to deliver interactive, informative and thought-provoking sessions, even if these are occasionally disrupted by the interventions of other teachers or the contributions and behaviours of students. The practice dilemmas above reflect institutional and organisational issues and I turn now to tensions and concerns that were highlighted regarding content.

5.2.1 Ambiguity

Consent, as highlighted in the literature review is a complicated term and is generally approached educationally in a legal and binary way. Later chapters will argue that there is a need to reframe consent in a way that enables people to talk about the ‘grey areas’ and messy elements of sexual negotiation, disrupting the idea that sexual consent is thought through and logical in the moment (Gilbert, 2017). During my time with, and as one of, the Brook workers we acknowledged that consent is an ambiguous concept, and that reducing it to its legal and binary definition was not always useful for young people they worked with. In the focus group however, there seemed to be some apprehension around how far educators can go in acknowledging the grey areas that do exist when it comes to sexual consent and sexual negotiation more broadly rather than providing a rule, or simple, but decontextualized, definition. Speaking about the ambiguities Julie said:

[...] people learn a rule and assume that's what it means but, but a lot of the time, when we're talking about where, when consent changes is really interesting – because that's not something that they've thought of before. [...] I feel like their understanding of consent is either saying like 'yes' to everything, like here is my body everything that you do to it I am willing. Or saying 'no' here is a barrier, there is going to be no sexual activity. And that like that's always been very important to break down and say like no that's not what it's about.

Julie reflects that it is important to stress the complexity of consent in order to make people really think about what it means to them. Her reference to the problematic understanding of consent as a binary is highly significant and has become a key theme for this thesis. Julie highlights the limits of a 'yes/no' model of consent and suggests it is important to consider the process of communication and negotiation in a way that is not absolute, or 'all or nothing'.

This reflects Jen Gilbert's assertion that SRE must move away from legal, and binary models of consent and instead should seek to enhance a discourse of ethics, exploration, surprise and risk-taking even if doing so seems like a risk for the educators because they open up conversations and invite questions to which there may be no 'right answer'(2017). Even the Brook workers noted a level of discomfort about addressing experimentation and how one might consent to something that one does not enjoy. Julie has suggested to young people that they "could say: 'I want to try this, but I don't want to try that, is that ok?'" but notes that this does not fit with many young people's understandings of sexual consent.

Ellen, the least experienced of the workers at the session asked the others if and how they might address exploration and risk taking:

Ellen:[...] how do you kind of negotiate talking with young people about the fact that even if it's all consensual not all your sexual experiences are going to be positive? Like you know you might be experimenting or trying things out and you might do something that actually you know afterwards, and you have consented and you wanted to do it, but afterwards you think 'I didn't like that'.

[lots of umming and discomfort from the others]

Natalie: Errr to be honest, well I don't.

[...]

Ellen: [...] well my concern is kind of like thinking, well getting that confused as a young person and think like ohh well maybe I didn't consent. Like I'm not saying you should be tricked into saying you consented when you hadn't but like if you have consented to something and you've done it and then you're like – well how do I negotiate that feeling within me of oh I didn't actually like it does that mean it was bad?

Ellen's question and concerns here speaks to the difficulty of teaching and talking about consent with young people in a way that acknowledges youth sexuality as something that will be inexperienced and may, unintentionally, go wrong (Hirst, 2008). It highlights the ambiguity and grey areas that are present, but often avoided, with discussing sexual consent and youth sexuality. Ambiguity, ambivalence and (in)experience will be revisited in Chapter Seven. The discomfort that this part of the focus group discussion produced indicated that more needs to

be done to scaffold educational conversations that actively address experimentation, risk taking and grey areas, something that will be revisited in the concluding chapter.

It is important to consider how it may be possible to teach and have clear messages about something that ultimately is ambiguous and different for everyone. Participants used the terms 'ambiguity' and 'grey areas' in discussions frequently; however, the way in which they were used often differed despite the obvious overlap. Ambiguity is the opposite of clarity, of being sure about what you want or do not want, and communicating this explicitly and clearly, or being able to define something. The difficulty of being clear and explicit in talk about sex has been confirmed by a number of researchers (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999; Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005; Brady et al. 2017). 'Grey area', as discussed later, is more about *labelling* experiences. Ambiguous communication give rise to actions or practices that cannot be easily labelled as either consensual or non-consensual in a binary or legalistic way. Ambiguity is also about *meaning*. If the meaning of something is unclear, open to interpretation and contextual then it can be difficult to explain and define. Something that the Brook workers highlighted by noting that young people are often unsure about what consent is and that "people have different ideas of consent" (Sia). Julie said:

[...]But then when you get people to dissect [the term consent] ...they kind of, they can reel off something but they don't understand how it fits into their lives and how and why it's really important. Because they're like 'oh well it's about respect'. And like well I've found it quite hard sometimes to like really make them think about what it means to them, rather than what it means as like – 'this is a rule that you must follow'.

Here Julie is advocating for a more critical pedagogy and highlights the pedagogic value of (and the difficulties associated with), deconstructing the term - something that necessarily complicates the legal binary of consent and could lead to more grounded, and therefore personal, discussion. The next chapter illustrates the process and pedagogy of deconstructing consent however this is a difficult task in school environments. Julie's reference to 'a rule' that must be followed reflects more traditional and teacher-centred pedagogies where schools set and teach rules, something that Moira Carmody warns against in her sexual ethics programme, advocating instead for reflective approach to sexual ethics (2013; 2015). Yet this more reflective approach can be at odds with educational practices that seek to minimise the chances of personal disclosure. Presently, teachers, whether school based or peripatetic, have to take on a topic that causes them discomfort (NCB, 2014) and try to present it in a simple way, avoiding young people's own (good and bad) experiences and consequently making the topic decontextualized and potentially boring.

The education workers at Brook gave numerous examples of developing activities which relate to young people's everyday lives, 'thinking outside the box,' and attempting to go beyond a legalistic and 'boring' approach to consent. Natalie described a scenario she often uses where she asks to borrow a student's phone in different ways and the different responses that students may give depending on the context:

[What] if I said erm well if you don't give me your phone then I'm gonna go outside and tell your teacher that you've been really rude to me. So then she gives it me. She doesn't want to, but she's said yes. [I ask the students] What's going on there then? And then keep feeding in these things to actually get them thinking [...] how does that relate to sex? Does it make a difference if I'm her friend? And she cares about me? [...]

In this example, Natalie highlights how coercion can work in ways that are routinely accepted. It is clear the young person does not want to hand over the phone, but they do because they know there may be negative consequences. While this further highlights the problematic power structures of the school setting it does encourage students to think about the possibilities for 'yes saying' and 'no saying' and how these are affected by the context of an interaction. By using 'non-sexual' examples it is possible to consider how knowledge and experience of negotiating consent in different context can be applied to, or are different from, sexual negotiation in a way that goes beyond a yes/no binary.

Sia described another activity that she and a school teacher developed to think about consent and communication. They created two strings of text messages involving someone inviting a friend to a party. In one scenario the other person was very reluctant for different reasons to go, but ended up going; and in the other scenario they were really positive. The students were asked to analyse the text conversations and dialogue. Sia commented:

[T]hey were like so amazing at it. like they were just so in tune to what '...' [dots in the text message] might have meant [...]. And what we tried to then say was like – that's how in tune you are, you are really good at communication. Like if you can read from a text message that someone's not so into something, and someone really is, if you can read those sorts of communications then you have the skills that you can use in your relationships and that kind of thing. So we're trying to say that the grey areas aren't as grey as you think they are, in a way. Like you actually have the skills to realise that that was an uncomfortable situation, even though that person wasn't saying 'I don't want to go' [...]

The young people were able to analyse the text messages and interpret the 'unspoken' desire/lack of desire and ambivalence behind the words. This reflects Kitzinger and Frith's (1999)

findings about how rare it is that someone say a direct 'no' in social as well as sexual situations. The aim of this activity was to show that life is full of grey areas characterised by uncertainty and ambivalent desire and that young people can recognise these and relate to why people may 'go along' with something.

This activity relates much more to young people's real lives and admits the possibility that decision making is influenced by peer pressure, expectations and social situations. Sia's use of the idea of 'grey areas,' however, is still predicated on a binary understanding of wanting/not wanting. The discourse of ambivalence is missing. What comes up in the accounts of the education staff and my experiences and observations is that it is important to understand the significance of ambiguity and its relationship with awkwardness, avoidance and ambivalence. This will be developed further in Chapter Seven.

The discussions presented above suggest that it *is* ok, and in reality, very likely, that people have different understandings of consent, especially when working with people who have more or less experience of sexual negotiation. Yet there is some unease about how far to go when it comes to opening things up and problematizing the 'rules' or what one practitioner characterised as going "off message" (FN). Moira Carmody's work on sexual ethics has shown that it is important to provide a framework that encourages young people to consider the ethics of different interaction rather than provide a list of 'dos and don'ts' (Carmody, 2013). It can be difficult to do this – especially when schools and safeguarding panels want to see clarity of message, and ideally, results from these interventions. The workers at Brook are in a position where at times they can bring young people's attention to the ambiguity of consent, yet in doing so they risk starting discussions and inviting questions to which they do not have answers, or which might challenge more mainstream and reductive models of consent.

The 'what if?' question

Young people's desire for certainty, clear labels and examples of acceptable and unacceptable practice was something the workers struggled with. They experienced a demand – particularly from young men – for clear and precise answers to specific questions that were often based in the young people starting to engage with the topic and apply the concepts to their own lives. These specific questions often start with 'what if...?' and they were also common place in the research conversation I had with young people.

Sia: [...] But what I found is that they, particularly the young men were really obsessed with the grey areas. [...] they are very much aware of the legal aspect, and the horror stories of – but what if this happened, what if you were drunk and then du du du... and then this, and like taking you on a story, and obviously you're not a lawyer and it's a not a real case so you can't tell them what the answer is gonna be.

[...] **Natalie:** [...] I have had one of those exact consent questions. Where it was like, 'yea but what if she's consented you're half way through having great sex and she changes her mind, but she hasn't told you? [...] 'what would happen!?!?' and I'm just like well I don't know that's like a really tricky situation isn't it, [...]

Both of the quotes above capture the complexity of teaching about consent and the reality that it is difficult to talk about it an abstract way. When young people present scenarios they are often seeking a binary answer about whether something would be legal or not. There was some frustration expressed by educators about how the 'what if?' question drags them back to talking about consent as if it is 'simple' and binary, and as if the laws are black and white rather than open to interpretation, something Gilbert warns against in SRE (2017). It is important however, to take young people's concerns and questions seriously. In the next chapter I will look at how those 'what if' scenarios may provide a site of learning, or a moment where both the student and teacher could be called 'into presence' (Biesta, 2005) to state what they think and why, rather than be provided with clear answers and outcomes as illustrated in Natalie's example.

Natalie: [continued from above...] what do you think we could do to make sure that that isn't happening?... what about talking!? Blank faces... 'is this nice?' 'Do you like this?' like 'how're you feeling?' [...]

By engaging with 'the what if...' teachers can usefully expose their own lack of knowledge and put the question back to the students. It also enables the educators to ask questions about the scenario that may encourage new ways of thinking. Biesta notes that 'We can look at learning as responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess' (2005:62). It is important to counter the frustration associated with these questions and not to avoid them. This is essential because it 'overrides assumptions that that students, and younger people will ask the right questions by themselves, before they have experiences' (both good and bad) to draw from (Graff and Schweiger, 2017:176).

5.2.2 Acknowledging grey areas

The concept of the 'grey area' has emerged from the data as an important category for talking about sexual negotiation. It allows us to articulate the more common experiences of sex, and any interaction for that matter, often being a combination of, or sitting somewhere between 'good' and 'bad' (Gavey, 2005; Kelly and Radford, 1990; Peterson and Muehlenhard, 2005; Hlavaka, 2014; Carmody, 2015). Some practitioners embraced the idea of grey areas - "they do exist" (Julie) – others acknowledged them but tried to move away from them as a crutch or excuse for misreading situations - "the grey areas aren't as grey as you think" (Sia) - while others took a much more hard line approach - "I don't suggest that there is a grey area [...] she hasn't consented unless it's positive" (Natalie). Although these three (and other workers too) have different ideas about what counts as a grey area, simply talking about them evokes and reinforces notions of 'good and bad', 'positive and negative', 'ok and not ok'. These are not as binary and polarised as understandings of consent that require an explicit 'yes' or 'no' but they do provide opposing ends of a spectrum and suggest that experiences need coding as one thing or another.

Many of the scenarios that I and others have used in teaching about consent, and the scenarios young people seek advice about, are an interaction that would fall into the 'grey area' because there is something which complicates what may on the surface be considered consensual sex, particularly by those who may be involved. As with the 'what if?' questions, acknowledging grey areas brought up tensions about being 'on message' and exposing the messy realities of sexual encounters. Below I outline one such example about intoxication as a grey area from my work on the film project, but other 'what if' and grey area questions often related to age as well.

One of the questions in the film project which was aiming explicitly to acknowledge a 'grey area' was 'can a drunk person give consent?' My own answer to this – in front of a number of young people – was:

Erm, sometimes. I think, I think it depends on the situation, and who they're with and whether that other person is drunk as well or if they're using it as an opportunity to, to, like an abuse of power[...]

(Elsie, Film)

My reflections on this in my notes, and more generally is that – “yes they can and frequently do it just depends how drunk...or should I say on the context” (FN). Yet I censored myself from fully acknowledging the ambiguities, inconstancies and realities of everyday life, which is something that the workers also eluded to in an earlier discussion which I did not record. This raises questions about what the possibilities for positive education might have been if I had been honest in this situation and embraced the grey areas, given that I was less constrained by institutional hierarchies and expectations than most educators.

This relates to the difficulty that educators can experience when trying to balance teaching and conversations about how to ‘do’ refusal while promoting ‘healthy relationships’. Julie spoke about how it is important not to focus on ‘the negative and how to show refusal’ all the time but to “talk about healthy relationships as well”. Moira Carmody has also highlighted the problematic focus on consent that constructs sexual negotiation as “primarily negative, especially for young heterosexual women” (2015:41), something that the educators were aware of:

Sia: the way I like to think of it, is [...] there is only ‘yes’ to me like you need to take a positive stance. Like I hate this focus on ‘no’ and you might upset someone, or you might hurt someone’s feelings, it might change this, you might find this, you might feel bad for saying you don’t want something. And it’s like well why!?

...

Sia: yea but well like I feel like it’s just reinforced in the way that it’s taught
[inaudible agreement]

Julie: I think that if you don’t make a real effort to talk about consent within healthy relationships as a whole then, then that’s the way that it is often perceived....

While it is important to not just “focus on the negative” (Sia), there are tensions and problems associated with focusing on a ‘yes model’ of consent without acknowledging and exploring the invisible power relations that naturalise hetero-sex as a war of attrition (Holland et al, 1991; Gilbert, 2017). An alternative, which the educators have illustrated above, is to de-sexualise and deconstruct consent viewing it as an everyday practice that requires skills in recognising and navigating ambiguity. ‘The sex education class then, becomes a forum within which the two worlds of adolescent sexuality and the authority of school culture come into open confrontation’ (Thomson & Scott, 1991:12). This is something that is complicated by the professional role and training of educators. Thus peripatetic teachers may be better placed to acknowledge youth sexuality and to challenge and address power imbalances and opportunities for everyday and sexual consent and dissent.

5.3 Institutions and individuals

Over the course of this research, I worked closely alongside 12 practitioners delivering different forms of SRE and was able to speak to and observe other practitioners in a more informal way. The tensions I have highlighted throughout this chapter are a reality for educators from different professional backgrounds working across different settings. Educators' ability to manage these tensions, take 'risks', or deliver education in a way that elevates young people's rights and interests above and beyond factors such as institutional reputation, concerns about disclosures and being 'on message' were often dependent on professional background, institutional work setting and personal biography.

As Pam Alldred has discussed in a recent chapter, practitioners' professional training influences their approach to SRE and the extent to which they prioritise youth centred practice and different pedagogy (2018). Interestingly, where Alldred's work has highlighted how youth workers are generally more willing and able to recognise and nurture youth sexuality with sex positive messages, I found that the Brook staff demonstrated this more than the qualified youth workers I observed. The following suggests that practitioners' competence, confidence and commitment to sex positive and feminist models of SRE, maps onto their own biography as well as their professional training and that practice can be constrained by the institutional context of educational encounters.

5.3.1 *Gender and generation*

Over the last 3 years working with Brook and researching in schools and youth clubs, my observations suggest that the work of 'teaching' young people about sex, and therefore consent, is disproportionately taken on by women and gay men. There is also evidence from work around sexual violence and consent at universities (NUS, 2010; Phipps and Young, 2015), which suggests that is predominantly women who engage in the campaigns, awareness raising and learning opportunities amongst their peers. This could suggest that sex education, and campaigning for a more ethical, equitable and enjoyable sexual culture is still the work of those who experience inequality, discrimination and violence, which could be viewed as a form of activism.

In the focus group educators talked about 'consent' becoming a "buzz word," something that came about when many of them were at university. Consent, then, forms part of a cultural

agenda for their generation, something that may distinguish them from older educators whose focus was more on reducing rates of STIs and unintended pregnancies.

Julie: [...] consent is such a buzz word right now [...] but like all of us were adults when consent became a big deal.

Natie: Yea we weren't taught it in school

Julie: Well yea it wasn't until I was at university when that first became a thing, and suddenly all of us were looking at our lives in different ways [...]

It is also of note that the vast majority of practitioners I worked with, both at Brook and at the youth club, were on part time or zero hours contracts so their role as sex educators was part of a patchwork of employment. It is not within the scope of this thesis to delve into the structural injustices of precarious and part time work however, it is important to recognise how this disproportionately affects women and undervalues their labour (Worth, 2015). SRE is commonly undervalued and those who work in the field often do not have the job security required to receive training and gain experience that helps them to balance the tensions outlined above. Therefore it is difficult for them to cultivate critical pedagogic practice that prioritises young people's rights whilst working within the framework and agenda of educational establishments. It is significant that the majority of practitioners I worked with were women. Everyone I worked with at Brook has now left the organisation, the citizenship teacher has left secondary education, and many of the youth workers were moving out of youth work and into teaching or youth justice roles. This raises questions about how it will be possible to sustain positive or critical SRE when the people doing the work often transition in and out of educational roles and may in some cases be unable to model dissent due to job insecurity.

5.3.2 Class and culture

In the Youth Club project, I worked alongside an openly heterosexual male youth worker who had experience teaching sexual health in other jobs, and who was able to support me in some group discussions. I was particularly pleased to have his support when working with a large group of boys, although I found his style often very different to my own youth work practice. This worker 'Dave' had a good rapport with the young people, yet I found him to be something of a caricature of the 'masculine youth worker' who has grown up in youth clubs, trained as a youth worker and then, through their practice reproduces heteronormative ideas of what it is to be a certain gender and class (Batsleer, 2012; 2014). He was, I observed, often very binary in

his teaching, labelling things as 'right' or 'wrong' and I reflected that his style of delivery sometimes involved "shutting down conversation before it had even got anywhere" (FN). The 'what if?' questions that are an important part of learning were often left un-explored; he offered a lot of facts and advice and readily challenged assumptions and what he saw as 'bad attitudes'. This dynamic with the boys' group was interesting and echoes finding in Mary-Jane Kehily's earlier work. The boys at the Youth Club liked and respected Dave and although he was an older worker, clearly saw him as 'one of them'. Although I was much nearer to them in age, I was an 'outsider' – and a woman, which meant they related to me differently. This was more clear at the start of research relationships when my attempts to gain insight into their sexual culture and enhance a sex positive discourse about pleasure meant I was perceived at times to be 'nosey' and inappropriate by some of the participants and it took some time before they saw me as a 'good' source of information. I recorded that:

The young people took on board what Dave told them – I often get questions or comments from the young people about something they had just heard/learnt from Dave. This was a great catalyst for discussion, but at times he gave very black and white answers to questions or taught them about sex and contraception in a way that I think reinforced gendered scripts about giving and getting consent [...]

(Field Notes)

Dave's profile as 'one of the lads' might as Kehily says 'place him beyond the bounds of desirability for the teaching of a subject which requires sensitivity and understanding, especially in relation to issues of gender politics' (2002:230). Yet his characteristics as an 'insider', someone who was also working class and local were an important part of his successful pedagogic practice. This facilitated a positive relationship in which the young people took on board the comments he made and the information he delivered; even if some of this was not sex positive or particularly anti-sexist, it got them thinking and encouraged discussion about boundaries and sexual communication

The majority of the youth workers at this venue maintained some more 'traditional' views around gender and sex and relationships. When promoting an event at the club I was asked to amend the poster²⁸ which originally advertised free condoms and that we would be talking about sex and consent, in favour of titling the session as 'healthy relationships' and only advertising the free pizza, not the condoms so that it "didn't give off the wrong message".

²⁸ See Appendix M

Condoms are often seen as a symbol of sexuality and by advertising them and giving them out youth workers were concerned that they may be perceived as encouraging underage and immoral sex amongst the youth population. This was initially surprising to me, but on reflection I should have considered the religious and cultural backgrounds of many of the workers, and young people who attend the club. It was important that anything which is advertised publicly is palatable to parents and the local community and the numerous people who use the club for events, meetings and activities – this venue is a public place and has a positive community image to uphold. In relation to this I noted a number of times in my notes that there is a sexual health clinic in the building but it is very discretely advertised – a number of the young people that I worked with did not know it was there, even though they had been attending the club for years in some cases. The clinic staff, anecdotally, noted an increase in people accessing the drop in for free condoms during the time I was at the club.

In contrast to Dave's teaching being enhanced by 'insider status' I also observed and experienced examples of students reacting against different educators, myself included, who were identifiable as 'outsiders'. One moment that 'shines' through and represents how generation, culture, class and pedagogic approach matter was at the School Consent Conference where a Nurse from a youth health charity was delivering a session on 'healthy relationships'. Her mode of address and the content of the session was very traditional and fitted what might be thought of as a conservative model of SRE (Lees, 1993). One student noted that what she was saying was quite 'old fashioned'(FN). In discussion with students after the session we picked up on the fact she read from a script and had to check her notes to answer some of the questions. We wondered how a young person could have confidence in someone who is clearly unsure and nervous about what they are saying, but also who was not relating their message to their everyday lives (FN). My notes reflected that the nurse's delivery "lacked passion, authenticity and authority", despite the formal delivery, and that this affected how the young people engaged with the content:

A lot of the girls laughed at a lot of what she said. They were clearly embarrassed about being told their "downstairs" is like "china", "you don't get it out for anyone" and that "once you lose it you can't get it back". FFS.

(Field notes)

This speaker was presenting a 'polite' discourse about consent and sex. She was emphasising traditional or conservative values and, as Kehily (2002) puts it, 'present[ing] an unchanging and

naturalised social gender order'. This was one of the few examples of conservative approaches to SRE that I observed during the research. It resonated with my own experiences of SRE 10-15 years ago, but also with the accounts given in other research projects and scholarly writings on SRE (Hughes, 1999; Ingham, 2006; UKYP, 2007; Alldred and David, 2007).

The person who was tasked with talking to these young people was of a different generation and from a medical background. There was a clear 'take away' message however this message (girls should protect themselves from the risks and regrets of sex) did not resonate with the youth cultures the students inhabit and positioned the teacher as outsider, and someone whose message was to be dismissed. It is important to note this because it shows that my observations, collaborations and discussion with Brook workers, for the most part, may not be representative of all who are tasked with, responsible for or who take on teaching about sex and consent.

5.3.3 Experience

The data produced from observations, and reflections on my own educational practice suggest that experience is a key factor in educators' competence and also confidence in taking risks and approaching topics in ways that are relevant to the young people they are working with. The older, more experienced practitioners who had worked in London for a long time across different boroughs were much more confident speaking about sex with diverse groups than some of the more inexperienced practitioners, myself included. I asked if there was any training for this and was told "no, you just learn how to respond and make it up as you go along" (Dave, FN). This made me wonder to what extent things are usually adapted, skipped over or put down to cultural differences and therefore shut down or left unchallenged.

I had the opportunity to experience this first hand during a week of shadowing Brook workers. One of the educational sessions that I participated in was a sexual health drop-in a supported living space for young men seeking asylum in the UK. At the drop in, we worked closely with four young men, two Albanians, one Afghani, and one Ethiopian who all had been in the UK for less than a year. Although this house was specifically for 'foreign wards of the state', the cultural variety of young people who came in and out of the room was not unique to this setting. This session, for me, encapsulated the importance of culture and language differences and not assuming a shared understanding or expectations in SRE. Field notes from this session show how

experience and confidence matter in terms of how practitioners can productively manage the potential awkwardness of such educational encounters.

In this session we ended up covering EVERYTHING. STI's, Contraception, how to actually have different kinds of sex [...] The boys we worked with were really interested – they were new to the UK and saw themselves as “outsiders” who want to learn about, and it seems, take part in a more liberal and open sexual/relationships culture...

(Field Notes)

In this session Alice and a Sexual Health Nurse had resources in different languages to help explain the basics about sexual health, but also the young people's rights to sexual health provision and confidential advice and support. The three of us were able to cover a wide variety of topics, ensuring that the young men's knowledge about sex and condoms was above and beyond what the C-card scheme and Fraser guidelines²⁹ might usually require. We were able to do this because there were three workers, four young people and two hours in which to have the session. I wrote in my field notes that having two very senior practitioners there was “perhaps not very cost effective,” yet it was their seniority, or rather experience, which ensured this was a relevant and educational session. Field notes record that:

A's experience was probably one of the things that meant we were able to cover so much stuff in a fairly simple and accessible way. She didn't seem fazed at all.

In this session I noted I felt more out of my depth than I had for the majority of my field work. I was conscious of my youth and inexperience in working with young men from traditional backgrounds, with whom I had little or no common reference points when it came to talking about sex. For the most part I watched, listened and participated with interest and enthusiasm, but at one point I was asked very directly about how to actually ‘do sex’.

Explaining to the Ethiopian guy the actual mechanical process of sex was so awkward! I definitely flushed when he asked me to tell him the technique. I realised that I couldn't take anything for granted and had to explain ‘sex’ simply, and anatomically. I was trying to think of the right words, make sure I included consent and pleasure into it... A, and the nurse just left me to it! I was so unprepared for his question and his insistence on getting a ‘proper’ explanation.

(Field Notes)

²⁹ The ‘c-card scheme’ is aimed at young people between 13-24 years old who can register to get a range of free condoms through youth sexual health services. Practitioners following the Fraser guidelines establish eligibility for the scheme.

On further reflection, my discomfort was legitimate. He was breaking a number of ‘taboos’ for both of us by asking me these questions and the embarrassment and awkwardness are always going to be part of this process for inexperienced workers.

This is an important reflection as it is *this* kind of discomfort and embarrassment that many teachers anticipate, fear and try to avoid when tasked with delivering SRE; whether focussed specifically on consent or other aspects of sexual health and wellbeing. Teachers have to take these questions seriously as it may be the one and only time for that young person to ask and to get a straight forward answer. In this instance, I would almost certainly never see this young man again and so the embarrassment I felt would not be carried forward into future encounters. Brook workers are often in a similar situation knowing that they will not have an ongoing, or particularly long, relationships with students. School teachers do not have this luxury, nor the luxury of having a small audience of only 6 people. Answering this question in front of thirty students would be a very different and potentially even more embarrassing experience. As SRE is not yet statutory teachers have very few opportunities to gain training and develop experience and confidence in the delivery of PHSE and SRE topics alongside their own subject specialism. Thus, they may be keen to avoid awkward and embarrassing conversations by delivering facts, and keeping discussions abstract which in effect silences young people’s concerns and limits the possibilities for critical and grounded discussion as discussed earlier. Experience seems a key variable for educators being able to productively balance their responsibilities for safeguarding and protecting young people from harmful sexuality while promoting and nurturing safe and satisfying youth sexuality.

The teacher who I worked with at the school had trained as a Citizenship and PHSE teacher. She was also very experienced and senior within the school having recently taken up the role of acting deputy head. When I first started working in the school I asked whether there had been any worries about allowing the young people to research and do projects on sexual consent. She spoke with confidence about it being an important topic and her experiences dealing with and supporting young women who had experiences bullying around ‘sexting’. She could manage a group and the topic, and also spoke about how it is part of a wider safeguarding agenda. Her role and experience meant that she could contain the anxieties provoked by this topic and explain clearly and competently to parents and governors why the topic was an appropriate one to cover at an ethnically diverse all-girls school. That said, the reason that I was able to work at the school was because she had sought support from staff at Brook to ensure that the girls got appropriate information and support while doing the project. As head of Citizenship and Deputy

Head of the school she had the power, position and budget to recognise her limitations in this area and 'employ' external expertise. This is something that other teachers may not be able to do when they are made responsible for SRE.

The observations and data generated from working with educators across different institutions highlights the importance of individual educators' role, experience and personal characteristics. Although the individual teacher matters, it is also clear that educators are constrained by the policy and expectations of institutions in which they work and a lack of access to training or support for developing confidence when teaching and talking about sex and consent with young people. Educators that are able, through institutional support or experience, to acknowledge young people as sexual agents, adapt, and deliver education sessions according to the group are more able to deliver and develop education that resonates with the interests and everyday lives of the young people they work with.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the competing expectations of protection and competence development that sex educators have to hold within their practice (Allred and David, 2007; Allred, 2018; Thomson, 2004b). It has exposed the difficulty of teaching critically about consent in institutional spaces such as schools where compliance is cultivated at the expense of celebrating and modelling positive dissent and 'no saying'. Whether a teacher is a full-time member of a school faculty, a youth worker, or an external education worker they are expected to balance safeguarding duties, institutional reputation and young people's rights to information.

During the research, concerns about corrupting children and young people and encouraging 'premature' sexual behaviour (Allred and David, 2007) were evident in some educators' approach to different content and managing educational encounters. This resulted in 'conservative, teacher/adult-led pedagogies which do little to challenge student learning' (Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018:1), and that contribute to reinforcing unhelpful heteronormative, gendered sexual expectations (Kehily, 2002; Thomson, 2004b; Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018).

Sex positive and informal teaching are not without their limits either. Yet the practices I observed that were more 'youth centred' and which sought to cultivate competence, rather than focusing

on risk, were better responded to by the young people. Educators highlighted that activities which encouraged young people to interrogate and 'deconstruct' consent enabled more critical awareness about the realities of negotiating sex. Those practitioners who worked in organisations that provided training and actively acknowledged young people's sexual agency were better able to address the ambiguity of consent, although there were concerns about how to do this.

Educators contributing to this study raised concerns about how to address the ambiguity of consent and engage with 'what if' questions without reducing the 'consent conversation' to legal binaries and abstract scenarios. Practitioners highlighted that the legal aspects of consent were a cause of anxiety for the young people they worked with, particularly for young men. Critical consent education which addresses ambiguity and goes beyond the binary is important but is difficult to enact in institutional settings which prioritise silence as safety at the expense of risky conversations that will inevitably call into question every day and institutional hierarchies and practices. The extent to which educators are able to bring young people into presence about consent and sex depends on the constraints of the institutions in which they work as well as their confidence and experience, and connection to the youth cultures they seek to influence. Observations and conversations captured in this chapter suggest that external educators and youth workers may be better positioned than school-based teachers (Carmody, 2015; Alldred, 2018). This will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Teachers are, and have to be, aware of the impact they could have on young people, but must also be aware of the other spaces and places that young people access information and more 'experiential' learning experiences. Meaningful SRE comes from opening spaces and confronting young people to think critically about sex, desire, power and consent. To do this it also means that teachers must confront these issues as well (NCB, 2014), something that many people are not encouraged to, or have little time to do. The next chapter presents data produced from conversations about consent that go beyond the binary. I develop a continuum of sexual consent that can provide a useful prop for having conversations about the grey areas associated with sex and consent. The findings from this chapter and the next have contributed to digital training resources for teachers, which seek to acknowledge and relive some of the concerns outlined above that educators experience when approaching the topic of consent.

Chapter 6: Learning Consent

As highlighted in Chapter Four, the methods used for this research had two clear aims. Firstly, to engage young people in a process of dialogic learning and formally recognise the research encounter as a moment of knowledge exchange and co-construction; and secondly, to elicit data and enable different modes of communication about a topic that can be considered difficult to talk about publicly. The methods and cyclical, reflective nature of this research have produced a learning situation for the participants and myself generating “learning about learning, or meta learning”, both in situ and during analysis (Coghlan and Brdon-Miller, 2014:240). The learning in this chapter is understood broadly, not simply as a direct result of ‘teaching’, formal or otherwise (Biesta, 2005; 2015; Batsleer, 2008). The previous chapter considered the role of the educator, what they are able to say and do to ‘facilitate’, enable and provoke learning and knowledge transmission or exchange about sex and consent. I noted that it is difficult to uncouple ‘teachingandlearning’ (Biesta, 2015), and to think of learning beyond the acquisition of a specific knowledge-set but that it is important to do so, particularly when considering the complex and unfixable concept and process of sexual negotiation.

Gurt Biesta’s work on the language of education and learning has been useful and complementary to the arguments I intend to make in the concluding chapter about how and in which contexts people develop ‘sexual literacy’ throughout their lives (Moore and Reynolds, 2018). By considering how people are able to construct, talk about and embody discourses of consent, this chapter shows that consent and sexual agency are spoken about and practiced differently; and that people are linguistically limited when it comes to expressing, labelling, inviting, seeking or rejecting certain sexual experiences (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999; Holland et al. 1998). What follows will be an analysis and presentation of data and findings which could strengthen the arguments of Biesta, Moore and Reynolds, and other scholars who consider learning, sexual competence and agency as something that develops and changes over time. People learn in multiple ways and through moments and interactions where they are challenged to think differently, and thus learning occurs in multiple directions - not simply as a one-way transmission in formal settings. Throughout this chapter I centre myself as *both* teacher and learner in different moments, thus providing insight into the co-construction of what ‘consent’ means and how it was constructed by the young people I worked with.

This chapter begins with examples of learning in situ, and highlights that the roles of ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’ are, as theories of radical education suggest, fluid and ever-changing. This account focuses predominantly on conversations with one school group that will frame the chapter, illustrating how learning and knowledge production can occur through conversation. Following this, I will demonstrate how participatory work with young people has allowed me to better understand how consent is commonly constructed and some of the limits to this. I develop and introduce a continuum of sexual agency which captures the spectrum of opinion and language that was used to discuss and label consent and sexual violation. The final section of this chapter illustrates how activities and conversations which encourage a breakdown of binaries and consider consent as situated can enable a more useful understanding of consent. The chapter concludes suggesting that there is a need to focus more on the process of sexual negotiation and how this can *produce* consensual encounters.

6.1 What is the learning situation?

This section focusses on examples of learning in multi-directional and dialogic learning which occurred with a school group over three consecutive weeks. It provides insight into the types of conversations, which occurred during the research project and offers one example of the diversity of sexual cultures and attitudes I encountered during the research. The intention of the small group work was for me to help students develop their consent campaign and plan for the school consent conference. It was also an opportunity for me capture conversations and produce data about what they think consent is, and what they think others need to know about it.

The first session was a little “disorganised and hesitant” (FN) with the students entering the session and sitting down at separate computers expecting to do class work, and me unsure about how much to disrupt this with my research agenda.

By the end of the session we were sat in a close circle having spent much of the time discussing how awkward consent can be and why, laughing about different ways that it could be communicated, seeking clarification on the law and considering how it may, or may not, relate to their own lives...

(Field notes)

Despite the unplanned and informal nature of this session, the girls responded positively about it as they left:

Nina: That was the best PHSE class we've ever had.

Adz: Yea and we didn't even have to write nothing!

Elsie: Well thanks, it wasn't really a class though -

Nina: Yea, but we learnt loads [Agreement from others]....

(Closing comments – as they were walking out the door)

In the extract above and the one I present below I, as the 'teacher' had entered the classroom with a desire to learn and without a set agenda. This arguably destabilised the 'teaching space' allowing the students to transgress and entertain their own agenda (hooks, 1994). By actively taking part in, and being excited by the comments, conversations and concerns that the students were vocalising we were able to learn from one another in a way that is less possible when desire and excitement are banished due to teaching plans and a focus on measurable outcomes.

6.1.1 Who is learning what from whom?

The following week I worked with the same group again, and this time we had a better rapport and were able to pursue the conversations from the previous week with a more nuanced and developed understanding of sex and consent. Towards the end of our second session together, we had a revealing conversation about how religion³⁰ affected how they thought about consent. In the following extract, I find out about different sexual cultures and begin to think through what agency, competence and consent might mean within different contexts. The girls had said that consent is an important issue for people their age but that it was not relevant to them because they do not intend to have sex until they are married, which they did not anticipate being soon. Yet the conversation revealed how these young women held and could articulate views that might be considered oppositional or in tension. On the one hand, they explained their commitment to religious expectation about virginity using language that was couched in a conservative and polite discourse, reminiscent of the school nurse in Chapter Five.

³⁰ Four of these five students were Muslim, which came up during discussions the previous week.

Adz: Basically, your sexual, your down stairs is off limits, not open for anyone else [before marriage]

Rihanna: But it's your choice if you want to follow that or if you don't. So, so if I follow it, like if, it doesn't, like there's a lot of people I know, they'd be still in the religion but they wouldn't practice some of the teachings so, they would have sex before and that's ok.

On the other hand, they also mobilised more liberal and feminist discourse when they spoke about choice, desire and religious practice. Earlier in the same session a number of the girls noted how much they disliked victim blaming in some of the rape cases they had researched for the project: "it's so bad that girls are blamed" (Rihanna, SCH). Throughout our conversations, it was clear the girls thought it was important for them to learn about and have conversations about sex and pleasure, even if they did not intend to engage in sexual activity yet. They were able to acknowledge the tensions associated with making a choice about following different religious teachings and the weight of expectations that were attributed to sex and marriage.

Adz: Like I'm not a strict Muslim, but sex before marriage is, for me a complete no. cos, cos I think that's one of the. I don't know about anyone else, but in my culture, my tradition, it's just no. You'll, you'll get looked down on. Basically, in the weddings and stuff virginity is a big thing. It's like your pride your honour, like among us Turkish people. And it's even proven, cos like you get a red ribbon tied around your waist to prove your virginity in your wedding. And your brother or your dad does it, because they're male and they're your family, they're meant to protect you.[...]

Adz goes on to explain how her virginity is not just hers but is the "pride of the family", and highlights its significance for the men, whose role is to "protect you" before marriage. Charlie confirms this by explaining how "Purity is a very big deal" within their religion and reiterates the significance of virginity:

Charlie: [...] They have to think very carefully about 'do I want this person' cos at the end of the day, once you've lost it, you've lost it.

Adz: Yea that's what I think about, once it's gone, it's gone. You can't take it. You can prove that a girl's not a virgin but you can't for a boy. You can't prove that a boy's not a virgin

Here, I am learning about a highly gendered and hetero-patriarchal culture of sexuality, which as I show later contains double standards that are to some extent internalised, accepted and reproduced by participants. However, both Adz and Charlie do, in moments, convey frustration about some of the traditions: "They make up some wack stuff... it's so stupid. It annoys me so

much” (Adz). The ‘wack stuff’ Adz is referring to are traditions within marriage that limit women’s sexual agency and where the man always has to lead – an idea that is present across many cultures (Thompson, 1995).

While I was learning about these different traditional and gendered expectations, I was also a source of information for the group. My knowledge about sex, the anatomy of pleasure and reproduction, and my relative confidence to talk openly about different types of sex and highlight double standards created an interesting dialogue. In response to the comment about being able to ‘prove’ a girl is a virgin – and I assumed this is by the presence of blood after first sex in marriage – I explained how this is not necessarily the case:

Elsie: [...]Cos if you do it, if you work up to penetration, slowly enough, like if you do enough foreplay and things, so then the woman gets aroused enough it actually means that the hymen is open and that you don’t have to break anything and it doesn’t have to hurt or bleed. So, your first time doesn’t have to be painful.

Adz: What if the boys not arousing me at all. And he’s just there doing some nonsense?

Elsie: I guess you’ve got to tell him what you want

Adz: Woah!

[All laugh]

Charlie: But how do you know what to tell them to do

Elsie: Well, that’s interesting. How are you gonna learn this stuff? Like you do you have conversations with friends, your mum?

[...]

My role here as an educator, but possibly more as an approachable outsider, afforded a conversation that may otherwise not be had in a school, or between this particular group. This was expressed by Nina when she reflected on our first session together “I just realised that like we don’t really talk about this like I think without this lesson [with Elsie] I wouldn’t talk about consent[...] and it’s good to know this stuff” (SCH). The girls acknowledged themselves as sexual agents with desires for pleasurable, and pain free sex, in the future and, despite the jokes acknowledged they might have to ask for what they want. They suggested they might seek advice about sex, and what to ask for from friend and family, “I’d talk to my mum” (Charlie, SCH) but also using YouTube and educational sites. This confirms findings from research that shows young women seek and receive sex education from informal sources and close relationships (Lear, 1995; Marston et al. 2004; Lader, 2009; Stone & Ingham, 2006; Sirianganathan et al. 2010;) and more recently through digital platforms (Brook, 2014).

6.1.2 *Power, patriarchy and pleasure*

Where these girls were resolved to learn about sex through research and conversations until they were married, they expected their future partners to have learnt about sex and pleasure by practice and therefore would not want them to be 'virgins'.

Charlie: Well you'd want them to know what they're doing

[Lots of talking over each other and laughing]

Charlie: So you can enjoy it, cos they know what they're doing you can

Nina: Yea they're like leading the way

Sarah: That's so unfair though!

Sarah, was the only other member of the group who was not Muslim, she spent much of this section of the session quiet and making faces when the others said something that she did not agree with. The fact that she spoke up here suggested that she was a little shocked by what she was hearing, and the way in which the others seems to accept some of the inequality they were addressing. I responded to this by seeking clarification on why this double standard was acceptable.

The girls acknowledge that while, in many ways, it is 'not fair' that women should remain 'pure' and that men could 'practice', this double standard was double edged as the men are expected to "lead" and know how to produce a woman's pleasure – something that was found in the WRAP project (Holland et al. 1998).

Charlie: They'll feel pressure to perform. Cos you know although a girl might be a virgin she'll have a rough idea of what's good and maybe what's not so good.

Elsie: For men or for her?

Charlie: For men. Like she'll probably expect a certain thing though...

[...]

Nina: I don't think I would mind [the man being sexually experienced]. Cos if like you're both shy virgins like nothings gonna happen. [Laughing and talking over each other]

This comment from Nina summed up much of what the others were not quite articulating. The importance of experience over knowledge gathered from education seemed weighty and was reflected across a number of research conversations at different sites. As we had discussed the

previous week, the narrative of men leading with experience and women following and responding to the desire of a man is deeply entrenched in everyday cultures (Holland et al. 1998; Coy et al. 2013; Brady, 2017) irrespective of religious teachings. The idea that someone, especially a young woman, might first know, and secondly be able to articulate and request what they want seemed to sit uncomfortably with the girls. They were straddling a space of innocence and purity, while also acknowledging themselves as (or at the very least with the potential to be) desirous sexual beings with some knowledge of what is pleasurable for them. Interestingly the older and more sexually experienced participants also articulated some discomfort around if and how they can articulate their desires and thus their knowledge and experience, to partners in a way that does not 'ruin the moment' (Jenna, P+), and disrupt the expectation that men should lead.

Charlie: When women take the lead everyone's always like 'oh my gosh women are...'

Adz: Nah, sometimes you just need to get like, you need someone to take the power

Charlie: It's just everyone acts so shocked when there is a woman maybe being the dominant. Everyone's like oh that's so un-lady like. And like no, it's been happening for ages it's just everyone's so used to the man being portrayed as the leading sexual being [**Rihanna:** Yea] who like you said always goes in for the kiss, always has to –

[Talking over each other]

This was one of very few explicit mentions of 'power' relations, which I have subsequently noted during analysis. The girls, here, seemed to be suggesting that experience affords (men) more power and thus an expectation that the man will lead an encounter, which according to them is not necessarily a bad thing. Yet, Adz seemed to be saying that the power can be taken by either party, and although she knows that there is a prominent narrative about woman being submissive this frustrates her. This resonates with the work of Foucault who encourages us to acknowledge that all relationships are relations of power and that this power is mobile and productive (Carmody, 2015). How this power is utilised or plays out may depend on gender, experience, and modes of communication, all things which feed into agency and one's ability to negotiate, as I will explore later.

When this group, and other groups I worked with talked about consent they often framed it as a choice. This was a key theme that came up in every group and encouraged me to think more about sexual decision making and how this links to agency and competence as well as unpacking an often binary understanding of choosing between one thing and another. During these

conversations I learnt that the choice associated with consent tended to be the choice between having (penetrative) sex or not, which reflected what the Brook educators had highlighted about consent being viewed as an all or nothing binary.

In the extracts above the “choice” to not have sex before marriage is highly mediated by gendered and cultural expectations and so it is important to reframe consent as a ‘free choice’ in favour of understanding it as outcome of a variety of constraints and social factors. The choice for these young women, as highlighted by Adz, is not so much about whether or not to have sex before marriage, but is a choice between maintaining their purity and being desirable as a bride or to be looked down on, and potentially bring shame to their family.

Thinking about how this relates to agency is interesting. Taking agency as the ability to ‘do otherwise’ (Willmott, 1999:9) it could be argued that the choice to not have sex before marriage is not an act of agency per se. Although the young women may be aware of and informed about the option to ‘do other’, the social risks that are associated with asserting or achieving this level of agency are considerable, particularly if their family and close social networks inhabit and embody the same social orders or expectations. As I will consider later in the chapter when I introduce a continuum of sexual agency and in Chapter Seven, it may be useful to also think about social and sexual competence, where competence is understood as someone being able to navigate societal expectations and manage social risks in a way that is conducive to them being accepted and supported in their more immediate social and intimate networks.

Religion arose several times in discussions. A number of young people at the youth club were very open about their Christianity, and others implied that Christian and Islamic values around sex and relationships were prevalent in their families and thus affected how they view relationships, and the things they thought it was important to consider when deciding if someone is ‘ready’ to have sex. The above extracts are just one example of many research encounters which have encouraged me to think beyond my own experiences of consent. It has also pushed me to think more actively about how to provide spaces for young people to learn about sex, communication and pleasure without undermining their socio-cultural and religious beliefs and affiliations.

One of the aims of this research has been to inform Brook about what young people know about consent, and what and how they would like to learn about it. The rest of this chapter captures

observations and findings in relation to this. It begins by considering how people construct and understand consent, and how it differs in theory (abstract) and practice (situated).

6.2 From abstract to situated: (re)constructing consent

The School students and P+ group who participated in the study were actively involved with projects on consent and so were highly aware of the term, as an abstract concept at least. In contrast the participants I worked with at the London youth club attended a variety of schools and many had never heard the term sexual consent before. The age of participants spanned from 13 to 25 and their socio-cultural and economic backgrounds were complex and varied. While this means I have captured insight into a variety of sexual cultures, it also complicates what I can say about 'how young people understand sexual consent'. This section aims to consider how consent is constructed and talked about, distinguishing between accounts of situated practice and sense-making and more abstract discourses of sexual health and equality. I build up a picture of different young people's understandings of sexual consent by paying close attention to the situation in which the talk occurred.

Although many of the young people I worked with at the youth club had not encountered or been formally taught about consent, this did not equate to a lack of understanding or value for the concept of mutually desired and negotiated intimacy/sex. This was highlighted in an interview with Shanella aged 18 at the youth club:

Elsie: Umm, and when you just said just now, 'I think lots of people know it but they don't know it's called consent', what do you think they would call it, what other words might they use to describe it?

Shanella: I dunno[...] I don't think a lot of young people would call it something, if you get what I mean, it's just like, oh, I wanna have sex with this person but I don't know if they want me to, it's not really called a thing, I don't think.

Shanella, was one of the oldest participants at the youth club and actively engaged with the project on consent. Her comment about 'consent' not really being a 'thing' resonated with many of the young people's accounts, and vague understandings of the term, along with ideas about wanting and not wanting sex. It is widely acknowledged that consent is an ambiguous concept, which is difficult to articulate (Reynolds, 2004).

Shanella, like other attendees had not covered consent in school, and so my research intervention at the youth club meant that over time she went from having “never heard about consent before you [Elsie] came to the club” (YC) and initially speaking about it in quite an abstracted way, to recognising the complexities and nuances involved in sexual negotiation. In the following extract taken from her interview for the film project, Shanella considers why body language may not be the ideal way of communicating desire or lack of it.

Elsie: Why is body language risky?

Shanella: Because it can be misinterpreted. So it's like, someone, like, their body could be saying one thing, but then they're not actually saying that, kind of thing, and especially like, downstairs I was talking to G, and umm, he was saying 'what if someone's afraid of the other person, but they don't wanna say it'. So, you know, you don't really know if what their body's telling you is the truth.

Shanella's interaction with the topic, me, and youth workers illustrates how being confronted with new information, in an environment and by people who are able and willing to challenge each other can result in the development of more critical awareness of the processes that could be involved in what might be called 'good consent'. Shanella developed a new vocabulary and began to construct consent in a more nuanced way. As the weeks went by she would tell me about how she was noticing issues in gender and consent more and once recounted a conversation about consent and gender with a tutor in her Drama class because they were doing a play that involved sex and violence. Here learning is characterised by gaining vocabulary and concepts that help make sense of experience critically.

6.2.1 Constructing consent:

Chapters Two and Three showed that consent is a contested term which has been constructed and reconstructed for decades, but in particular through shifts in legal discourses that have been the result of feminist campaigning for the recognition of women's rights to bodily autonomy. Consent is commonly constructed as a decision about sex that must be freely made. One fifteen year old participant noted that the decision should be made, “without coercion” (Maya, Film). Maya's reference to this in the film interview is one such example of how some of the young people were able to draw on a legal discourse. In fact, when sorting the data from all the research groups it is significant how consistent their definitions of consent were, particularly

given the diversity of young people I worked with. Below are some examples of outputs from definition tasks with four quite different groups, in the order that I worked with them.

Table 6 Definitions of consent from range of participants

<p><u>Definitions of consent by the pilot body mapping group</u></p> <p>“Consent is [a] constantly renegotiated agreement between people which is informed by the situation at that moment. Not assumed but communicated both verbally and non-verbally and not under conditions of pressure.”</p> <p>“Consent is a fluid negotiation regarding a situation”</p> <p><u>(Ages 21-25)</u></p>	<p><u>NVQ College Students in Brook participation session</u></p> <p>“I think sexual consent is when you don’t only agree verbally but also physically to the act of committing - I think sexual consent is when both parties agree to have sex. Sexual consent is also knowing what they’re doing”</p> <p>“Consent is when all parties participating in a sexual activity agree and want to take part in that specific sexual act”</p> <p><u>(Ages 16-17)</u></p>
<p><u>Whole class definition task at school</u></p> <p>“Consent – to approve or agree to something such as having sex”</p> <p>“All parties mutually agreeing to engage in sexual consent”</p> <p>“A constantly renewed agreement between a couple on sexual acts”</p> <p><u>(Ages 15-16)</u></p>	<p><u>Extracts from youth club film interviews</u></p> <p>“I think it’s when you have permission to have sex with your partner, and... it’s not by force cos it’s our own, cos it’s coming from your own personal view” (Maryon, age 15)</p> <p>“I think that I would describe it as a permission...” (Kiya, age 14)</p>

These activities required the young people to draw on a dictionary or legal definition, or make up their own definition as if they had to explain consent to someone else. As is visible from the above definitions there are consistent discourses present across all groups despite the diversity in age, class and sexual experience. Ideas of ‘agreement’, ‘permission’, and ‘retractability’ consistently came up in definitions and conversations. The tasks I used often stimulated much

discussion and also some frustration. I partnered with another young woman in the body mapping pilot group to do the joint exercise of summing up consent in a sentence. We struggled to convey our complex and often contradictory thoughts and experiences in a sentence, so we cheated a little and wrote up a few bullet points.

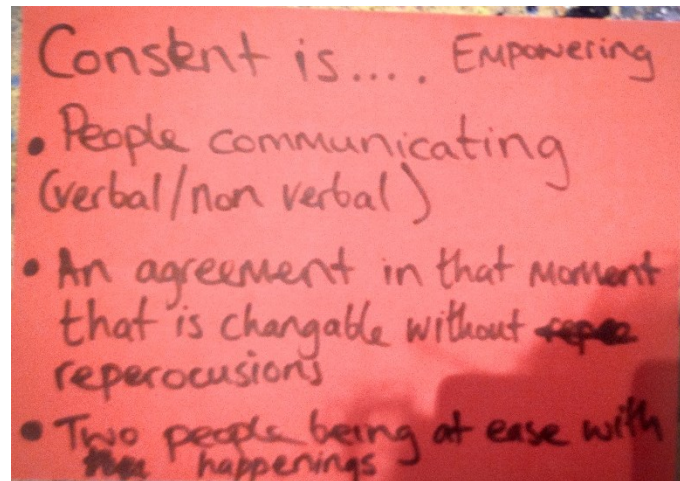


Figure 15 Output from definition exercise with Body mapping group

This also occurred when school groups had to define consent in 10 words or fewer. Many were quite quickly able to do this, but those that discussed and considered consent a little more critically seemed to struggle more.

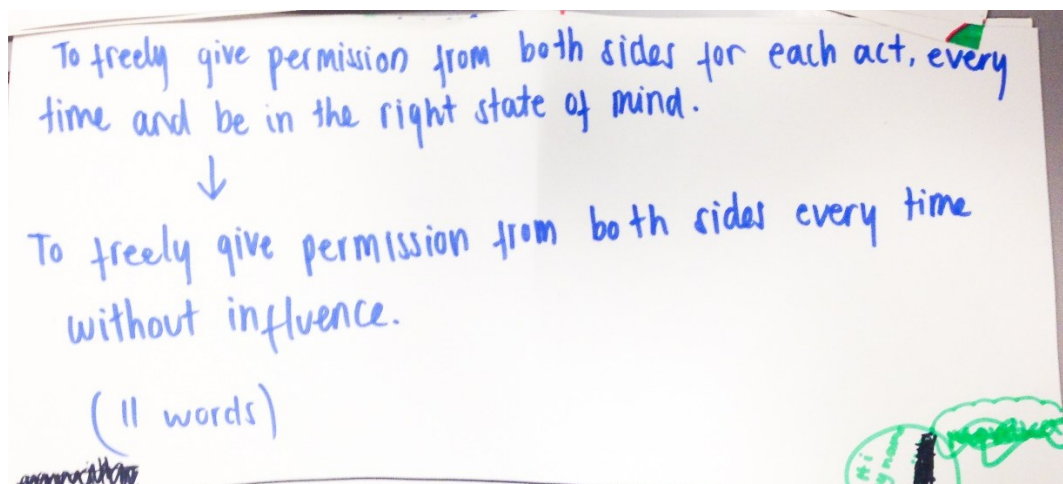


Figure 16 Output from definition task at School

The request for a definition of consent seemed, understandably, to prompt people to think about and define it in quite an abstract way: few of the definitions had any grounding or reference to types of sex or the body, desire and negotiation – particularly those written by younger participants, in more public classroom spaces. In the examples above consent is

generally viewed to be something that is give-able, posses-able and changeable. At this point in the sessions, in both cases depicted above, we had yet to consider what counts as sex, and how or why it may be difficult to give/do consent as defined above in different contexts. This highlights the importance of methods which encourage people to think beyond an abstract notion of consent and reflects the Educators' reflections that 'dissecting' (Julie, ED) consent can help students to understand it better. As I experienced, it is quite easy (if frustrating) to provide a neat and tidy definition of consent with little or no reference to everyday practices and experience. Consent however becomes more complex and difficult to define when we begin to unpick some of the ideas around it and how they apply to real life and relational interactions.

Over time, all the people and groups I worked with were able to have conversations and develop understandings of consent that moved beyond a more binary understanding of the term. Those young people who did already know what consent was before I worked with them would, when given the opportunity, state how they found it "confusing" (BM), but more commonly younger participants didn't really "get it" (Kiya, 14 and Dilon, 14 YC).

'Getting it', is actually rather difficult, not least because it can be challenging to vocalise how some of the simple definitions above might be put into practice. In addition to simple and binary definitions of consent, many of the younger participants spoke about consent in a way that conflated readiness, and preparing for or agreeing to 'first sex' rather than thinking about a longer term sexual 'career' or development of sexual literacy.

[It's good to know about consent] so you know, so it'll always be in your conscious that you know not to lose it to the wrong person. Because like, once you've lost it you can't get that back. That's gone forever.

(Maryon, YC)

This, and other discussions about readiness, consent and virginity suggested that although young people in most groups were able to define consent in terms of 'choosing' and 'agreeing', they sometimes thought that once you have 'done it' the first time, consent, or deciding to have sex again becomes less of a "big deal" (BTN) or that once you have reached 'readiness' you stay ready. This might be a somewhat crude interpretation, however there were moments where it was clear that those young people, particularly the young women, who had not had sex before did not tend to think beyond the 'first time' and the implications this may have on their reputation and future relationship(s).

Age and readiness

The way that young people navigated the ambiguity of sex, readiness, and the presentation of their own sexual 'status' as virgins was at times surprising and differed starkly between those younger people I worked with in London and those in Brighton, who I perceived to be more middle class, liberal and less religious. At the youth club many of the young men and women were open about the fact that they were and "legally should all be virgins... cos we're all under 16" (JT, YC). Conversely, field notes from the Youth Group in Brighton captured one young woman saying "I don't see why virginity is such a big deal, it's not an actual thing that you can lose" (age, 15). This contrasted with the attitudes towards virginity and purity outlined in the school session at the start of this chapter and the opinions expressed by the young people at the ethnically diverse youth club, which was attended by more working-class young people. This difference in opinion, but also how the young people spoke about sex and virginity reflects Debbie Weekes' findings that black working class girls portray themselves as sexually respectable in different ways than middle class white girls (2002). The significance and the social currency of sex and virginity differed in these two distinct social groups.

Legal, educational and lay discourses about who can be and how to become ready for 'first sex' differ. A number of participants noted that "personal and legal are different" (Lizzie and Jenna, YC) and that many people "don't follow the law[...] loads of people do it before they're 16 and no one gets in trouble" (Nina, SCH). This reflects Thomson's findings from research published in 2004 where participants somewhat rejected the age of consent but also recognised that it is there as a helpful "back stop" (Lizzie, YC), to support young people to protect themselves.

In relation to sexuality, there were a number of different notions of 'readiness' in operation across research conversations, and in literature pertaining to sexual consent and competence. These included moral readiness (e.g. no sex before marriage), social readiness (what is acceptable in peer groups or by societal conventions), and finally, biological and developmental (related to medical and legal discourse that incorporates age and maturity). As Rachel Thomson has noted it can be difficult to judge a person's 'readiness' or competence "in a cultural context where sexual pressure is perceived to be the norm, where female sexual agency is difficult to articulate and where inequalities of power and experience characterise sexual relationships" (2004:143).

Age has been highlighted as an 'empty signifier' of competence (Butler, 2012; Waites 2005; Hirst, 2008). Yet participants in this study, especially the younger ones seemed committed to ideas of consent, competence and readiness that were initially linked to age and adulthood. Younger participants routinely spoke about 16 as the legal age of consent. The binary notion of 'adult/child' came up a number of times, reinforcing the belief that sex is an 'adult' thing and that unless you are 16 (or in some cases older) you should not be engaging in sexual activity because you do not have the capacity or maturity to understand what you are doing.

At the school and the youth club I often took the time, when provoked by 'what if questions' or misinformation, to explain the legal background which meant that sex between two teenagers under 16 would not always require legal intervention. I would then often ask participants if they thought 13 was an acceptable age to make decisions about sex. This resulted in conversations with comments such as:

Maryon: NO! No! [laughter from others] you're still a child! What you, what you doing having sex?! No. nah ah, mmm, mm, mmm

[Inaudible comments from others...]

Maryon: you shouldn't be having sex till like 16.

(YC group interview)

Comments like this suggest that the idea of sexual delay as an expression of sexual competence (Hirst, 2008) holds weight amongst the youth cultures I encountered. This could be related to my participants' religious backgrounds but also shows a strong discourse of sex as an 'adult only domain' (Waites, 1999).

Elsie: ok so what age do you think people should wait until they have sex?

Shanella: I think, personally, a lot of people should wait until they're like, 19, because I believe you're still a kid, like before then, like, I believe I'm a kid, so, you don't really know, but then I guess, if you feel like it's right then do it. But definitely, definitely not below, 14. Definitely.

Elsie: Why not below 14?

Shanella: Because I feel like you're so blind to everything, you don't know what you're jumping into. Like, you're still a kid, you're just vulnerable to everything. And by those times like, a lot of girls they're able to get pregnant, like, just by you doing something coz you wanna do it, but you're still like, the fact that you're blind to everything, you can mess up your life before it's even started and yeah. And that's just thinking really far ahead.

(YC, Interview)

Shanella and other participants' responses about age highlighted a discourse of children being in need of protection and incompetent to make 'sensible' decisions about sex. Although many of the participants seemed invested in age as a signifier for when someone might be 'ready' for and able to consent to sex, they also offered alternative qualities that might mitigate for youth. These included 'maturity', independent and sober decision making, but predominantly related to the context of the relationship. Decisions to have sex 'young' were deemed ok "if you love them" (Izzy, SCH), "both want to" (Al, Film), and if the other person "respects you" (BTN) and "makes you happy" (Shanella, YC). The examples given by participants often reflected elements of the NATSAL model of sexual competence: 'Willingness', 'autonomous decision making' and 'acceptable timing' or 'lack of regret' (Wellings et al. 2001; Palmer, 2017).

6.3 Deconstructing consent: giving it context

The previous section presented some of the ways in which consent was commonly constructed by participants. Many of the above definitions are, in my view, far more appropriate than the dictionary and the Sexual Offences Act definitions of 'consent' - not least because they are defined by young people in a way that relates to their everyday lives and language. While these definitions of consent are articulated by young people in their own words, they are also limited and reproduce abstract and binary notions of consent. There are clear references to a discourse of choice and decision-making and the importance of seeking consent, not merely the importance of giving it. Although these definitions are useful and paint a positive picture that young people understand and value consent, it is important to consider whether these abstract definitions sufficiently capture the complexities and realities of negotiating what might be termed 'active' consent.

The following section illustrates how grounding consent in scenarios and everyday experiences can highlight the limits of the term and cultivate a more situated understanding of sexual negotiation. It illustrates how deconstructing consent offers opportunities for critical teaching and learning by considering the context: the environmental, material and relational aspects of an encounter, and the perceived agency and competence of those involved.

6.3.1 Breaking down consent: undoing the binary

The piloting work outlined in Chapter Four involved a group exploring where the hurdles to other people's participation or learning may be and how I might overcome these through the use of activities and scenarios which encourage exploratory talk. Through a continuum activity based on the dictionary definitions of consent, we became more able to see and articulate how sexual consent and sexual encounters can be tricky to neatly define and label. The post-it notes and scenarios we used were often repositioned on the line by different people.

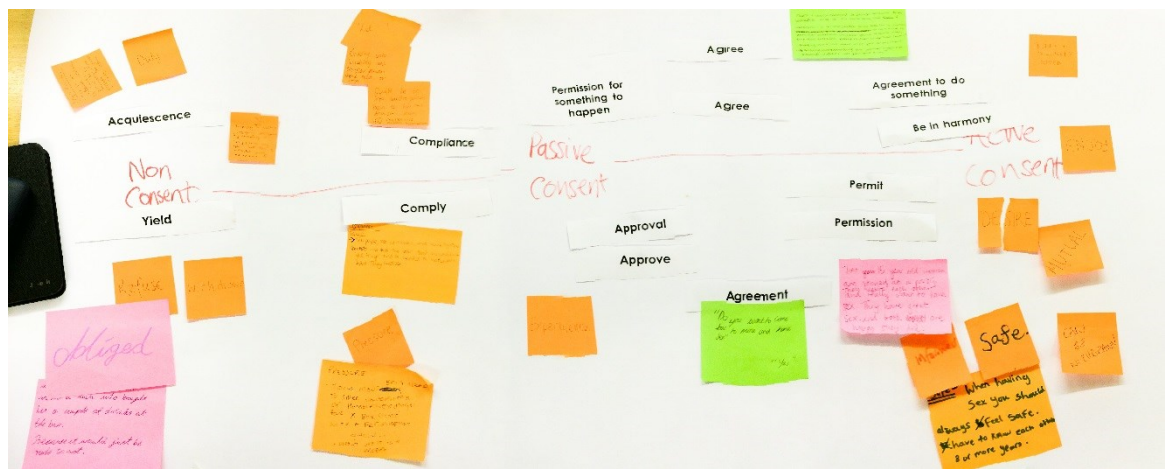


Figure 17: Consent continuum activity developed with P+ group.

This activity highlighted the importance of acknowledging and working through some of the ambiguity of the term in order to allow people to articulate the intricacies of negotiating sexual encounters. By starting from a point of unsureness and embracing ambiguity I have been able to pay attention to how and why different people construct consent, and the more fluid, embodied and situated experience of consensual interactions. It also echoes the way that Liz Kelly (1988, 1987) conceptualised sexual violence, using the device of the continuum. This continuum makes it possible to plot the range of ways in which people talk about and experience sexual violence, but also in this case positive sexual encounters. The conversations this activity produced with young people reflects Liz Kelly's assertion that that 'lower' levels of sexual violation or harassment are more difficult to recognise and label (Kelly, 1988). The continuum will be revisited shortly.

Integral to the deconstruction of consent was thinking about the things which limit people from 'doing it properly'. The P+ group also took time, in a session independent to the ones I

facilitated, to consider why people might not 'do' consent, and what kind of things people might need to know in order to develop the confidence and competence to negotiate a good sexual encounter.

The variety of reasons outlined in the picture below such as 'lack of confidence', 'worries about reputation', 'wanting to please someone else' and 'pressure to conform' are congruent with the data I later gathered from other groups of young people. They capture many of the themes that came up throughout analysis and show the variety of factors that make consent and sexual negotiation complex to navigate.

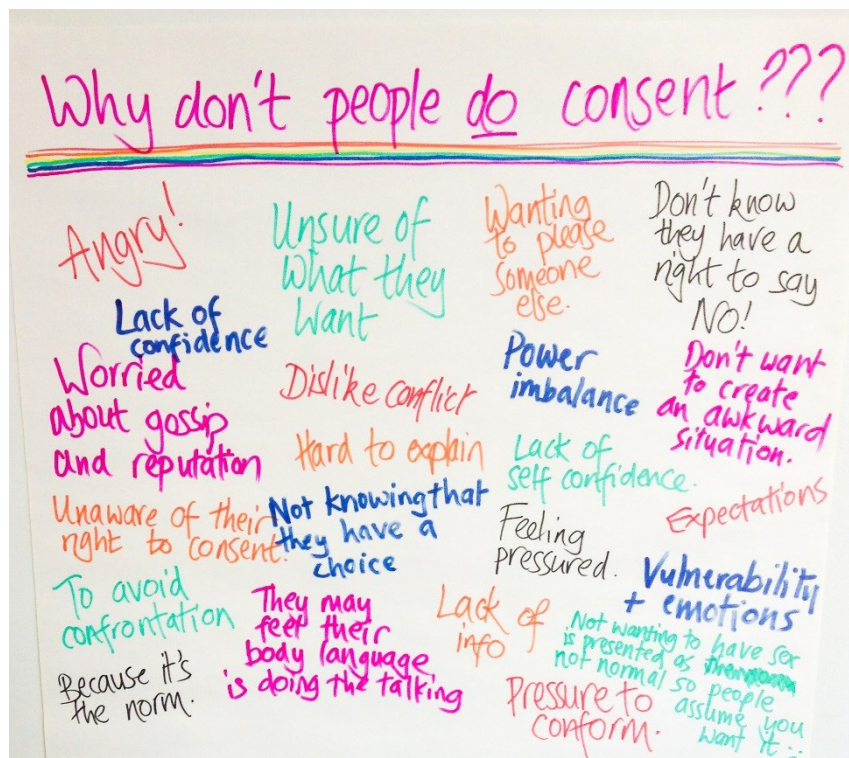


Figure 18 neat output from P+ session of reasons people might not 'do consent'

Some of the most insightful comments came from more challenging conversations which resulted from methods and stimuli such as those depicted above. Activities such as the continuum motivated the group to move away from talking about consent in an abstract way. Data that resulted from these activities were full of contradictions and illustrated the persistence of gendered power relations, double standards and the dissonance between abstracted (and thus tidy) definitions of consent and the situated messy and volatile realities of negotiating sexual interaction at different points in one's sexual career. Initially I found this data quite difficult to write about because I did not want to undermine the overall response from *all* my

participants that 'consent', or rather equitable and ethically negotiated sex *is* important. I was also concerned that I might inadvertently encourage the downplaying of rape and sexual violence by advocating for the in-between space. This reflects the fear and tension teachers may experience and be anxious about regarding opening up grey areas and moving beyond the binary in SRE. Yet I have found that working with the language of participants, and acknowledging the fluid and contested ways in which consent may or may not be practiced, has encouraged a more situated understanding of consent in practice. The next section of this chapter considers a continuum of sexual agency as an alternative to the consent/rape binary which is the focus of the 'what if' questions posed by young people, and especially young men.

6.3.2 *The consent/rape binary*

This research has avoided framing consent in terms of rape, and other extreme examples of sexual violation. However, like Brady and her team, I found it nearly impossible to talk about consent, without also talking about rape (2017:8). Even if I did not mention the term, many of the young people I worked with did. The simple and binary definitions of consent which young people gave suggested that if consent was not explicitly sought or given then the act that followed should legally be termed rape: "legally that would be rape" (JT, YC). Although the term rape was used fairly frequently it was often spoken about in jokes, or with an element of embarrassment. It was considered a "harsh" word (Willow, SCH), only to be used in extreme and more 'clear' cases reflecting the work of Kelly and Radford (1990). It seemed that cases were only ever 'clear' when the scenario was more abstract, less detailed and less relatable. Participants noted they "understand more on consent if you see different scenarios" (Asmin, SCH) and members of the body mapping group suggested that "the more you know the more difficult it gets" (BM). All the conversations about scenarios that were more grounded and detailed, or when people offered examples and were able to draw on their own situated experience were more difficult to define. Often participants would note that they didn't "have enough information" (Willow, SCH) to categorise something. However, more information did not always help and who delivered it also mattered.

To help with analysis I developed a continuum based on how young people responded to scenarios, and the way they defined (in activities or through conversation) rape and consent in the first instance. These responses contained some statements that could be considered 'rape myths' – but more significantly show that non-consensual sex and rape were defined by the

relative presence of violence and or explicit rejection. Like the work of Brady et al. (2017) and Coy et al. (2013), I have found that young people commonly view and speak about acts and encounters on a spectrum with rape on one extreme end, and what the P+ group termed 'active consent' on the other.

The idea of a continuum of sexual violence was first suggested by Liz Kelly in the late 1980s as a way of making sense of the relationship between criminal acts (such as rape) and everyday forms of pressure that are part and parcel of heterosexual cultures in a patriarchal society. While this continuum has become the backbone for much policy and practice relating to violence against women and girls its focus is on violence and negative experiences. This research seeks to develop a discourse of ethical sexual practice and so the continuum developed here extends the range to include more positive and agentic elements of sexual negotiation. While it can be considered reductive to create a model, I think this is a useful prop for interrogating how sexual experiences, rape and consent are defined and conceptualised. As Kelly highlights, a continuum offers a different way of looking at the world and better captures complex and interlinked experiences that are difficult to differentiate if they do not sit at an 'extreme' end (1987). This continuum extends to include notions of active consent, while taking note of interpersonal and societal pressures

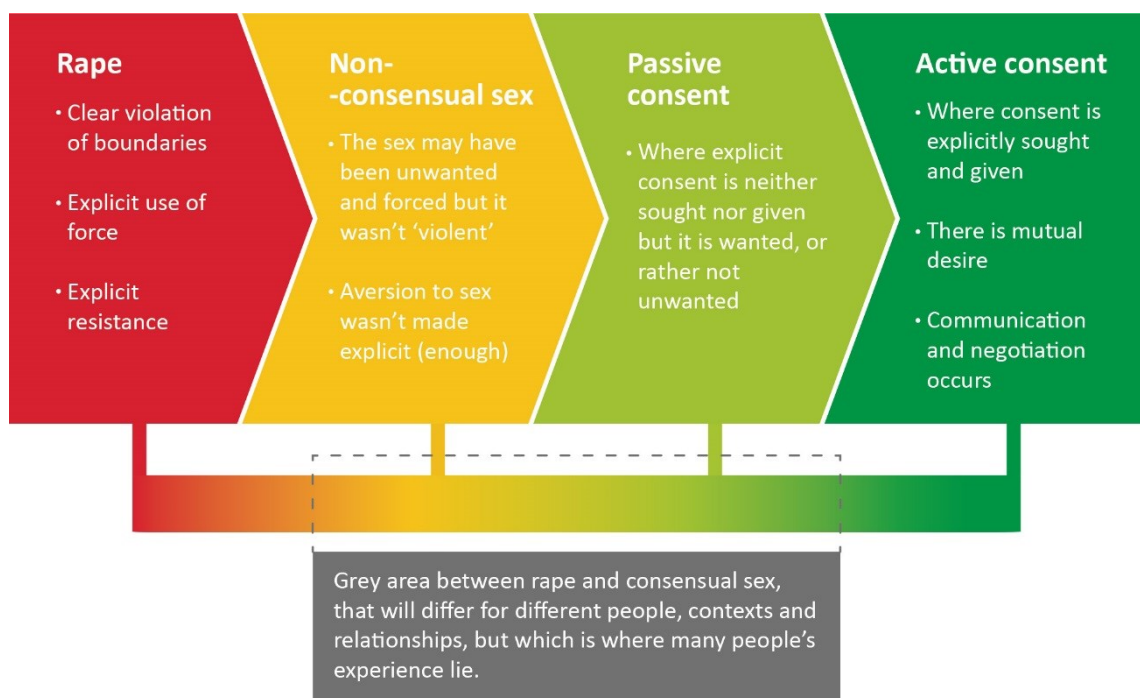


Figure 19 Continuum of sexual agency developed from young people's discussion of consent and rape

Related to this continuum there were moments in the research where I felt uncomfortable with the comments being made by participants or the labels attributed to people and acts in certain scenarios we discussed. Although many of the participants acknowledged that rape occurs within relationships and “between people who know each other” (Poppy, SCH) stereotypes and victim blaming still characterise the way these young people spoke about rape. For example, one participant wondered whether a real-life scenario that I offered counted as “a proper rape scenario” because the perpetrator and victim were in a relationship (Asmin, SCH). Both young men and young women constructed and discussed scenarios and examples in ways that avoided laying all the ‘blame’ on the person (usually a man) who would be viewed as the perpetrator, considering the victim (usually a woman) to have been active in the sex. This reflects Liz Kelly’s findings that the categories we use to name and distinguish forms of violence, whether in research, law, policy or lay discourse shade into and out of one another (1988). Rather than shut down these conversations I took the time to understand why they might think something and offer alternative examples and ways of thinking in exchange. This helped me to develop an overview of what factors may need to be present for something to be considered consensual or not and has contributed to the development of the continuum.

The way that Asmin and her group at school engaged in the conversation about the BBC show ‘Sex on trial, is this rape?’ demonstrates how the process of blame attribution worked.

Asmin: Like it’s kind of true, you know about the led on part. Like some girls actually do lead boys on and when something does happen

Issy: They say they didn’t

[...]

Elsie: So do you think that that happens then? Girls lead boys on and then regret it the next day?

Issy: Yea

Asmin: Not all girls but yea

Elsie: So why do you think, well what’s the difference between the girls that do and the girls that don’t?

Asmin: The girls that don’t do it, are not stupid. [we all laugh nervously]

Elsie: ok, what’s stupid about it?

Asmin: Cos like why would you lead someone on and not accept the consequences?

[...]

Elsie: But in the film he’s the one that’s like ‘can I get into bed with you?’ ‘can I do this’ and she is like half asleep.

Asmin: Oh well she did move away so there was space [**Issy:** laughs loud and uncomfortably]

Elsie: So you think that her moving over and letting him in the bed was her -

Asmin: No it's not a one way thing. I err I ok like, it's mostly girls that are the victim of rape. But I feel like in some cases, in most cases it's not a one way thing. Like obviously, like. I don't know how to explain it. Like I'm not saying that about clothing because most like most of the time people are like 'oh well you shouldn't have dressed like that' like, you're basically asking for it. It's not that cos I feel like people should have the right to wear whatever they want. But like the way they talk, the way they flirt and stuff I feel like that kind of stuff leads it on. [...]

In this extract there are competing understandings of 'leading on' and 'asking for it'. The 'stupid' girl, is one who does not know their boundaries and later regrets it. In other conversations, this was applied to examples of young women getting drunk or seeking to protect their reputation by denying their sexual agency and suggesting coercion. This character was someone many groups referenced and knew of via a friend. The sensible girl however, who many of the students I worked with seemed to identify with, was one who liked to dress up "for themselves" (Willow, SCH) but who is not asking for it because they have clear boundaries, do not drink (perhaps because of their age or religious background) and are not behaving in a way that could be wrongly interpreted. The way that the young people spoke about these two characters maps onto the NATSAL definitions of sexual competence, one character – the one they identify with is sexually competent and the other is not because they experience 'regret', have sex 'under duress' and do not make autonomous' decisions (Wellings et al. 2001). I found that where young people had little sexual experience notions of 'asking for it' that circulate in popular culture were easier to articulate and adopt as they are not complicated by personal experience or understanding of context. This kind of analysis gives weight to the argument that sexual literacy is developed primarily through experience rather than, or exclusively through, conversation and debate. This is something that participants themselves could acknowledge and that I often enquired further about asking how they would feel if it was them or a close friend.

Yea I feel like unless it's happened to you. Like we might be saying this now, and God forbid if it happens to us and it happened how it happened at the party [in 'Sex on trial'] we would call it rape as well. But because it hasn't happened to us [yea], we just don't know how to put it really to words. [...]

(Asmin, SCH)

The importance of experience for navigating and labelling encounters was also apparent in analysis of the body mapping group conversations and outputs. Everyone in this group had had multiple sexual partners and two openly disclosed experiences of sexual violation. This group, the oldest and most sexually experienced of all the groups I worked with, engaged with ideas

around boundaries, power dynamics and social pressures and expectations, recognising that ‘decisions’ and the ability to be assertive in sexual negotiation are mediated by these constraints. Reference was made in these groups to the idea that being explicit and assertive about desire (or its absence) was difficult and ‘awkward’ regardless of experience, but that it became easier to articulate with practice: “I’ve got better at initiating things and talking about sex [...] but I still get embarrassed and can’t do it sometimes” (Joy, BM). I explore the role of awkwardness and the way this might play out positively in encounters in the next chapter.

6.3.3 *The give/get binary*

There was some consistency in the way that young people defined and described the ‘ideal’ type or model of consent, despite the diversity of age, education, class and religious backgrounds. This suggests there is a common, if limited, lexicon for people to draw on when it comes to consent. Many of the definitions of and discussions about consent broke down the process of consent into ‘giving’, ‘getting’ and in some cases ‘withdrawing’. The way many participants spoke about consent (provoked in part by how my questions were posed), reproduced an understanding of consent as explicit, responsive and segmented, something that is rational and which involves a ‘seeker’ and a ‘giver’. Discussions with young people, and exercises such as the continuum outlined above, encouraged me to recognise the limitations of these roles, expressions and responses.

I think consent is, is when you ask permission from your girlfriend or boyfriend, or partner, if they wanna have sex, or if they’re in the mood to have sex or if they’re comfortable doing any, any position that, you know [...]

(Maryon, YC)

The notion of consent as ‘something’ that you must seek or can give is also linked to socio/legal and contractual discourses. The ‘yes model’ and the ‘no model’ as defined by Anderson (2005), posits that consent is about response. When the young people and I took the time to think about wanting and not wanting sex, and the process of negotiation, it became clear that ‘getting and giving’ was too simple to adequately explain the process of sexual negotiation in ways that it commonly occurs. Whether thinking about choice, decision making or consent there is an assumption that we are responding to a clear stimulus or set of options and outcomes; *and* that we are able to (have the language, confidence, competence, power) to respond. In the P+ output about ‘why people don’t do consent’ there is clear acknowledgement that some people simply may “not know they have a right to say no”, might want to “avoid confrontation” or be

“unsure of what they want”. They may also “dislike conflict”, be “vulnerable” or “lack confidence”.

There are a number of other binary elements of consent caught up in the give/get binary such as the frequently cited ‘yes’/‘no’ binary in response to someone seeking consent; and also what could be termed a heteronormative, monogamous and highly gendered binary that is apparent in all kinds of media, education, and public discourse.

Erm, definition of consent is when two people agree to have sex. Like, verbally, like if you was to aks her to have sex and she says yes then like good. Or like yea, that’s really it.

(Reggie,YC)

Yet when pushed a little to consider these binaries and framings of consent in more depth, most young people were quick to move away from or at the very least problematize the idea that consent is this binary in practice.

Issy: I think asking, saying yes

Elsie: Just saying yes?

Issy: Yes or no, like your permission

Mickela: It’s like an action to say you don’t want it

Elsie: Ok, and you think is as black and white as yes or no?

Asmin: That’s how it should be, but people don't understand.

(School group)

The following extract from a group discussion at the youth club, shows expressions of ambiguity, but also a more jokey and nuanced, approach to consent than any of these participants offered in their answers for the film. It is a good example of people bringing their situated and experimental knowledge into discussion in a way that destabilises a binary notion of getting and giving.

[Do you really think people ask like that?]

JT: Cool a’ight, look I don’t think that often people actually straight up ask it [agreement from Matt]. I think it’s in like, it’s in like the feeling of the room. So, it’s like there, if you’ve like already stated kissing then you can like move on sort of thing.

Elsie: Mmm, so how do you know that someone wants to move on?

Matt: Shirts off [we all laugh].

Maryon: You can tell their body language

Matt: When, when they lean down to you [...]

I have found the work of Judith Butler useful for thinking about how legalistic notions of consent suggests that it is always a response to the desire of another or others (2012). She argues that consent assumes a level of autonomy and rational thinking that ultimately cannot be applied to sexual decisions making. If, following Butler, we try to escape the model of getting and giving as distinct actions and reactions we might instead think about the articulation or expression of desire, ambivalence or disinterest as part and parcel of a more embodied and fluid negotiation of self-expression.

A number of the young people during discussions and activities which encouraged them to move beyond the abstract and binary would talk about consent as a fluid and embodied relational experience which involves 'subtle' navigation, 'reading' signals, tones, and restrained expressions and advances which fit current cultural expectations of gendered sexuality. This reflects the findings of Hickman and Muehlenhard (1990) who found four categories for conveying sexual signals: direct, indirect, verbal and nonverbal, and suggested that nonverbal signalling was more common. Rather than asking and asserting your desires, requiring a response from another, you might for example "go by the feeling in the room" (JT, YC).

This quote from JT encapsulates what a number of young people said about consent, or wanting and being ready for sex. Many of them referred to 'feeling it', or feeling and 'sensing' their way through an encounter, suggesting that consent, or a boarder articulation and synthesis of desires, cannot be broken down into a set or series of (speech) acts and successive reactions. The more embodied and fluid descriptions of sexual negotiation that were offered by participants resonate with the Latin and French origins of the word *consentir* – 'to feel with'. This raises questions about how to conceptualise consent without basing it on transactional models of having, giving and withdrawing and instead think of it as a process, the outcome of which can be defined as consent, or perhaps consensual. This shift to focus on consent as the *result* of negotiation has parallels with work on agency and actorship. Jo Moran-Ellis' work on children's agency usefully frames agency as an "accomplishment and hence as a situated event produced by the dynamics between individuals" (2013:312). Reframing consent as the result or outcome of a situated process that is produced, rather than gained or given could contribute to theories of consent that can be more easily applied to everyday sexual negotiation.

Consent may be the product of a variety of acts, and conversations that are part and parcel of people feeling their way through an encounter. In the final section of this chapter I 'reconstruct consent' as an accomplishment, something that is situated; different according to context and the people that are interacting at that moment. I suggest that consent is not something that is possessed and given away in response to another, rather it is the culmination of a relational experience. Following this line of thinking may raise questions about what 'bad consent', or 'rape' consist of and how to evaluate this, however for now my focus is specifically on affirmative consensual accomplishments.

6.4 Conclusion: Reconstructing consent as situated

The data presented in this chapter demonstrates that young people generally have an understanding of consent that is based on the simple legal and transactional discourses, found in educational programmes and campaigns. However, it has also exposed how young people, while fluent with a legal lexicon of consent, are uncomfortable with the binaries and labels that it produces and are interested in the more complex aspects of sexual negotiation. That educational strategies tend to emphasise the law is understandable, as discussed in Chapter Five, and participants noted that the law is a useful and helpful backstop if things go wrong. However, they were more interested in grey areas of the law than the legal age of consent and I would suggest that it is the space between the law and young people's personal and peer cultures that is the ideal space for effective educational engagement.

Drawing on talk produced during activities which deconstructed consent and negotiation I have been able to explore the 'ideal' of consent imagined by young people and how and why this contrasts with how they talk about and experience it. The data presented in this chapter shows how young people hold ambiguity and tensions by mobilising different discourses and scripts to construct, label and talk about the process and outcome of sexual negotiation and violation. When called into presence and encouraged to elaborate on what consent is, and moreover how to *do it* participants provided more complex answers which often involved deconstructing consent and focussing more on the situated and contextual realities of sexual negotiation. The contributions that participants gave showed that sexual agency and 'decision making' are constrained, enabled or mediated by social and cultural context and expectations, as well as interpersonal ones that I will explore later. This chapter has also highlighted the persistence of

gendered expectations that maintain patriarchal and male centred views of sex and pleasure, and which perpetuate discourses of 'asking for it' and victim blaming.

It has been shown that multidirectional learning can occur when boundaries between 'teacher' and 'learner' are blurred through a commitment to critical pedagogy and youth work practice as a process of collaborative enquiry (Friere, 1996; Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018; Chambers, 2004; Batsleer, 2008). The findings presented here have complemented those in Chapter Five by illustrating the possibilities for learning about and reconceptualising consent which can result from activity based sessions in environments and with educators that encourage young people to go beyond the legal binary of consent and engage with the ambiguity of everyday encounters. This chapter has illustrated how learning can be enhanced through activities and conversations that deconstruct consent and challenge both teachers and learners to think about the more complex and situated elements of sexual negotiation. Participants' engagement with this project suggests that young people from a range of backgrounds value opportunities to discuss sexual consent and negotiation by thinking through different scenarios in an exploratory way. I would argue that this co-constructed knowledge could inform and enhance pedagogies for sexual agency.

It has been suggested that learning is about being challenged and developing a new vocabulary with which to understand, make sense of and explain concepts and experiences. In the next chapter I explore how enhancing vocabulary and the stories we tell about sexual negotiation to include awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence might enable better articulation and understanding of sexual desires and improve processes of negotiation. There are compelling arguments from other scholars that the term consent needs to be replaced. For example, Palmer (2017) suggests the legal standard of consent ought to be changed for the phrase 'freedom to negotiate'. The findings in this chapter show that it is important to focus on process and not just outcome, and thus negotiation is a more useful way of conceptualising how consensual encounters occur. The continuum of sexual agency that I have developed bridges the space between 'ideal' consent and rape and, as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, could enable conversations and education about violation and passive consent which resonate more with the lived experience of young people.

Chapter 7: Awkwardness, Ambiguity and Ambivalence

The previous chapter charted some of the learning experienced by participants and myself in relation to consent and the situated realities of negotiating sexual interaction. This chapter expands on some of this and considers the significance of awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence as key elements of sexual negotiation. The literature review and conversations with young people and practitioners alike have thrown a spotlight on the ambiguity and awkwardness of consent, as both a concept and a process. This chapter thinks through the awkwardness of sexual encounters and considers the productivity of talking more about ambiguity and ambivalence. As highlighted in Chapter Five, it can be difficult and anxiety provoking to teach children and young people about the ambiguity and fluidity of a topic, particularly one as politically and morally charged as sexual consent. To explore this, I use extracts from discussions with participants referring to consent as “awkward!” and consider what this means using a theoretical framework which gives the term explanatory and analytic value.

This chapter begins with an introduction to Kotsko’s work on awkwardness, and considers how using awkwardness as a lens for analysis helps to understand the everyday assumptions that contribute to practices of sexual negotiation. I outline some of the unspoken norms that persist in participants’ constructions of sexual practice and consider how these can be destabilised by emphasising ambiguity. Following this, I explore the interplay between awkwardness and ambiguity considering the tensions that come from exposing and accepting ambivalence and passivity in sexual encounters. These three terms are related but distinct and the themes are a direct result of conversations with young people and practitioners. In this chapter, each term is used analytically to mean the following: ‘ambiguity’ is about meaning and links to discourse and scripts; ‘ambivalence’ is about feelings, desire and affect; and ‘awkwardness’ is experiential, situated and embodied. The chapter concludes suggesting that it is important to embrace awkwardness, in order to enable shifts towards a more ethical sexual practice and for more explicit communication to gain new meaning.

7.1 An encounter with awkwardness

This chapter came into being after reading ‘Awkwardness’ by Adam Kotsko (2010), while considering how to explain and define awkwardness as something more than a ‘difficult conversation’. Kotsko writes and frames his book around popular films and television series, highlighting how awkwardness has become a key trope in popular culture. He starts by tracing the etymology of the word, then highlights the recent historic shifts that have led to us living in what he terms an ‘age of awkwardness’. Like Jeffrey Weeks, Kotsko tracks a significant cultural shift, post WWII, which moves away from strict Christian and conservative norms around gender, work, marriage and sex.

Kotsko, as I read him, highlights that we have moved from a culture where there was a clear (patriarchal) social order to one where there are now multiple, and at times ambiguous, norms and expectations to navigate. Currently we live in a moment of awkwardness because, although some of the constraining norms and orders of the 20th century have been challenged and weakened, they have arguably not been replaced by anything concrete or consistent. There is also a significant increase in diversity, and more than ever, people move between multiple ‘fields’, both online and offline, throughout their lives, establishing and practicing different norms and narratives. Rather than knowing that a certain practice may be right or wrong according to social narratives and scripts, we must experiment. Kotsko contends that there are three forms of awkwardness: everyday, cultural, and radical. He notes that certain people are often thought of as ‘being awkward’ or ‘socially inept’ yet he shows that awkwardness is an inherently social experience, produced by interaction with others and in response to explicit and implicit social norms and hierarchies.

During discussions about consent one participant, jokingly responded “#AWKWARD” to a scenario we were developing. The existence and subsequent use of this hashtag speaks to Kotsko’s observation that awkwardness is part of popular culture, a prolific social experience, and that there is a wider societal preoccupation with both acknowledging or avoiding awkwardness. Social media may be responsible for amplifying awkwardness (by reducing social cues), while also providing tools for naming and engaging with awkwardness, often through humour. The hashtag has become a popular social media commentary used in a variety of settings and to describe a variety of social encounters, ‘social’ being the key factor. Kotsko points out that rather than deal with the root of awkwardness many people embody a bemused

detachment from the encounter or source – something that was captured by exclamations of “awkward!”.

I came to this book having already arrived at ‘awkwardness’ as a key category emerging from data about sexual communication. Kotsko suggests that that if we embrace awkwardness and “*go with it*” (original emphasis) there is space for something novel and productive to occur, which could “take us toward something like utopia” (2010:86). He encourages readers to understand “awkwardness [as] a breakdown in our normal experience of social interaction while itself remaining irreducibly social” (15). An ‘awkward person’ does not, necessarily, experience themselves as awkward, they are doing ‘their normal’ but when this ‘normal’ contradicts the expectations of the people or structures they interact with, a sense or shared feeling of awkwardness is produced. Given what has been outlined above it stands to reason that sex education and sexual encounters provide fertile ground for exploring awkwardness, and that paying attention to this awkwardness can reveal unspoken social orders.

7.1.1 Where does awkwardness come from?

Exploring the etymology of the word can helpfully unpack the meaning of ‘awkwardness’. Kotsko breaks down the term into its respective parts: ‘ward’, as in forward or backward – thus it is directional; and ‘awk’ which he suggests means ‘wrong’ (2010:5-6). So awkward is ‘wrongward’, arguably the opposite, or a violation, of stable norms and of linear and logical progression. It can be thought of as a “gap in the social order” (83) or, drawing on the language of practice theory, as a moment of rupture. The social order(s) that is disrupted differ by context and according to the people involved, however “awkwardness is pervasive [...] it stalks us everywhere” (2010:2).

There is a significant amount of feminist and queer literature that focusses on the possibility for change through disruption. Other scholars such as Baraitser (2009), write about the ethics of interruption and the possibilities afforded by ‘destabilising moments’. Janet Batsleer and other youth workers highlight the importance of ‘dissent’ (2010b) for enabling a more democratic society and both Judith Butler and Terry Lovell write about moments of, ‘transgression’ and ‘resistance’ for enabling social and political change (Butler, 2012; Lovell, 2003). Renold and Ringrose (2008) in their work on sexuality with young women refer to moments of rupture which can spark change and shifts in practice. These terms are all useful and the following work on awkwardness seeks to contribute to the arguments they make. It was Kotsko’s use of the

term 'awkwardness' however, that resonated with this research providing a springboard for considering the radical potential of awkwardness in the context of sexual negotiation and social interaction more broadly.

7.1.2 *An awkward age*

Late modern and contemporary literature and popular culture highlight and play on the period of adolescences as 'awkward' and transitional (Thurschwell, 2016). Participants, both young people and practitioners, consistently referred to consent as "awkward"; be that the act or process of getting, giving and doing it and of teaching and learning about it. Every transcript from this research includes the word multiple times, yet without proper consideration it could go unnoticed. This is a word that could be taken for granted, and casually attribute to the state of adolescence (Kotsko, 2010:3). The fact that teenagers might find sex and consent awkward is perhaps not surprising, however I do not want to reductively assume that the awkwardness they expressed is simply due to their 'awkward stage of life'(2010:3).

Contemporary childhood and youth studies highlight the complex and liminal space of 'youth'. There are political and practical implications for whom and why we term someone a 'child', a 'youth' and an 'adult'. The young people in this study can be collectively categorised as 'young people', however some would be easily categorised as children and others as adults. The different ways that young people are viewed, interacted with, and defined by themselves, policy and practitioners are often out of sync. With the increasing awareness of child sexual exploitation and young people 'falling through the cracks' of two seemingly distinct categories, the asexual innocent 'child' and the 'adult' sexual agent, this work has a newfound political significance. The transition from 'child' to 'adult' is far from linear (Thomson, 2009, Thomson et al. 2002), and people seemingly experience a prolonged period during their teens, and early adulthood when agency and responsibility are fragmented. Sex is commonly considered an 'adult thing' (Waites, 2005; Thomson, 2004): generally off limits until someone, usually parents or teachers, deem younger people as 'mature enough' to 'do it responsibly', something that was reflected in young people's opinions about appropriate ages to have sex. This means that children and young people are caught between the imperative to be innocent and the capacity to be sexual (Jackson, 1999; Carmody, 2015; Robinson, 2012). A significant body of research suggests that formal SRE omits frank and important messages about youthful sexuality including the complex, changeable and emotional nature of sexual negotiation, and relationships more

broadly. This is certainly something that older participants' contributions often confirmed. Many of them noted that sex education does not "prepare you for the awkwardness" of sexual encounters (BM, FN).

Following Kotsko, in order to understand why something is considered or experienced as awkward it is important to first understand what the (perceived) social order and embedded practice might be. In the context of consent this involves looking at the normative narratives and expectations around sex, gender, pleasure and communication. Despite the changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles mentioned above, this research captured the persistence of unspoken norms that reproduce a patriarchal set of gender relations and expectations about what 'consent' means. In this chapter, the data is read through the lens of awkwardness. I seek to understand the interplay between awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence and the ways in which making practices visible, and breaking the silence, can provide opportunities for them to change or for new practice to emerge.

7.2 Establishing a sexual social order

In order to understand why consent was considered awkward by the participants, it is important to establish what the unspoken social/sexual norms were that meant explicitly seeking consent was 'awkward'. The latest NATSAL statistics illustrate many of the shifts and changes that both Adam Kotsko and Jeffrey Weeks observe in their work. The UK is becoming a more sexually 'liberal' society and both sexual attitudes and practices are becoming more open and diverse with time (Weeks, 2007; NATSAL, 2014). There has been a shift to recognising women's sexual agency and rights to pleasure (Renolds and Ringrose, 2014; McGeeney, 2013); and sexualities of all kinds are for the most part acknowledged and accepted, sometimes even celebrated. However, this shift away from conservative and traditional hetero-patriarchal sexual cultures is still in process. This was visible in the conversations presented in Chapter Six. Although there is more acceptance of, and desire for, equity in sexual relationships of all kinds, a coherent discourse and narrative, which provides the safety and security of knowing that you are 'doing it right' when communicating openly about and during sex, is lacking.

The sexual practices that participants in this study referred to were varied, and the ways in which they were spoken about differed with experience, age and socio-cultural background. However, there was an overarching theme of heteronormativity, and many accounts, scenarios and

examples that were volunteered followed a highly gendered and linear script: one in which the “man leads, and the woman responds” (Elsie, SCH). The discursive practice of heteronormativity is pervasive in British society. This discourse was the most readily available and, seemingly, safe to use when discussing sex and relationships. For example, many of the younger and less sexually experienced participants expressed a notion that sex happens in the context of monogamous, longer-term and “loving” (Izzy, Sch) partnerships. This idea held significant weight when we considered who, how and why different people may communicate about sex. As I highlight in the previous chapter, many scenarios and discussions with younger participants began with some highly gendered expectations or double standards.

The extract below from one of the school groups provides some insight into the kinds of discourse that have been normalised by mainstream media and inexperience:

Charlie: But like in the movies you never see them like, the guy you know when it's passionate. Like in the Notebook where it's raining, they aren't gonna stop and be like 'hey, can I kiss you'? [...]

Nina: I think, I think like in movies it's just shown like the girl just always follows the guy
[what would happen if you asked?]

Adz: Like guys would be like pssst!

Charlie: Yea they'd be like 'you just put the fire out'
[Laughter]

Elsie: Ok but then why is that a turn off for us? Why is consent not a turn on?

Rihanna: I think that like you want consent but you're too scared to ask for it
Adz: Yea

Charlie: Yea but like there's like you just wanna do it in the moment like

Sarah: Well maybe people won't like it cos they'd be like 'oh do I not look like I want it?'

Elsie: Ha yea, like can you not read my mind?!?

Charlie: Can't you tell?! Can't you tell!? [this was pretty funny when she did it in a menacing way!]

Rihanna: But then like if, if it's a random moment where someone comes up to you and is like 'oh can I kiss you?', that is kinda weird

Charlie: Uhh huu

Rihanna: But then like if you're in a proper situation then it doesn't matter if you ask or not. Like when you're in proper relationships.

In this fragment of talk the girls are expressing a common discourse about male desire as something that needs to be acted upon and carried through, and that it is a bad thing to 'put the

fire out'. This also complements the constant reference to 'breaking the flow' and ruining the moment that came up across many research conversations. Above, I positioned myself with them asking why consent is a turn off for *us* rather than a positive thing. This showed that I was not going to reprimand them for suggesting consent is not a necessity and that I can, and do, understand where they are coming from. In response to this they highlight the difficulty of "asking for consent" and fears related to misreading the situation or exposing too much or too little sexual competence. The importance of being able to 'read' the situation is foregrounded in this conversation exposing tensions between knowing yourself and articulating desires and following an assumed trajectory of heterosexual encounters. The idea that someone might be able to 'read your mind' and work out your desires without you knowing or articulating them yourself is ridiculous. Yet there is an expectation expressed here, and by other participants, that men should take the lead and know what the woman wants or is willing to do. In this extract 'going along' with it is not viewed as passive but rather as being 'in tune' with one another. Something that was considered important and more likely in 'proper' relationships where prior knowledge of one another means partners ought to be able to "read" each other (Reggie, YC). This idea creates tension with discourses of asking every single time as it raises a question about whether something is a 'proper relationship' if you have to ask.

The extract above encapsulates many of the tensions that will be explored for the remainder of the chapter. Conversations with young participants has produced a clear idea that the assumed sexual social order does not involve being explicit about one's desires, boundaries and other logistical elements of sex. It assumes that that sex, and the build up to it, is passionately embodied, and that the 'fire' of desire provides some innate sense of direction for the embodied practice of sex. Many participants spoke about the 'flow' of an encounter in a way that suggested there was a clear direction of travel and assumed fluid and seamless transition into sexual interaction. The metaphor of a 'flow', is useful when we consider the practice of sexual negotiation as a constant process, in a given interaction and throughout one's sexual career; it has a direction, but the speed and route can vary, like that of a river.

7.2.1 *Awkwardness aka "ruining the moment"*

A key finding for this research was the extent to which young people communicated that doing active and verbal consent is 'awkward', disruptive and undesirable. Communicating openly about sex, and seeking it explicitly was viewed to be "a massive risk" (Karl, YC). Explicitly and

vocally seeking consent or negotiating a sexual encounter made you vulnerable, not only to rejection, but also to being viewed as lacking the sexual knowhow to experience and/or produce a normative sexual encounter with no mishaps. These ‘mishaps’ might range from rejection, a negative sexual experience, or more commonly seemed to be considered as an unexpected pause or break in the assumed fluid and seamless transition from “kissing” to “leaning in” to “shirts off” to “sex” (Sam and JT, YC). The risks that young people feared ranged from outright rejection and thus sadness or humiliation to ‘in the moment’ embarrassment. In working with the documents of our various research encounters, I developed a strategy to code these kinds of expressions as ‘awkward’, distinguishing them from references to a different kind of ‘risk’ or fear associated with STIs, pain, unintended pregnancy and violence. The risks of communicating about sex, whether to (potential) partners, peers or educators are very real for young people because talking about and, often by implication, having and negotiating sex can make you both visible and vulnerable. This is expressed in research on sexual communication and condom use and captured well in the WRAP project pamphlet “Don’t die of ignorance, I nearly died of embarrassment. Condoms in context” (Holland et al. 1993). This is also well articulated by JT in a group interview:

I feel like asking is really hard. I feel, I think, no, I know that it’s really hard for someone to actually upfront ask someone if they want to do specific things with them, [...] it’s kinda sad as well, if the other person says no, because they’re actually opening themselves to the other person, like, giving them one of the hardest things that you can actually say at your age if you’re my age or, if, you’re an adult it’s still really hard for you to actually ask someone, and then be denied it might be a really massive impact on your self-esteem.

(JT, YC)

Seeking consent explicitly, and verbally, involves recognising yourself as a desiring and sexual being, something that many, particularly young women, are discouraged from or linguistically ill equipped to do (Holland et al. 1994 and 1998; Carmody, 2015). Not only do you have to ‘out’ your desires and take a stand about what you want; but in acknowledging this and communicating it to another, perhaps by seeking a ‘yes’, you become vulnerable to a ‘no’ which is commonly, and sometimes mistakenly, perceived as outright rejection. Seeking explicit and verbal consent was therefore not viewed as the best course of action if you actually wanted to get anywhere without “ruining the moment” (Charlie, SCH) and running the risk of rejection, coupled with embarrassment and leading to an “awkward moment” (Nessa, YC). This supports the findings of Hickman and Muehlenhard (1990) and can be linked to research about condom

use, where the moment of finding, and putting on a condom is often seen as a 'mood killer' (Braun, 2013), because it both disrupts the flow and makes clear what is about to happen.

Over the course of the research working with small groups, I have, at times, challenged the notion that practising explicit consent is 'too risky', even if the assumed sexual order suggests otherwise. I have done this in part to aid my understanding of what it is that many people 'fear' and therefore attempt to avoid by being ambiguous in their communication. But also, to highlight that the risks associated with 'active consent' may not be as problematic, in the long run, as the consequences of being ambiguous and avoidant. As Kotsko so eloquently puts it "the strategy for avoiding awkwardness only winds up compounding it" (2010:54).

It felt important to confront the young people with an alternative narrative and to disrupt the notion that rejection, and moreover awkwardness is always bad. To do this, I have, at times, shared with participants my experiences of trying to practice what might be considered 'active consent'. In almost every instance with young people under 16 this has been met with incredulity, jokes, and explanations about why a more explicit or communicative approach would not fly amongst them and their peers.

Karl: How do you think we should say it?

Elsie: What? Asking? [they nod] well er, well I erm have got quite direct nowadays, now I've got older

JT: So you say 'do you wanna fuck'?

Elsie: Ha! Kindof

Karl: Is that how you say it?!? [we all laugh].

Elsie: Not exactly like that

Karl: I wouldn't say that to anyone.

Elsie: Well would you say something like er, do you want to come back to mine? Or like well I would actually, I have asked people straight up if they want to kiss me, or if I can kiss them and if they want to have sex. And sometimes it's worked out really well and sometimes it hasn't.

Karl: So, so what you're saying is that you take a big massive risk?

Elsie: Well I guess, why not? But is it a risk? --

JT: Err rejection

Me: Why are we scared of rejection?

JT: Well it depends on the situation doesn't it. If it's just you two... you may as well take a risk. But you don't really ever want to move to her when she's with her squad³¹

(Youth club session with four (occasionally six) 14 year old boys and 1 youth worker)

The discourse of heteronormativity is at play in this discussion, bringing with it a narrative of men leading and women responding. My contribution to the discussion disrupts this somewhat, showing that women can lead and ask, but also that I am clearly fine despite experiencing rejection in the past. In other group conversations, it was recognised that I could embody 'alternative' practices of consent and also demonstrate more sexual freedom due to my 'maturity'. One group at the youth club noted that I was older and so people would judge my decision-making less than they would be judged at ages 14 and 15. I recognise my 'older-ness' as an important factor in this, but also recognise the privilege afforded by my race, social class and education, meaning that I have been able to explore and express sexuality differently. Although I often positioned myself with the young people I at times, (as above) was clearly an adult talking to teenagers as the examples I gave showed I had autonomy and privacy to invite someone back to my own space, and that I did not have to navigate peer group dynamics in the same way. I return to the significance of class, race, gender, education and geographic location shortly.

The above extract also illustrates the often public nature of romantic and sexual negotiation, something that, according to my data, seems to shift and change with age and environmental circumstances. Many of the participants, particularly those who were under 16, spoke about the public or collective practices of romance, dating and communication. Our conversations and my observations suggest that it is rare to be alone with someone of the opposite sex, particularly 'pre-relationship' and thus face to face flirting, and developing relationships were often mediated by the "squad" or group and supplemented through the use of digital technology – which, while private in a sense, still bears the risk of public exposure.

Theories of consent tend to assume negotiations between just two (or more) people in a given sexual encounter – rather than a more collective practice of youth culture where intimacy and communication is mediated by group practices and expectations. The significance of peer

³¹ 'Squad' is a colloquial term used here to mean friendship group.

culture is perhaps most apparent during school years. Children and young people interact with the same peer group five days a week and it is very difficult for them to have autonomy about the environments, institutions and people they interact with without some form of adult intervention or punitive action. I would suggest that although children and young people do have agency to disengage or not participate in certain peer practices, and can, at times, compel their parents to make different choices about schooling and involvement with certain environments, this agency is limited, particularly when it intersects with family class, socio-economic status, and wider societal norms established at a national and local level.

Regarding consent and relationships, research suggests that young people develop some of their attitudes from their family, friends and school-based peer groups (Lear, 1995; Marston et al. 2004; Lader, 2009; Stone and Ingham, 2006,). The peer group very often forms the base from which relationships, norms and practices occur, both face to face and through technology. Thus, practices emerge from, and are mediated and modified according to, the explicit and implicit social order of the peer group. The practice of bullying and banter in schools maintains a heteronormative status quo (Formby and Willis, 2011; Formby, 2015) and this is present in the way some of my participants spoke about and represented the experiences of others.

Low level bullying such as teasing and joking play a huge role in the maintenance of heteropatriarchal norms, which in turn reproduce the gendered double standards and narratives introduced above. It is awkward to go against the crowd in these instances – quite literally ‘wrong-ward’ (Kotsko, 2010) and due to the consistency and intensity of peer interaction the act of ‘doing things differently’ can result in difficult social consequences. For instance, my field notes reflect that during the time I was at the youth club a number of the young men and women were teased, excluded and sometimes vilified, or valorised according to how they were preforming and displaying their sexuality and relationships within the wider group.

They've all gone off K this week because he's interested in L and moving a bit 'fast' (they've been sitting close and hugging a bit) and 'everyone' seems to know, but not be saying, that they are being too public with their affection [...]but there are some definite bad vibes going around.

(Field notes)

There is a lot of homophobic 'banter' and the boys trying to show off about how sexually active they supposedly are [...] but I guess I have to pick my battles.

(Field notes)

Not only was heteronormativity amplified through jokes, and the young men in particular playing up to the camera/each other and the workers, but heteronormative notions of respectability were also present in the way young people responded to me and each other. This is illustrated by the way that the terms ‘slut’ and ‘frigid’ still hold significant traction (Dobson and Ringrose, 2016) and that it is difficult and awkward to perform sexuality that sits ‘acceptably’ in-between these two categories but which avoids the potential of you ‘both being shy virgins’ (Nina, SCH). What these labels: slut, slag, frigid and prude meant, and the practices associated with them differed slightly between groups and ages. Young women in particular were often able to articulate some discrepancy in how labels are given and how for some people they ‘stick’ and have a longer-term effect than for others.

The young people at the school and the London youth club, for example, spoke candidly of people they knew who had had ‘bad’ sexual experiences, or been at the centre of ‘sexting scandals’, and often exhibited a more conservative approach to sex and relationships. They would initially judge and condemn the practices of their peers, although upon further inquiry tended to reveal and acknowledge an unfair double standard, noting that they “would probably feel very differently about it if I knew the person well or if the same thing happened to me” (Azmin, SCH). However, the young people, of the same age, at the alternative youth group in Brighton provided and drew on different, less heteronormative discourses, when discussing sex, relationships and peer attitudes towards sex and intimacy. The collective practices and public nature of relationships seemed no less prominent, simply the norms and expectations encouraged a more open culture of intimacy. This culture of intimacy was present in the way these young people interacted with one another and how they reflected on ‘sex’ and displays of affection.

One young person noted that they, and others in their peer group find it very normal and comforting to hug and have tactile relationships with many of their friends. They reflected that because this was their norm they had not realised that there was a member of the group who did not like hugs and it took them a while to accept and then accommodate this, rather than see it as weird and awkward

(Field notes)

There was also, a more sex positive discourse being voiced by the young people in this group suggesting that it was good to be sexually active, and to take the opportunity to “experiment”, within reason.

The examples outlined above from the youth clubs in London and in Brighton provide different and perhaps extreme representations of youth culture and collective practice around consent

and intimacy. Although there are different, unspoken norms and expectations about what it means to be sexual (in an acceptable way), awkwardness can be produced in both contexts. This highlights that awkwardness is not about content, or certainly not about specific acts and actions, but it is about a disturbance in the taken for granted norms. Within the social circles of the Brighton group it is normal to hug friends of any gender, this norm is highlighted and disturbed in the same instance by someone articulating that they actually do not like hugs. Whereas, the social norm of keeping affection private was only revealed in the London club by people's responses to Karl breaching this norm thorough overtly and publicly displaying his affection for L – something that seems to be done more through digital communication in the earlier stages of relationships.

This neatly links to Garfinkle's ethnomethodology and breaching experiments (Rafalovich, 2006; Garfinkle, 1996). Although the young people I was working with were not conducting experiments per se, they were and are testing and establishing the sexual/social status quo through their interactions with one another. What is clear from this, is that expectations and norms differ and thus have to be mediated and navigated in different ways according to social class, cultural background and so on. Thus, the way in which 'consent' fits into or disrupts unspoken norms and is perceived or experienced as 'awkward' varies between sexual cultures. This stands in tension with more abstract and individualised constructions of consent.

7.3 Rejection as Rupture

Rejection was highlighted as a key moment or example of awkwardness. The perceived and potential awkwardness of rejection is avoided, by keeping things "subtle" (JT, YC) or ambiguous. This is elaborated in the work of Lear and Wight, whose empirical studies in the UK and Australia in the early nineties found that ambiguity is present and arguably important for young people when negotiating sexual encounters. They highlight that ambiguity is used to gain, or rather not be denied, consent for fear that the other partner will decide not to continue (Lear, 1995:1320, Wight, 1992). This may be interpreted in such a way that suggests that young people do not value the importance of consent, however this is not the case.

The young people I worked with related sincere and in some cases compelling arguments and expressions of fear around why it was not (socially) safe or acceptable to explicitly seek or articulate consent to sex. Yet they *all* expressed the importance and value of what we might

term ‘mutual consent’, even if they did not use the word. Sex and intimacy was seen as something that you “should both want... [and] be ready for” (Al, Film) and that was a ‘mutual agreement’ (BM and School outputs). My findings, like Rachel Thomson’s in 2004, show that there is a clear recognition from young people that “you shouldn’t have sex if you don’t want to and that you shouldn’t pressure someone else” (Amy, YC).

Romantic, linear and un-communicative representations of sexual encounters in popular media and porn produce and reinforce discourses that suggest ‘good sex’ just happens (Carmody, 2015). However, where young people may recognise an ideal version of good sex they may have little idea of how to produce it. The interactions are navigated based on taken for granted norms and expectations which are rooted in patriarchal and uneven gendered relations. This juxtaposes binary messages from consent education which encourage people not to assume anything and to seek explicit affirmation or rejection as a sexual encounter progresses. In reading my data and comparing how participants spoke about abstracted and situated consent it is clear these messages conflict and result in ambiguous readings of what good sex and good consent (as one thing) look and feel like.

It is difficult to balance an aspiration for mutuality with the fear of rejection, or rather the effect the rejection may have on one’s self esteem and sense of sexual competence. Yet when fear of rejection motivates the style and openness of communication it becomes difficult to assert your ‘readiness’ and desires, and to establish the readiness and desires of another because the interaction becomes shrouded in ambiguity and diffidence.

It can be useful to think about the moment of ‘rejection’ as a moment of rupture or a disruption to the assumed ‘flow’ or direction of an interaction. Disruption, and rupture bring expectations into presence, and thus norms and transgressions become suddenly visible. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider how ambiguity is used as a kind of armour against rejection. The significance of awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence and ways in which naming these elements of sexual practice help to highlight and resist some of the problematic and patriarchal assumptions about sex is explored in the following section.

7.3.1 *Thinking through avoidance and ambiguity*

Research conversations with young people, and anecdotally with friends and colleagues, have suggested that ambiguity is both an active and passive product of sexual navigation. Once again, it has been useful to think of ambiguity in relation to the directional nature of 'awkward'. Sexual encounters are normatively thought to progress in a linear direction towards a certain outcome, or to continue the directional theme, a destination.

The first way that ambiguity is produced is through the *avoidance* of clarity. It appears that ambiguity is often actively utilised to avoid explicit commitment and rejection. Many sexually active people, I would suggest of all ages, avoid being explicit about their desires and as such ambiguity is present in an encounter because the direction of it and desires related to it are unclear, or at least the destination has not been named or decided. If the direction of an encounter lacks clarity then it might follow that 'awkwardness' is minimised, because there is seemingly not a 'wrong' direction. However, if there is clarity - 'Would you like to have sex with me?' – then the desired direction of the interaction is clear: we are moving towards 'sex' (whatever this means). So, if and when the other person, or even the 'instigator' articulates that they do not want to move towards 'sex', or that they might want to do something different, this could be considered an example of blocking, changing or turning in a different direction. Awkward.

This change in direction, I will argue later, does not necessarily have to be 'awkward'. Or rather, the 'awkwardness' does not have to be experienced as a moment of irretrievable or unfixable rupture or disintegration. It could instead be considered an opportunity for learning, and developing a more mutual and, in the longer run, enjoyable experience of sex.

Although ambiguity can be used to avoid awkwardness there will still be some awkwardness present and as such ambiguity cannot cancel out awkwardness altogether. Even if ambiguity is actively produced and performed, the direction of an encounter is often implicit and assumed, based on normative narratives and discourses of 'romance and sex' that are pervasive in media discourses. Although the desired 'destination' is not made explicit and ambiguity is employed to avoid explicit moments of awkwardness, the implicit and embodied norms and practices of society do not allow for there to be no direction, and therefore absolutely no awkwardness.

The second way that ambiguity manifests is less a product of avoidance but more as a product of everyday interaction. Life is full of unpredictability and contradictions (Fincham, 2016; Kotsko, 2010), and a 'clear' steadfast direction or development of occurrences is rarely assured. From shopping expeditions, family outings and thesis plans, all the way to sexual negotiation, things change. This is often the case even when desires and expectations are made more explicit. There is rarely a guarantee that what we think is going to happen definitely will, that it will occur in the way we imagine, or that we will feel good about it afterwards (Butler, 2012). In the example given above what 'sex' means is not clear – although the two people involved may have a shared understanding or practice. They may 'head to bed', and on the way, while cleaning their teeth, or while undressing each other, the desire to have 'sex' might decrease. This could be experienced as 'awkward', yet many people are able to hold and manage contradictions and unpredictability on a daily basis. This is important in everyday interactions including sex and consent, yet it appears that people are more sensitive to it here than during other, perhaps less intimate, social interactions.

As Judith Butler points out, it is possible to agree to and actively partake in sex. Yet at the stage of agreement there is no way of knowing exactly what will occur, how³², and how you will feel about it during and after (2012). Affect and emotion are at times unpredictable and, in a society where people are often over-stimulated and not encouraged to listen to their body, or decode their emotions, it can be difficult to know how an interaction will impact upon the parties involved. The body mapping exercises with the older groups exposed how difficult it is to listen to and enact different feelings in the body, but also showed many examples of how ambivalence and ambiguity might be embodied.

There was reference to being 'torn' between wanting and not wanting, and that body and head might be out of sync. There were contradictions with how someone feels, and how they believed they should feel, according to the narratives and discourses they have been exposed to. The narratives I outline above about an obvious flow, and a passionate understanding of what is to come do not leave space for ambiguity, or ambivalence. You either "get that feeling, like there's a spark" (Maryon, YC) or you do not. This reflects the 'want/not want' binary that was present

³² This is less the case in BDSM and sex work encounters where the sex acts are often discussed in advance. Although this ideal model does not always occur, and even if it does there may be changes that occur in situ, or an unintended outcome.

in some conversations with young people before we explored scenarios and accepted that there can be grey areas, ambiguity and unsureness in sexual desires and encounters.

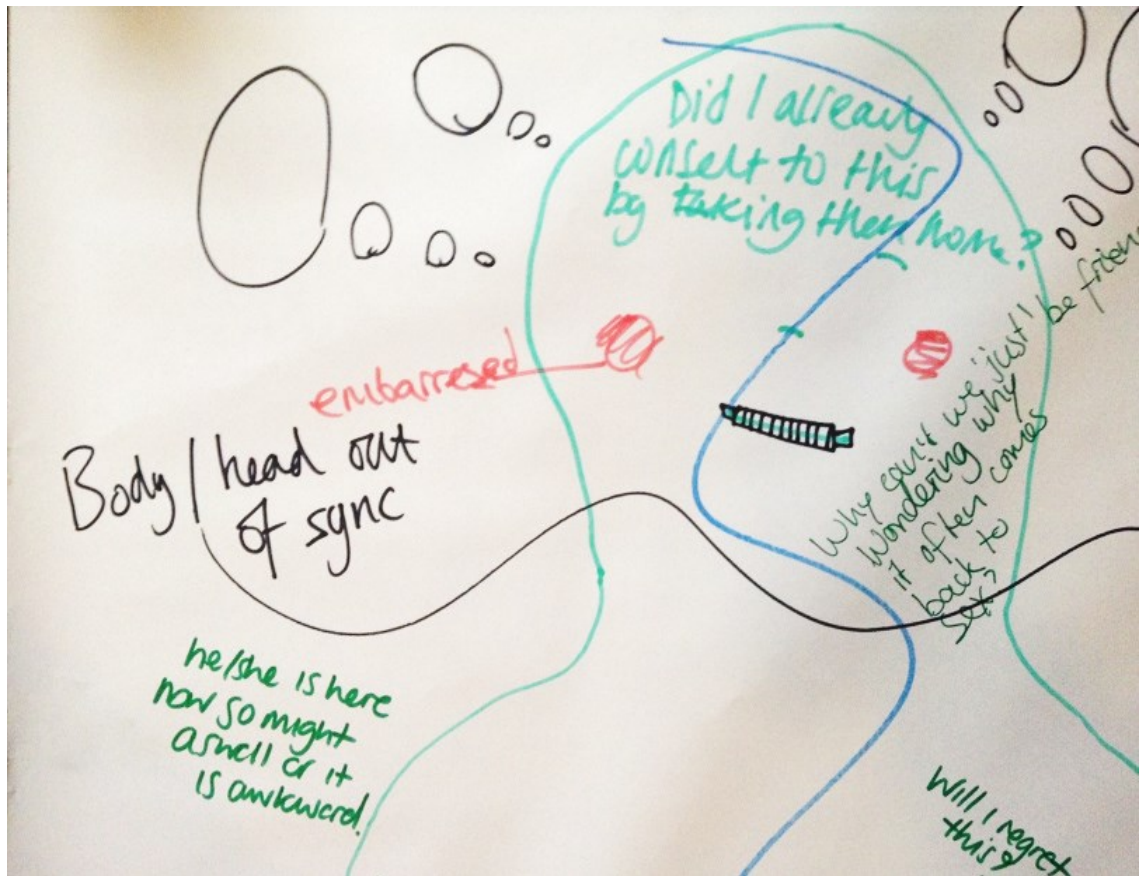


Figure 20 Close up of body map 'I've taken someone home but not sure I want to have sex'

7.4 Embodying awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence

It has been noted that participants who were older and or more sexually experienced tended to provide different, more situated and thus more nuanced talk about sex and consent. The notion that seeking explicit consent is a risk, and that it is awkward, was also strongly voiced in these groups. Although they could, and did, draw on a variety of experiences, the common and most easily accessible or publicly disclosable stories also seemed to be ones that involved minimal communication, a male centric view of sex and pleasure and an avoidance of awkwardness in light of this. All the young women in the body mapping group for example, spoke about how it can be 'easier' to just go with it than to say 'no' multiple times or communicate their needs and desires in certain encounters. It was noted, by young women across a few groups that they might feel bad for rejecting someone because they "don't want to make the other person feel bad"

(P+). This perhaps suggests that the 'norm' here would have been to go with the flow, and in stopping or rejecting the sexual interaction, they breach the expectations that women will be passive in a sexual encounter, or more simply create a rupture in the other persons' assumption that they have 'read' the feelings and desires of the other person accurately.

I will revisit this scenario when I consider rejection and ambivalence, but it is worth noting the persistence of hetero-patriarchal-normativity within our common discourse – both in conversations and in practice. Male domination and violence is normalised and thus its effects, at times, go unquestioned as part of an accepted social order. The role women play in protecting, reproducing and colluding with hetero-patriarchal normativity in sex has been well documented and discussed by scholars such as Nicola Gavey, Gail Ruben and Andrea Dworkin. However, the stories and narratives my participants shared with me, and utilised as part of our continued learning were not shared with the intention that I would critique their practice from a radical feminist standpoint. Rather I use them as examples of how difficult and awkward it can be to balance norms and narratives - old and new; to break the silence around pleasure and violence and disrupt embedded and embodied patriarchal practices; and to negotiate 'good sex' within different contemporary contexts.

Working with participants of varying ages has given me contrasting and contradictory messages about the importance of sex, active consent and the ways in which people might develop their sexual competence and literacy. Where younger participants tended to speak about sex and consent in a more abstract way, older participants; (in part, due to age, familiarity with me and or the topic, but also as a product of their education and class) tended to offer more grounded and nuanced responses to the topic.

Talk produced in workshops with older, more sexually experienced participants has revealed that much of their knowledge about consent, or rather the realities of negotiating a positive, or even a 'not bad' sexual encounter, had been developed through *experience*. This experience, they noted, tended to contradict what they may have been taught formally, or informally, and the messages they immediately think of on hearing the words 'sexual consent'. The consent definitions I outlined in the previous chapter showed some of the more nuanced ideas that the older participants were able to articulate, and later explain with reference to their own experiences, the expectations of others and wider societal constraints.

The participants involved in P+ and the body mapping were self-selecting, well-educated and 'politically engaged' groups. They were willing and able to critically engage with the research and to provided honest and candid answers about how and why they may say one thing – “that consent is really important” (Joy, BM), and embody a practice that avoids the articulation of explicit consent “I don’t always know what to say if I’m asked ‘do you want to’ or ‘what do you want me to do?’” (Joy, BM) or refusal “I might as well [have/continue with the sex] otherwise it’s awkward” (Vic, P+).

At another workshop, independent to this research project, one young woman³³ awkwardly contributed her feelings that “sometimes, sex is just sex,” conveying that it may not always be pleasurable or actively wanted and that “it’s not a big deal”. This was an opinion that seemed to contradict the collective or at least more vocalised views of other workshop participants. Her comment was an incredibly important one – and is an opinion that can be silenced in feminist and sex positive circles. This encouraged me to look back at the data from my body mapping session and to think through the significance of ambivalence, and how experiences that may ‘technically’ be considered un-consensual are experienced or remembered, as acceptable, or at the least tolerable and un-traumatic reflecting the work of Gavey (2005) and Kelly and Radford (1990).

The discourses of ambivalence and ambiguity were revealed, throughout the conversations following body mapping exercises. The young women articulated that they often felt torn about where, when and how to resist normative narratives and prioritise their own pleasure and desire. They noted that there were times where “you have sex you don’t necessarily want” and that this is OK, but that other times you can tell that it is not ok and that it is “invasive” and “pressured” (BM and P+ FN). Rose noted in the body mapping session how having two bodies to think about really made her consider “what is going on for the guy” in those kinds of situations.

³³ I have gained her permission/consent to reference her comments in this work.

Figure 21 Full body map 'I've taken someone home but not sure I want to have sex'

Common assumptions about hetero-sex do not provide a space for men to change their mind or to be unsure. She highlighted that there must be a lot of confusion going on for the other person as well, but it is not viewed as OK to voice this in case you seem socially/sexually inept. This was echoed in conversations with other groups. The young men at the youth club all spoke about consent as their responsibly to 'ask the girl' and know what they want and to follow through

with it unless the 'girl' said no. Similarly, the desire expressed from some of the younger women that the man they first have sex with should know what they are doing reinforces a discourse that men should be more sexually knowing and take the lead in interactions.

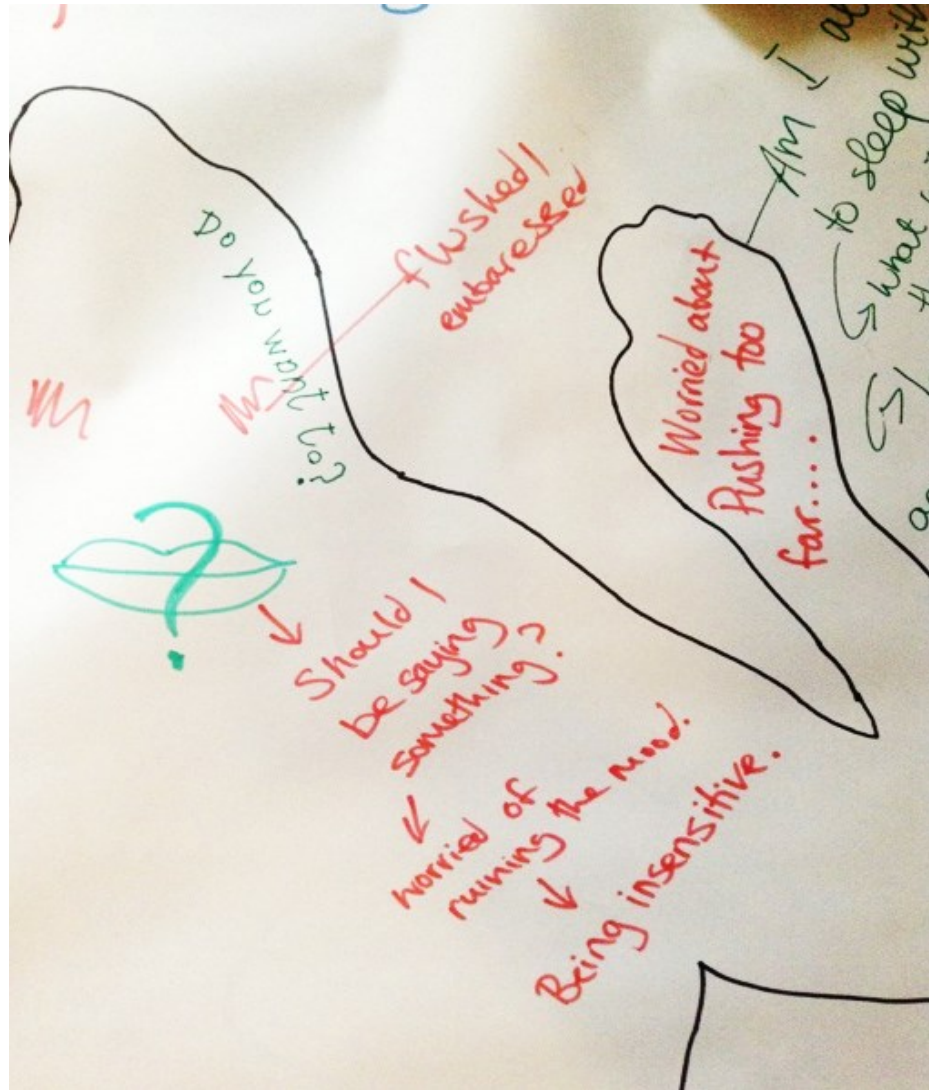


Figure 22 close up body map 'I've come home with this person and want to have sex'

While many participants were able to recognise gendered and patriarchal assumptions and practice at play, body mapping and P+ participants also exposed some ambivalence about the idea that they should always resist gendered scripts and that passivity and routine is a bad thing. As Stevi Jackson points out in her book 'Heterosexuality in question' sex will not be earth-shattering and orgasmic every single time, sometimes sex is boring and routine (1999:168). The young women also highlighted moments where they feel insecure and unable to take the lead, particularly with partners they imagined a sexual future with, or because sometimes "I don't know my body well enough" (Joy, BM) to know what will work in that moment. There was an

expression from some members of the group, which resonates with my own experiences of sometimes wanting the other person to 'just know what they are doing', but this desire assumes that technique is generic, rather than relational and specific thus needing to be explored and developed. If the other person did already have a technique that worked, there is no need to expose a (lack of) self-knowledge and limited vocabulary and confidence for explaining to another what is wanted. These comments and feelings reflect the missing discourses of female desire (Fine, 1988) and pleasure and how this can play out as insecurity and ambivalence (Muehlenhard and Peterson, 2005).

So far, this chapter has presented observations that awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence are common elements of sexual interaction and negotiation. Although there have been shifts in sexual attitudes and lifestyles assumptions about what is 'normal' continue to be routed in heteronormative and male centred ideas about 'sex'. I would suggest that embracing awkwardness and letting go of the armour of ambiguity may be an important component of breaking the silence around sex and sexual violence. Yet there is an uneasy tension involved in acknowledging and working 'with' ideas of ambiguity and experiences of awkwardness as it sits somewhere between challenging and accepting norms as they are (for now). This leads to questions about abuse, and where the line is, reflecting concerns that teachers may have about acknowledging the grey area and moving beyond the consent binary.

7.4.1 Abuse... Where is the line?

There is an inevitable tension between ambiguity and ambivalence. I am cautious about where and when to draw a line between exposing and accepting "ordinary" ambivalent and passive sexual interaction; and normalising passivity which is a result of subordination; 'lower levels' of sexual violence and, often gendered, narratives about 'pleasing the other' at the expense of one's own desires. A key achievement of feminist research about sex and sexual violation is seen to suggest that much 'ordinary sex' is effectively lacking in active consent, and that pressure is normalised (Thomson, 2004; Jackson, 1999 and 2008; Gavey, 2005 and 1992; Radford and Kelly, 1990; Coy et al. 2013; Hlavaka, 2014). The body mapping session, along with sessions with younger groups tended to foreground male desire and pleasure within heterosexual sex; both in examples of 'one-night stands' and longer term monogamous relationships. In both situations, it was viewed as potentially awkward to 'say no', 'retract consent' or to prioritise their lack of desire. Sex within longer-term and monogamous relationships was at times

considered difficult to negotiate for fear of disrupting the whole relationships over sex – which is only one element of what many people would consider a ‘successful’ and enjoyable relationship. There were times where passive routine consent was considered a normal, if sometimes frustrating, part of maintaining a smooth relationship.

Upon disclosure of a recent ‘unwanted’ sexual encounter in one of the body mapping session, the rest of the group, myself included, felt able to share similar situations and consider how and why people sometimes have sex we do not want. There was reference to it being tiring or awkward to say ‘no’, particularly if you have to say it many times. But also, there was sometimes an uncomfortable acceptance of responsibility. The comments outlined earlier from younger participants suggesting that ‘girls lead guys on’ and that it’s a ‘two-way thing’, were uneasily echoed in these sessions as well. All of these young women would consider themselves feminists and were open about having had multiple partners, both longer term and casual. Yet, the way we *all* spoke about consent and sex contained some significant contradictions particularly between what we say and might advocate for, and what we later disclosed we sometimes do. We noted how in theory we think, like the younger participants, that it is always OK, important even, to ‘say no’, ask someone to leave or retract consent at any point in an encounter, and to flirt without later being blamed for leading someone on. Yet when reflecting on our own practice and the realities of sexual negotiation with both casual and committed partner we acknowledged this can be difficult to articulate.

Sometimes resisting norms of passivity is more complex, risky and difficult than just ‘going with them’ and not thinking about it too much

(Field notes).

This statement from my field notes captures what many of the participants were articulating when they spoke about ambivalent sexual encounters. Not thinking too much about things avoids self-doubt and judgement, yet it maintains a status quo that prioritises men’s pleasure and limits self-knowledge and sexual satisfaction.

There was also reference in the data to how sometimes sex that you have not actively sought can end up being “So NICE!” (Joy, BM) because you did not have to do anything and it shows someone “wants you” and wants to “put the effort in” (BM notes). This relates to findings reported in ‘The male in the head’ (Holland et al. 1999) where young women did, at times, want the men they were with to ‘be in control’ and to know what they are doing. The body mapping

group also considered how this might play out and change in different contexts and encounters for different people. It is important to note that while the examples I have were provided by young women, we recognised that men can experience ambivalence too and may at times provide and partake in sexual acts that they are 'not in the mood for', for but for which they desire the outcome more than the effort of saying no.

There was also reference to what Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) have shown in their work on ambivalence, about how sometimes although people may not desire the sex act, they actively partake or consent to it because they do desire the outcome of it. This resonated with what some of the older participants said. Sometimes people have sex they are not really 'in the mood for' to maintain or enhance intimate connections, to create the possibility for pregnancy, to show affection or desire to the other person or, in the case of sex work, as part of a negotiated agreement that will result in payment. These were all examples which are, for the most part common, and acceptable practices. However, in accepting more passive and ambivalent sexual practices we enter potentially dangerous and 'un-feminist' territory. There are situations where the sexual practice is undesired but it is performed in order to pacify the other person, minimise the chance of violence, to them or to others, or engaged in in exchange for safety and/or comfort that there is no other way of receiving. This is not an example where what could be termed ambivalence should be accepted – and yet the line between passive consent – 'not really in the mood', and non-consent 'not saying no through fear', can be difficult to detect, both from the outside and the inside, and it is always contextual.

Although I have not addressed overt sexual violence in this thesis it is important to pay attention to how gendered and sexual violence is normalised in the discourses participants drew on and the experiences that some of them disclosed. While the continuum introduced in Chapter Six is extremely important and helpful for enabling more open discussions about sex and consent it does concern me that it could be used to collude with the normalisation of sexual violence and the subordination of women, or those who have less power within everyday patriarchal society for numerous intersectional reasons.

RAPE	NON CONSENSUAL SEX	PASSIVE CONSENT	ACTIVE CONSENT
Explicit use of force	Aversion to sex was not made explicit	There may be some desire from at least one person	Consent is explicitly sought and given
Explicit resistance	Sex may have been unwanted and forced but it wasn't violent	Sex is wanted but explicit consent is neither sought nor given	Communication and negotiation occurs
Clear violation of boundaries			There is mutual desire

Figure 23 Development of Sexual agency continuum for teaching and learning Materials
By Onlick and Brook.

The line between 'passive consent' and 'non-consensual' encounters is problematic, as in some ways both labels are 'wrong', and perhaps unhelpful for more traditional, binary feminist and legal discourses about sexual violence. Yet this research, and the research of other scholars such as Gavey (1992, 2005), Peterson and Muelenhard (2005), Coy et al. (2013) and Brady et al. (2017) reveals that many people's sexual encounters and the way in which they are likely to label them more often fall into the aforementioned categories. Legal and lay definitions of rape and consent tend to draw on fairly reductive conception of 'sex' and thus the 'non-consent' and 'passive consent' categories are more 'user friendly' when people are thinking about their own sexual experiences.

The contributions of older participants, and those with more sexual experience have been invaluable for thinking through the nuances, and complexities of sexual practice and the ways people do, and do not communicate about it. The final section of this chapter considers the generative potential of awkwardness and draws on examples of when transgressions in heterosexual norms, although awkward, ultimately went 'well'.

7.5 Radical awkwardness: Towards a culture of sexual communication

This chapter has highlighted how and why consent is understood as awkward, and the ways in which ambiguity might be utilised in order to "avoid the awkwardness and unpredictability of open communication with each other" (Kotsko, 2010:60). The fear of rejection; discomfort around communication; and limited confidence and vocabulary for talking about and seeking sex with another was present in many conversations. Who felt able to say and articulate what depended very much on age, sexual experience, gender and class. Despite this, with time and consideration many of the young participants became more able to look past the fear of

awkwardness and view the potential positive outcomes that come with risk taking. Biesta argues that “to engage in learning always entails the risk that learning may have an impact on you, that learning may change you. This means, however, that education only begins when the learner is willing to take a risk” (2005:61). Positive outcomes, self-development and new ways of doing things can often occur from taking risks, experiencing and working through moments of conflict and rupture.

The young women in the body mapping workshop, as well as sharing experiences of ambivalence and violation also shared positive experiences of resistance. This included examples of encounters in which more pleasurable outcomes arose from having had explicit and awkward conversations about their desires and boundaries with partners. There was reference to moments where, despite the awkwardness of ‘saying no’ or ‘withdrawing consent’, they were pleased to have done so, and found more often than not, that this has not affected things with a partner longer term. They considered that if the person was a one night stand “you’re probably not going to see them again anyway” (BM) and if it was a longer term partner then it is “good to know that you can say no and have it heard” (P+). How this plays out for younger groups where sexual practises can more easily become public knowledge and be commented upon may be different. In a context where young people are judged and commented on by their peers it seems that although there was a worry for the younger women that I worked with about being labelled ‘frigid’ by men, there was more respect from other young women towards those known to have said ‘no’. They were seen as managing their sexuality maturely, and not getting involved in things they can not control, or are unwilling to take the consequences of. Young women in this study were less supportive of peers who engaged in other sexual activity such as ‘sexting’.

These moments of articulating refusal or withdrawal could be considered moments of resistance. Many everyday experiences of choice and opportunity play out in such a way that resistance is done subtly, if at all (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999). This can be through silence, humour, disengaging or perhaps seeking or utilising the support of others. These acts are often in response to assumed consent and normalised power imbalance and motivated by consequences and experiences of vulnerability. Some of the participants reflected in some way that “consent makes you vulnerable” (Lizzie, YC) to awkwardness and rejection. Judith Butler highlights that vulnerability is not the opposite of resistance and argues affirmatively that “vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment” (2012).

Other examples of resistance, in relation to sex and consent, may be moments in which women 'make the first move' in a heterosexual encounter, disrupting the practice of passive and responsive feminine sexuality. Older participants spoke about this positively and where younger participants had less experience to draw on I provided examples of when I had been the instigator. I reflected that sometime this has "gone really well and guys have liked it", but that in other moments I have found it did not go well because "they said no" which was not what I wanted but something I could (initially quite begrudgingly) accept and respect. After all, I had created a space for them to convey a 'no' and as such had done 'good consent'. In other moments, however, there was not a clear response and things remained ambiguous and awkward for a longer period. I hesitantly attribute this to an assumption that some of these men have never been asked explicitly or given the space to think about their desires in situ and simply did not know how to respond. This scenario and the one in which I was rejected are what the young people feared and aimed to avoid by keeping things subtle and ambiguous. Yet I have found these moments the most useful for developing my sexual competence; regarding style of communication and negotiation, being able to read and respond to others better and learning that rejection is not really a 'bad' thing.

7.6 Conclusion

The norms, expectations and possibilities for transgression that have been revealed in conversation with participants highlight the persistence of hetero-patriarchal discourses across youth cultures. Yet the talk produced in sessions, as a result of varied and at times challenging stimuli, has required participants to partake in a collective effort to break the silence around sex and pleasure. The conversations have been awkward, and yet they have flowed into a process of mutual learning and may enable people to embrace and work through the awkward process of subverting the heterosexual social order in the future.

This chapter suggests that in order to meaningfully engage in, or rather *do*, sexual negotiation one has to make oneself vulnerable and ensure that power and space for decision making is provided to another. This could be done through the act, possibly, but not necessarily a speech act, of naming and acknowledging your own desires and offering them to another person/people. To do this one must be open and vulnerable to the desires of another, to a response that may articulate a 'no', or an 'I don't know', a 'yes' that may in process become a

‘no’. One needs to be vulnerable to a potentially awkward conversation and an outcome that does not precisely resemble your initial desire. In doing this, normative social and sexual scripts become disrupted and space is provided for exploration, thought, clarity, and compromise.

When we resist awkwardness, the social order looks good. When we resist the social order, awkwardness looks good. But on those rare occasion when we figure out a way to stop resisting the social order and yet also stop resisting awkwardness and just *go with it*; something genuinely new and unexpected might happen: we might be able to simply enjoy one another without the mediation of any expectations and demands.

(Kotsko, 2010:86. Original Emphasis)

If people can ‘just go with it’ they might move into an unknown space, something that many people may, initially, find awkward. However, as Kotsko states new experiences, practices and desires can grow from this space if given the opportunity. This is how more explicit articulations of desire, consent and rejection can be considered ‘radical’. They are moments of resistance, but they are also experienced as awkward and unsettling and as such it takes confidence, competence, energy and commitment to consistently embody practices that counter everyday narratives and experiences.

This chapter has explored the connections between awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence and the ways in which these terms can enable a more situated understanding of the practice of sexual negotiation. Building on the work of Kotsko I have explored the assumed norms and constructions related to hetero-sex and how these contribute to the experience of awkwardness when negotiating sexual interaction and articulating desires and boundaries. I have shown that ambiguity, as the avoidance of clarity is used as armour to minimise opportunities for naming desires and risking outright rejection. This chapter has also recognised ambivalence as part of ‘ordinary’ sex while also considering how passivity may be the result of hetero-patriarchal norms and constraints.

Chapter 8: Advocating for Critical Consent Education

Over the last 4 years I have had the opportunity to work alongside diverse groups of young people and develop some insight into what sexual consent might mean to them and why. I have worked with young people in seven different settings, sometimes dropping in to do one-off workshops or sessions alongside other practitioners, and sometimes over a longer period where I was present and actively engaged in leading and supporting group projects for months at a time. Consent has been a consistent focus, but how we have explored this has occurred differently, often informed by the nature of the group and their experience of, and interest in the topic. The educators and young people I have encountered have challenged me to think differently, or to dig a little deeper and consider my own views and understanding. I have developed and adapted my methods, and at times my language, to meaningfully engage with the young people I have worked with. In each setting we all learnt something new: a new word, a new way of thinking, an awareness of practices and narratives that are 'other' to our own experiences. Research encounters with young asylum seekers from countries where sex is not spoken about, to Gender Studies graduates with an awareness of hetero-patriarchal power within their own relationships, have encouraged me to think about how people talk and learn about and enact sexuality, desires and agency.

During this time, I grappled personally and theoretically with the notion of consent. I have been challenged to think about whether consent is something that is possessed, and as such can be given or taken in a verbal transaction with other parties, or whether consent is a process, performance or an outcome of agentic sex and competent communicative negotiation. The different young people I worked with shared with me their thoughts, ideas and at times their experiences of consent. They have spoken candidly of their sex education, both formal and informal, and taken part in conversations and activities which have, I hope, proved stimulating in some way for all involved.

The methods used throughout this research exemplified participatory practice and provided opportunities to capture how young people think about, process and label different sexual encounters. The educators I worked with and observed provided insight into some of the difficulties associated with teaching consent in different contexts. Together, participants and I demonstrated the possibilities for teaching about consent in a way that attends to ambiguity, but also highlighted the tensions that come with this.

This final chapter discusses how findings and themes outlined in the previous three chapters might contribute to better practices for teaching about sexual consent. A key aim of this project was to understand what young people know about consent and how this related to educational definitions and discourse. It is clear from the data that young people desire more nuanced education and opportunities to explore consent that go beyond legal and binary definitions. The work presented in this thesis contributes to teaching practices and educational agendas in a way that encourages this more critical and youth-centred agenda for 'consent education'. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the empirical findings before moving into a discussion of four key themes. I discuss the implications of these findings for practice, especially in light of the PSHE and SRE Addition to Children and Social Work Bill to make relationships and sex education compulsory from September 2019. This chapter advocates that for SRE to fulfil its remit, educators (whatever their professional background or institutional context) need to teach in a way that enables young people to recognise and handle awkwardness and ambiguity as they consider the ethics of situated sexual negotiation.

8.1 Summary

This study adopted a participatory research design, which de-centred adult and institutional agendas in favour of developing and co-producing youth centred ethics and a youth led research focus. The project was developed initially to understand the processes and practice of participation in the organisation Brook, but adapted later to focus more on educational practices and common constructions of sexual consent. The research questions and methods were developed in collaboration with young people and staff at Brook, which ensured that the research focus, subsequent findings and outcomes are of direct relevance to many groups of young people and educators. The research was set up in a way that prioritised youth work and PAR research principles. This centred on crediting young people with competence to consent, participate in and dissent from research activities while also providing them with tools to cultivate their sexual agency. Thus, the project afforded me first-hand experience of the possibilities and challenges of practicing critical pedagogy and taking a youth-centred approach to consent education. Education did not start as a key research question. However, through analysis and sorting of data, it became clear that institutions produce and reproduce notions of consent that limit the ways in which young people can learn about and thus enact sexual negotiation earlier in their sexual careers.

By dividing the first two chapters into ‘teaching and ‘learning’, the topic of consent education has been approached from both ‘sides’ of the educational relationship. This thesis has illustrated that educational encounters are multi-directional and are perhaps most productive when knowledge is co-constructed through engaging with ‘grey areas’ and when the learning is reciprocal, as advocated by Gurt Biesta (2005; 2015), Paulo Freire (1996) and Janet Batsleer (2013). Throughout the thesis, different types of knowledge have been referenced and challenged. For example, knowledge about consent that draws on legal discourses is thought to be credible and often forms the back stop or starting point for conversations about consent. Yet embodied and experiential knowledge opposes some of the black and white authority often afforded to the law, suggesting that knowledge about grey areas is difficult to articulate in an ‘acceptable’ way. Chapters Five and Six showed how consent was commonly constructed, by educators and young people, in binary terms, with a focus on giving and getting, legal definitions of consent and rape. It is often taught through extreme examples, rather than ordinary and mundane occurrences of sexual violation. The literature review reflected that contemporary understandings of consent are affected by a range of factors including the policing of the law, and feminist and equality activism for reform, culminating in a legalistic understanding of consent. Yet findings suggest there is no reason for pedagogy to be so tightly tied to the law (Gilbert, 2017). Critical engagement with the grey areas is important, recognising that there is no ‘timeless’ and absolutely ‘correct’ answer to questions of consent. The following provides a short summary of each empirical chapter, followed by a discussion of the key themes ambiguity, risk, power and awkwardness and considers how educators can change the story about consent to be relevant to young people’s everyday lives.

Chapter Five drew heavily on data gathered from and with 12 practitioners who are responsible for ‘sex education’, providing observations and analysis of the tensions that can occur when teaching about consent. It noted some limitations and constraints that educators, working in different contexts, experience when opening up conversations and addressing ‘what if?’ questions associated with the complex realities of sexual negotiation. The chapter explained that young men, in particular, are anxious to establish what counts as legally acceptable or unacceptable. It also captured the possibilities and risks associated with teaching beyond the binary of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and consent/rape. Building on my own experience of teaching and the contributions of practitioner participants, this chapter suggested that controlled risk taking and engaging with grey areas are meaningful and effective (if contentious) ways to teach about sexual consent. Lastly, it suggested that difficult conversations and pedagogic practices which

deconstruct consent, enable young people to develop more critical and situated understandings of sexual negotiation, something that was confirmed in the following chapter.

Chapter Six reflected on the process of learning about consent using data collected with young people. Here, I analysed the consistent ways in which consent was constructed as binary in abstract discussions. Participants frequently referred to the legal age of consent, but they also identified a variety of qualities above and beyond age that mattered when it comes to making decisions about sex. It was clear from discussions that sexual decision making is socially and culturally mediated and that participants understood this. The chapter showed that sexual consent is a problematic and ambiguous term and that 'sexual negotiation' may provide a better terminology to expand understandings of consent as an outcome of situated negotiation. I highlighted the significance of age and experience for learning and emphasised how the diversity of participants allowed me to gain insight into a variety of sexual cultures. This chapter ultimately showed how we learn from one another, through conversations, storytelling, and relational sexual experiences. An original 'continuum of sexual agency' was introduced as a way of talking about and exploring sexual experiences that are more situated and relatable to everyday sexual practices and which attends to young people's avoidance of certain categories and labels. By developing and using the continuum, and other interactive activities, I further demonstrated that deconstructing consent as part of an educational session enables constructive dialogic opportunities for learning.

The final empirical chapter drew out the themes of discomfort and ambiguity that were present in the previous chapters. Here awkwardness was used as a lens through which to understand practices of consent and sexual negotiation. It was acknowledged that adolescence and youth is often considered an 'awkward age'; young people are caught between being constructed as children (who need to be protected from sex) and adults (who should be able to make responsible decisions about and during sex). This chapter illustrated that awkwardness is a useful way of conceptualising transgressions and the potential for practices to shift as a result. Here it was noted how the act of explicitly seeking consent or articulating one's desires was viewed as awkward and disruptive. By understanding how this is seen to 'break the flow' it is then possible to re-frame consent, and sexual negotiation as something that flows awkwardly with a variable direction of travel. I suggested that experience enables people with the situated knowledge to understand and embody the generative potential of embracing awkwardness, holding ambiguity and recognising ambivalence. The concluding argument of this chapter was

that 'awkwardness' needs to become part of the sexual stories that are told, both in SRE and other contexts.

Before moving on to a discussion of these findings it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this work. The significance of consent for SRE has been addressed with limited reference to pornography and 'sexting'. These are two important factors that do influence how young people learn about sexual negotiation. However, they did not come up in research conversations, so are not directly addressed in this Thesis. Despite this, there is a need to recognise that both pornography (by depicting sexual interaction that is devoid of awkward communication or any explicit consent and negotiation) and digital communication (by reducing social cues and blurring line between public and private) compound issues of ambiguity, awkwardness and ambivalence when it comes to negotiating sexual relations (Clarke, 2018). There is more work to be done on digital sexuality and young people that goes beyond the risks associated with young people 'sexting', instead acknowledging how these new technologies provide new modes of being sexual (McGeeney and Hanson, 2018). Academic and educational practice in this area needs more nuance. It must be approached in a way that resists victim blaming and instead considers the ethics of privacy and image distribution (Clarke, 2018).

Furthermore, this project was small scale. While participants came from a variety of groups, the findings from this work may not be generalisable across all young people, or educators. A number of the young people who put themselves forward to participate in and plan the research were especially interested in and in some cases experienced in talking about sex and sex education. For example the young people in the groups involved in phase one of the research tended to be well educated and well informed with previous training, mentoring or education around sexuality, sexual health and consent. Some qualitative research traditions would highlight this as an issue of selection bias (Robinson, 2013). Sampling strategies in both qualitative and quantitative research involve a "homogeneity/heterogeneity trade-off" (Robinson, 2013:29) which affects the generalisability of findings. PAR however does not prioritise 'generalisability' (Fine et al. 2001) and by its nature often includes and is designed by people with experience of or interest in the collectively identified topic. While selection bias could be identified in this project, I am interested in exploring the benefits and challenges of homogeneity/heterogeneity in different ways. For instance, could this project have been co-produced with such vision and ease had the groups involved in the initial stages not already been interested in sexual health, wellbeing and consent?

Where self-selection and prior knowledge were helpful in the planning phase of the research we collectively acknowledged that this research and action/educational elements of the project could be enriched by involving younger and more diverse young people. We also felt that it was important to capture data from young people with a range of knowledge about and interest in consent, thus extending the transformative and educational potential of the research. As noted in Chapter Four action was taken that enabled me to work at the youth club, and the school. This enabled me to capture the opinion and learning experiences of young people who were initially un-interested in or had never “really heard about ‘consent’” (Shanella, YC) before the research intervention. Gaining participation from young people at the youth club and school who might not ordinarily self-select into this kind of research was in part due to my prolonged presence at each site. This allowed me, with support from workers, to cultivate interest and participation in research conversations about consent from a more mixed group of participants.

Working with young people from a variety of backgrounds has been a strength but also challenging aspect of this research. It has complicated what it is possible to say about ‘what young people think about consent’, and has provoked me to think more actively about what consent and sexual agency means in different contexts and for different people. This is certainly something that could form the basis of future work in this field. The study accessed a variety of sexual cultures, but the research took place in urban areas where there is good provision for sexual health and SRE. Few participants self-defined as LGBT+ thus the extent to which the findings and conversations relate to LGBT+ young people’s experiences and understandings of consent may be vastly different. This research has found that consent is not a gender-neutral concept; gender and sexuality affect how consent is understood and practiced. Thus, young people who identify in ways that sit outside of heteronormative scripts and practices may have different experiences of what it means to negotiate sex, establish their desires, and manage expectations and judgements from others. Despite these limitations, this work and the recommendations that follow enable a departure from legalistic and binary conceptions of consent. This will allow more inclusive sex education because it focuses not on ‘sex’ and risk but on the ambiguous and awkward realities of sexual communication and negotiation. The following discussion and recommendations are relevant to a wider community of practice.

8.2 Cultivating a culture of consent

This chapter turns now to discuss four cross-cutting themes that have been evident across the preceding empirical chapters. These are ‘experience and risk’, ‘bearing the awkwardness’, ‘hetero-patriarchal norms and expectations’ and ‘beyond the binary’. These themes are interrelated and as such the following section discusses them collectively while also referencing how these findings reflect and build on literature outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Being ‘sexually literate’, in the words of Paul Reynolds and Alison Moore (2018), includes having a vocabulary with which to express and acknowledged one’s desires and boundaries. I suggest this includes the capacity to recognise, articulate and work with awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence as elements of sexual negotiation. This section concludes with reference to the 2017 Social Work Bill’s stipulation for SRE to become mandatory in 2019, arguing that more needs to be done to ensure all young people have access to critical consent education. There are inherent institutional difficulties in delivering reflective and youth-centred education in the mainstream school system, but starting with training for educators is likely to be the most effective way to influence what those teachers deliver in classrooms – or other settings – in the longer term.

In this thesis, learning has been framed as gaining a vocabulary and concepts to help make sense of and critically engage with experiences, or to imagine new possibilities. Education is a right for all children and SRE should not be viewed any differently (Hirst, 2008; Robinson, 2012; Carmody, 2015). It has been argued throughout the thesis that a critical pedagogy approach enhances young people’s sexual competence and provides them with new vocabulary to understand and enact ethical sex, and to speak out about un-ethical encounters. However, to achieve this, educators need to enhance, or also be willing to develop this new vocabulary. This may involve deconstructing definitions and practices they may have previously taken for granted and in some cases recognising their own lack of knowledge or expertise (NCB, 2014). ‘Consent’ is a fairly recent addition to mainstream campaigns and education as a result of feminist advocacy for (women’s) bodily autonomy to be recognised and protected by the law (Beres, 2007; Cahill, 2001; Gavey, 1992; Jackson 1999; Whittington and Thomson, 2018).

A crucial part of the legal context of consent is how consent education is promoted as part of safeguarding agendas which result from increasing awareness of child sexual exploitation, institutionalised sexism and harassment and the exposure of normative practice of sexual violation (Coy et al. 2013; Brady et al. 2017; Gilbert, 2017). Whilst the legal context is often

where consent education starts, it is essential that it does not end there. Sexual health education has historically focused on both practice and outcomes. Yet a focus on the legality of consent foregrounds outcomes and simplifies process at the expense of acknowledging the complexity of sexual negotiation. Authors argue that the purpose of SRE has been to cultivate young people's sexual competence in relation to avoiding risks (Hirst, 2008, 2012; Ingham 2005, Alldred and David 2007, Brook 2014). A critical pedagogic approach would suggest that young people learn most effectively from exploring, taking risks and building their experience and confidence, rather than by being given abstract binary definitions which do not relate to the nuances of their own experience (Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018; Christensen and Mikkelsen, 2008).

This research has highlighted the value of talking more openly about grey areas, social pressure and expectation when exploring sexual consent with young people. Arguably, an intense focus on extreme examples of sexual violence can obscure the everyday character of sexual wellbeing, sexual agency and competence inadvertently undermining young people's capacity to make 'safe' decisions and to seek out support where needed. This research contributes to an important body of work which challenges reactionary policies and practice agendas. Despite the Gillick ruling, parents' interests and adult concerns are prioritised resulting in sex and relationships education that is not 'fit for purpose' and which does not respond to young people's calls for a more youth centred curriculum (Ofsted, 2013; Alldred and David, 2007).

My contention is that educators should not settle for enabling children and young people to 'protect themselves'. A more ambitious agenda for SRE is to equip young people with the knowledge and competence to navigate different encounters and contexts in a way that is right for them. This research suggests that SRE can contribute towards a more ethical sexual culture, and that this would be facilitated by an expansion in our understanding of safeguarding to include this more positive and proactive project

Sexual learning and understanding 'consent' occurs through formal and informal conversations, but also through experience. Acknowledging this is a key step for cultivating a more communicative sexual culture and encouraging people to develop the skills and competence to negotiate an encounter that is 'good' for all involved. However, this stands in tension with public health and educational discourses which seek to delay sexual debut and advocate for informed decision making (Hirst, 2008; 2013). Where there is an educational focus on developing competence, this competence remains untested and unquestioned in most learning spaces, because personal experience is often avoided. The literature review showed that the notion of

sexual competence exists in public and sexual health discourse (Wellings et al. 2005; Hirst, 2008; Palmer et al. 2016). However, the young people in this study were more likely to think about what makes individuals and couples 'ready' for negotiating sex and relationships. Both these conceptualisations of being able to consent are somewhat static and do not acknowledge the relational aspects of encounters. An educational focus on developing individual competence arguably overlooks the relational and situated nature of sexual decision making, which I argue is key to understanding sexual negotiation.

Taking a critical pedagogic approach to SRE would raise questions about what it means to co-produce and research sexual knowledge with young people. Experiential knowledge is highly valued by young people, but talking about and reflecting on it is generally avoided in formal teaching spaces. Thus, it is difficult to imagine how educators might ethically approach situated experiences and deliver education that promotes sexual exploration and reflective learning from personal experience. It is difficult for educators and youth practitioners to promote sexual exploration as a form of education. This is something sex positive educators are at times criticised for, on grounds of corrupting young people's innocence (Alldred and David, 2007). However this research suggests that grounding discussion in situated scenarios or responding to young people's experiences is valuable. Being sexual with one another and exploring desires and boundaries can enable people to develop experience and subsequently learn from and apply it to future interactions. Hirst (2008) found that (in)experience affects what is considered to be good and fulfilling. A number of older and more sexually experienced participants in this study highlighted how experience had provided and provoked much of their sexual learning. They noted how their expectations have changed, and their confidence to 'take risks' and competently negotiate sexual encounters in a way that disrupts gendered expectations continues to develop with time. Yet they also noted that they lacked spaces to learn from others and acknowledge when things went 'wrong'. This would require, as Jen Gilbert (2017) advocates, making exploration, risk taking, and learning from mistakes part of the educational message. The findings in this thesis suggest that much needs to be done to provide productive spaces and training for educators to do this kind of work.

The focus of SRE often shifts in response to the moral panic of the moment (Carmody, 2015; Thomson, 2004;). Weeks (2007) and Waites (2004) have both shown how understandings of consent and sexual negotiation have shifted over the last 50 years or so. A continuing shift has resulted in and from grass roots campaigning and awareness raising, changes to legislation, policy and education. Presently, the push back against institutionalised sexism, harassment, and

exploitation has, ironically, provoked an educational agenda that is somewhat heavy-handed and focussed more on 'getting consent' and 'getting it right' (Coy et al. 2013) rather engaging with nuances and complexity (Carmody, 2015; Gilbert 2017). In response to the recent Social Work Bill, Brook's new Head of Education has advocated a need for "brave teachers" who are willing to critically engage with issues of consent and negotiation (Corteen, 2017). This style of teaching and learning is uncomfortable – and often awkward – especially as there is limited training for teachers. While it is important for teachers to 'be brave' and bare the awkwardness and difficulties associated with critical sex education, this cannot be left to individual teachers at the expense of addressing the structural and institutional constraints within which they work. As Alldred and David highlighted in 2007: "The emotionally unhealthy dynamics in many British secondary schools creates cultures of blame and accusation, so that teachers are reluctant to take responsibility for, or management positions on, issues perceived as risky [...] because they feel threatened and are fearful of potential moral outrage and approbation" (169). Over the last 10 years there is little to suggest that these school dynamics are changing for the better. Thus, it is important to address sex education at the levels of policy and practice and to look critically at the institutions that deliver SRE as well as the content of this education. While teachers need to be brave, so does policy and people in national, local and school governance and leadership positions. For example, the Citizenship teacher at the school site, where some of this research was conducted, was able to use her leadership position to seek support and provide consent education with space for critical exploration.

Numerous scholars and practitioners have noted that SRE is limited when it only focuses on 'risks' associated with hetero sex and intervention and which advocate instead for a 'sex positive' or sex critical approach (Sanjakdar and Yip, 2018; Alldred and David, 2007; McGeeney, 2013). One argument is that the term 'risk' should be reframed so that the focus is not on avoiding the risk of STI's, unintended pregnancy and harm but rather on the risk that the sexual encounter may not pleasurable, enjoyable, or wanted by all those involved. In doing this it becomes necessary to reconsider what counts as a 'successful' encounter. By suggesting that people learn from taking risks, it is also important that sex positive and critical sex education engages more with the process of exploration and how people can learn from what did and did not work for them to ensure that they do not contribute to unethical sex in the future. This will feel risky, but it is important to recognise that youthful sexuality is, by definition, a product of inexperience (Hirst, 2008), so there must be space for things to go wrong and for people to talk about this openly without the immediate fear of labels such as rape and sexual violence (Gilbert, 2017) and the current consequences of these.

If educators are being encouraged to take risks, 'be brave' and critically engage with sexual consent in their teaching, they will require support which acknowledges and enables this uneasy shift from 'public health pragmatism' (Thomson, 2004) and risk-centred education toward a more critical, exploratory and positive pedagogy. Moira Carmody's work on sexual ethics (2015), and NCB guidance for teachers (2014) acknowledges that this is a difficult and revealing task, but an important one. Jen Gilbert (2017) highlights the magnitude of this task.

We may ask too much of sex education – we want it to address the complicated scene of sexual decision-making and prepare young people to recognise the structural inequalities that make sex riskier for some than others; to protect and nurture girls' sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure; to notice how some young people's sexuality is seen as in need of protection and others is seen as threatening; and, in the midst of these lessons on social inequality, to hold open a space for the surprise of sexuality, a sense that even within a wanted sexual encounter, unexpected things can occur.

(Gilbert, 2017:277-278)

Risk and learning need reframing for sex education to fulfil what Gilbert outlines above. Yet the educators whose conversations and concerns contributed to Chapter Five expressed anxiety about how to do this, particularly acknowledging the limited resources and time they have to approach these complex topics. This reframing will initially produce a period of awkwardness and discomfort for both educators and young people. However, as Kotsko (2010) notes, awkwardness precedes change. It is important to lean into this discomfort to cultivate a change in how sex is taught, talked about and practiced. The data and analysis suggest that awkwardness is not something to avoid, but rather something to work through. It can be a key part of breaking the silence and destabilising hetero-patriarchal norms that persists in the way that people speak about and practice sex and negotiation. Kotsko advocates that awkwardness is a relational experience based on assumed social orders and moment of transgression where these social orders become visible and it is clear that they do not 'work' for most people. By understanding the expectations that link to performativity, power and pleasure it is possible to reframe and destabilise some of these assumptions in a way that foregrounds exploratory sexual practice and communication rather than affirmation or rejection. This needs to be a key focus in future consent education.

All the empirical chapters in this thesis identified and highlighted the gendered nature of consent and how hetero-patriarchal expectations about sex and gendered roles persist in a variety of contemporary youth cultures. A common thread across the fifth and sixth chapters related to

observations about how young men, and young women responded differently to consent education. As the practitioners noted boys are particular concerned about the legal side of consent. This is understandable as what is seen as, and often portrayed as normal may be illegal. Contrastingly, girls were often keen to explore ambiguity in order to escape assumptions of passivity. This research found that young people, particularly those with limited sexual and relationship experience, view the process of seeking explicit consent to sexual interaction and establishing their own and the desires of another as awkward, undesirable and disruptive to an imagined process of sexual interaction flowing seamlessly from 'start to finish'. The idea of 'flow', is produced from heteronormative narratives involving a man leading an encounter and a woman going along with, or offering resistance in the form of rejection (Holland et al. 1998; Jackson, 1999; Alldred and David, 2007; Coy et al. 2013; Carmody and Ovenden, 2013). This heteronormative flow was present in the conversations with all participants and it provided fertile ground for critical reflection and rethinking how consent might occur, and thus how to do sexual negotiation in more ethical and non-gendered ways.

Much of the 'awkwardness' participants attributed to seeking explicit consent related to discomfort around transgressing heteronormative (sexual) roles. For example, by naming and exposing their desires and expectations. Theories of consent, so far, tend to assume that negotiation happens privately between two people (or in some instances more) in a given encounter and this does not apply so well to youth cultures – nor to more digital cultures. They also assume that there is a seeker and a giver of consent and are based on an assumption that the consent is to 'travel' together in a specified direction towards 'sex' (Butler, 2012). Many of the common place messages in contemporary consent education continue to reproduce gendered expectations around giving and getting which map onto ideas that men initiate and lead sexual interaction and that women respond to this – being seen as the gate keepers and responsible for looking after their own sexual safety and reputation (Coy et al. 2013; Kehiliy, 2002; Gilbert, 2017) which ironically challenges some of the "conventions of femininity" (Holland et al. 1991:143). Thus, sex education needs to address and advocate for changes in gendered expectations about who wants sex and how this is communicated. To do this, it is necessary to go beyond the give/get binary and think more about desire, communication and the ways in which people are judged, according to gender, race, class, sexual orientation and age, for displaying sexual competence.

Many scholars have pointed to the difficulties of being clear and explicit about sex. Indeed, there are many 'sex advice' books that convey all kinds of different messages about sex and yet,

according to Meg-John Barker's review of over 100 books, blogs and articles there is little if any time dedicated to discussing consent (Barker, Gill and Harvey, 2018). Expanding mainstream understandings of consent to go beyond the binary and embrace ambiguity is certainly an important part of cultivating a more ethical sexual culture. Moving beyond ideas of give/get, rape/consent and yes/no to talking and teaching about the nuances of this could contribute to breaking down gendered expectations and ideas that contribute to victim blaming/passivity and silence around desire and violation. This research has found that experience is a crucial variable in how young people are able to acknowledge and then actively disrupt gendered norms that reproduce expectations about if and how one should communicate about sex. Presently, educational messages and terminology do not map onto or resonate with young people's everyday experiences and understandings of consent and sexual negotiation in practice. Their experiences are shrouded in ambiguity that is both a product of assumptions, but also produced through fear of making things explicit and taking the 'risk' of checking in to see what is about to happen and whether it is wanted by all involved.

This discussion has shown that education, and youth provision for sex education requires a change of vocabulary which attends to ambiguity, ambivalence and awkwardness and allows for a more expanded model of consent and violation. The continuum developed in Chapter Six, captures the ways in which the young people in this study spoke about and defined different sexual encounters and processes of negotiation and coercion. It could become a useful model to address many of the themes discussed above. Throughout this thesis I have spoken about sexual consent, negotiation, rape and sexual violence, yet it is arguable that the most useful terms for enabling more open and therefore educational conversations about ethical sex are the terms 'negotiation' and 'violation'. These two terms bridge many people's understandings of active consent and rape and enable conversations that link more to 'ordinary sex' and violation. Rather than continuing to invalidate women (and men's) experience of sexual violence (Kelly and Radford, 1990) it is possible that expanding vocabulary to address grey areas may encourage people to name and validate 'bad' experiences without having to use terms such as rape and violence, which initially they may not feel comfortable with. Some feminist scholars and activists would likely push back against this suggestion. For example, there is much discussion and backlash occurring in response to Germaine Greer's forthcoming book 'On Rape' (In Press, 2018). Some activists and feminists are anxious that hard-fought definitions and laws around recognising rape are being eroded. Given the years of campaigning that went into establishing a legal standard of consent and recognition of rape this concern is understandable. However many people feel excluded from and uncomfortable with the binary language of rape and

consent and it is important to create a 'way in' to the consent conversation that can be inclusive and productive rather than exclusionary. This is something that a continuum of consent and conversations about sexual ethics could encourage.

8.2.1 The case for the consent continuum

The key themes from this research suggest that it is important to acknowledge the difference between everyday exploration of sexuality and the boundaries of the law. It is difficult to admit that explorations will go wrong, and this may not (need) to go to court. However it is important that people recognise and learn from mistakes, rather than burying them (Gilbert 2017, Hirst 2008). This is not to say that people should 'learn from rape'. However, experiences of violation differ. When people avoid labelling things as 'bad', 'wrong' or 'rape', there is little room to consider how violation, boundary crossing or simply unsatisfactory sex can be avoided in the future. This section of the conclusion makes a case for why the continuum of sexual agency can provide a useful bridge from theory into practice. It can scaffold conversations that teachers are apprehensive about but which young people view as an important, and currently missing, element of SRE.

Firstly, I must clarify this is called the continuum a 'continuum of sexual agency', and not simply a 'continuum of consent'³⁴ to recognise the interplay between structure and agency and to follow the thinking that agency and consent are the result or product of a relational and contextual moment. People's agency will always be constrained and in relation to the other actors in the scenario, and so is a person's ability to 'do other' and not follow an expected gendered and yes/no script. This also develops from Liz Kelly's (1988, 1993) concept of the continuum of sexual violence where she acknowledges sexual violence on a continuum. It is important not to focus only on extreme examples of sexual violence which isolate certain instances at the expense of acknowledging smaller every day acts of violence and coercion (1993).

³⁴ It has been labelled 'the consent continuum' in the Brook learning modules for simplicity.

Figure 24 Consent continuum (without definitions) By Onclick and Brook



Participants in this study echoed the findings from Coy et al. (2014), Brady et al. (2017), Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) amongst others and were clear that there is a difference between coercive and invasive sex and passively going along with sex, in some cases because a person desired the outcome of sex, or did not feel strongly adverse to going with the flow. There is an inevitable tension here about how to talk about and acknowledge awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence that is part and parcel of sexual interaction and that which is the result of subordination, coercion and a lack of agency, or lack of ‘room to negotiate’ (Palmer, 2017). It is important to separate these elements but acknowledge the uneasy space between incompetence, passive expressions of consent and ‘non-consensual’ encounters. The law attempts to separate this by having a legal age of consent, but also by tolerating consensual sex between 13-15 year olds and by having different sexual offences. Yet the ways these are defined are clumsy and open to interpretation. Mainstream representations of rape and sexual violence obscure the different ways in which people could manage, report and learn from moments of accidental, as well as intentional violation. By opening conversations about how to acknowledge, manage and later speak about and learn from these more questionable encounters, it may be possible to de-normalise passivity and thus contribute to a shift in how successful sexual encounters are constructed.

This nuance is what the continuum of sexual agency captures. It provides useful scaffolding for these more difficult conversations by offering a way of speaking about and viewing sex, consent and violation that is not absolute. The continuum shows how rape myths still characterise the ways that young people speak about rape and that victim blaming still needs tackling, yet it will enable educators and researchers to engage more constructively with ambiguity and the ‘what if’ questions that come up in conversations about consent, without having to immediately fall back on the law. It encourages people to consider the process, and outcome of sexual negotiation and to critically observe the norms and expectation that restrict how different

encounters may play out. It would also enable people to think more critically about how different experiences and presentations of negotiation are judged by others and take an approach that promotes sexual ethics, rather than foregrounding legal definitions and discourses. This has been captured in feedback from the Brook learn module on consent.³⁵

The consent continuum seemed to capture a much better picture of consent and the grey areas. It's great to teach young people about verbal and non-verbal consent so dynamically.

(Educator feedback on Brook learn Consent module)

As a teaching tool, the continuum enables 'risky' conversations, yet it is clear that some encounters will be viewed as more or less ethical. The continuum also illustrates that experiences can move up and down and that what is 'successful' for one person or in one encounter may shift and change according to the context. It can hold the potential that encounter's may be 're-categorise' over time and as a person's sexual competence develops. This continuum has potential to contribute further to feminist theories of sex and sexual violence. However, the key contribution of this continuum and study is its practical application to teaching that will enhance people's vocabulary around sex and sexual violation and enable conversations about the more nuanced and messy process of 'ordinary' sexual negotiation.

8.3 Contributing to a curriculum for consent

The findings and discussion from this research can speak directly to elements of last-minute amendments to the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which seeks to ensure SRE is mandatory from September 2019. However, there are a number of concerns and caveats raised in the Bill about the need for SRE to be age, culturally or community-appropriate (Greening, 2017), which findings from this research suggest it will be important to challenge. The Bill states that although SRE will be compulsory in all schools, parents will still have the right to remove their children from these lessons. Thus, it would be timely to enhance and mobilise the Gillick

³⁵ The continuum has been taken up as key activity for Brook's online training resources for educators. I have collaborated with Brook, On Click, Ester McGeeney, Rachel Thomson and Ben Fincham to use findings from this research in training and educational resources. The continuum was one element of this research that the team thought would help teachers to open up conversation about consent in a useful way. In developing the module, much attention was given to how the continuum can be used to scaffold conversations about ambiguity, awkwardness and ambivalence in a way that give teachers the confidence to take risks and explore grey areas, but also provides them with some safety and facts to fall back on if they feel they cannot answer a question.

principle and the UNCRC to affirm and prioritise young people's own rights to access information, education and to explore their sexuality safely. Schools in particular need to take the influence they have seriously in contributing to a more ethical sexual culture. To do this, they must recognise young people as sexual citizens who are entitled to information that will help them to make informed decision and be reflective about their experiences.

The Bill, and various responses from educational bodies, highlights attention to 'age-appropriate' and 'culturally sensitive' education (Puffet, 2017). Whilst these are relevant factors, they should not be used as a reason to avoid teaching these topics critically and in depth. Teaching can be done, as illustrated in Chapters Five and Six, in a way that prioritises young peoples' rights and is not experienced as 'culturally inappropriate'. For instance this research found that young people from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds were interested in, and enjoyed, having conversations about sex and consent. They saw the value of learning about it even if they might not be engaging in sex, romantic or intimate relationships yet. As Robinson (2012) and Waites (2005) note, the education system has a responsibility for ensuring that children and young people have access to all the information they need to fulfil and make the most of their sexual citizenship.

This illustrates that young people are interested in and understand more about the ethics of negotiation than they are commonly credited with in media and policy discourse (Gunter and Schweiger, 2017). Popular culture provides all kinds of examples, scenarios and messages about sex and relationships, so teachers might find comfort in the fact they are only one part of a web of educational sources. Positive SRE can provide spaces for critical discussion and myth busting and ensure that young people have exposure to messages about sex and negotiation which support them to think critically about what consent means to them, in their own lives and why.

Despite advocating a need to move from talking and teaching about 'consent' toward 'sexual negotiation' it is important to acknowledge that any education, training and resources in this field will have more uptake if done under the heading of 'consent' due to its recent popularity. Consent has become a key term in educational policy and, as outlined above, is a key topic for new SRE curricula. It is important that the work from this thesis contributes to the 'consent conversation' rather than running parallel to it.

8.3.1 Who can do this work?

Improving SRE and enabling a more ethical sexual culture will involve pushing boundaries and taking risks. It has been well documented that young people learn about sex and sexuality from a variety of sources ranging from formal education, to friends and family, 'the media' and pornography (Lear, 1995; Marston et al. 2004; Lader, 2009; Stone & Ingham, 2006; Srianganathan et al. 2010; Brook 2014). At present youth workers and external specialist educators are well placed to deliver SRE and take the 'risks' associated with opening up conversations and working in a more participatory and critical way. However, this work is something that school teachers will have to deliver from 2019 and the dynamic will be different due to their ongoing relationships with the students under their care. As noted, schools are not currently the ideal institutional setting for this kind of work (McGeeney 2013; Alldred and David, 2007; Kehily, 2002; Alldred 2018). They do not model consensual decisions making, nor do they celebrate dissent and resistance - something that is important to practice in order to resist the norms and expectation that maintain a hetero-patriarchal sexual status quo. Yet schools are the only place that young people have to attend, and it is possible to develop a curriculum that ensures consistent, regular and relevant SRE. The Ofsted report 'Not yet good enough' (2013) that was outlined in the literature review identifies a need for more confident and trained teachers to deliver SRE as part of a whole school approach to safeguarding.

Brook's assertion that in the longer-term it is important that school teachers deliver SRE and that external specialists are employed to enhance rather than replace the provision (Corteen, 2017) is an important one. It is likely, in the context of cuts, that many schools will not be able to employ specialist input, so it is important that teachers can access training and resources to deliver the curriculum. The roles of educators in schools, and other institutions of formal and informal learning, is important and they need equipping with the vocabulary and confidence to approach the topic of consent critically with young people. Thus, cultivating a more ethical sexual culture is an intergenerational project. Teachers and adults more broadly need to learn from and develop a vocabulary that will help them to teach and exemplify consent with children and young people.

In order to equip teachers in particular with the information and confidence to approach consent more critically it is necessary for training and resources that champion critical and youth centred research are available. These resources should seek to reduce the concerns educators have about acknowledging grey areas and moving away from a legal framework of consent. Drawing on the findings from this research, the thesis concludes with five recommendations for practice that can be applied in educational settings. Many of these have been put into action through an

impact acceleration grant and project to develop digital training and teaching resources for educators.³⁶

8.4 Recommendations for Educational Practice

1. Educational and youth settings need to develop policies and encourage practices that enable the critical exploration of sexual consent.

This may involve bringing in external educators who are more familiar and comfortable with talking about sex and employing critical pedagogy. It is also important that teachers in schools have access to good quality training and resources that enable them to approach this key topic with confidence in a way that is meaningful to young people. To do this, educators, institutions and policy need to reframe risk and encourage a more critical approach to the subject (Corteen, 2017).

All young people should have access to education about consent, and schools and governing bodies should make brave policies that do not allow parents to remove their children from SRE. It is possible and necessary for young people of different ages, backgrounds and cultures to learn about and discuss the meaning of consent. Any policies that are developed should champion young people's rights to education and develop their citizenship over and above parents' rights or viewing parents (rather than their children) as the 'consumer' of education.

2. Educational programmes about consent need to embrace ambiguity and go beyond the binary

It is vital that teaching about consent acknowledges the limits of the legal binary of rape/consent and the simplicity of common definitions. It is important for young people to know about the legal ages of consent, and what is considered 'non-consensual' sex. However, facts and laws alone will not help them to negotiate consent in everyday interactions. The legal framework makes consent and rape seem very clear cut, but in reality consent and sexual negotiation can be awkward and ambiguous. This is something that educators might find uncomfortable but this research shows there is significant educational value for engaging with 'grey areas' because these are the spaces young people more often inhabit.

³⁶ An overview of how key themes have been converted into digital training materials can be found in Appendix O.

3. Challenging gendered roles and addressing power and pleasure

Effective teaching about consent needs to address the complexities of negotiation. It is important to acknowledge that negotiation always involves power relations and we need to provide examples of how to navigate, give and read different desires and signals. This research has found that using definition and scenario tasks to think about consent in different contexts can enable focused discussion about the possibilities and limits of sexual decision making in different contexts and according to individual characteristics. It is particularly important to consider how age, gender and socio-economic background may affect someone's ability and motives for negotiating.

4. Use a continuum to acknowledge and address 'grey areas'

The continuum of sexual agency/consent developed in this research directly reflects how young people commonly talk about and label different kinds of sexual encounters or violation. Used as a teaching tool, this continuum provides a useful way of scaffolding conversations that educators might find difficult. The continuum and scenarios that have been adapted into teaching resources on Brook learn enable teachers to identify the limitations of yes/no, good/bad models of consent but also leaves room to manoeuvre when questions or discussion turn to examples that lack clarity.

5. Teach beyond the binary of 'yes' and 'no'

Education which aims to cultivate a more consensual sexual culture must consider how communication and negotiation happens, using real life examples that are both sexual and non-sexual. Educators need to explore what negotiation looks like that is verbal, non-verbal, explicit and implicit. This can help to develop young peoples' vocabulary for recognising and describing the range of thoughts and feelings that someone might have when thinking about, negotiating and doing sex – and how this might interact with those of another/others. It is important to acknowledge that awkwardness is a key part of the process for negotiation and working together to find an outcome that is good/ok for all involved.

Educators who wish to develop some knowledge and confidence for teaching in a way that attends to the above should access the free online Brook Learn training modules which also offer free recourses and lesson plans. The Brook Learn course on consent has been developed from this research and provides a timely and accessible way to think about the nuances of consent in a way that is appropriate for formal and informal educational settings.

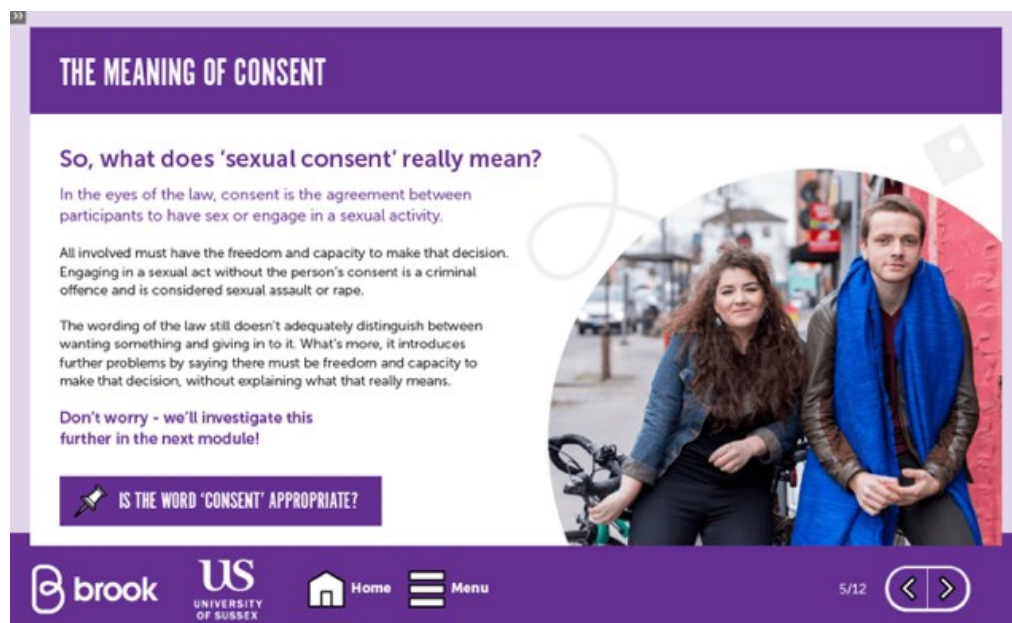


Figure 25 example of Brook Learn course taken from module 1 'The meaning of consent'

8.5 Where next?

The recommendations above are the result of participatory work with over 100 young people and 12 practitioners. The co-production and collaborative nature of this project has been a strength, as well as challenging aspect of the research. The applied nature of the work has enabled the findings to quickly contribute to educational resources. However, there is still more theoretical and practice-based work to be done in this area. It is important to encourage a departure from legalistic and binary conceptions of consent and enable conversations about ethics and the ambiguous and awkward realities of sexual communication and negotiation. This research raises questions about how this can be done within societal and institutional structures that reproduce intergenerational, gendered and racialised inequalities. More exploration into sexual agency is a vital part of intellectual and educational agendas for promoting a more ethical sexual culture. It may be possible to build on existing work about sexual competence by applying practice theory to 'sex', in a way that may perhaps contribute to changes in policy and educational content that is more youth centred and attends to intersecting axes of oppression.

As outlined in Chapter Seven, awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence are pervasive, but not always problematic. Stevi Jackson has said that 'it's what we say, not what we do behind closed doors' that matters when people are teaching and talking about sex with others (1999). This suggests that as long as academics and practitioners working in the field of education enhance a discourse around positive, pleasurable and ethical sexual interaction then changes in sexual practice will occur. Having spent four years talking and researching about sexual consent, I suggest it is important to move beyond this statement. While strengthening a discourse of more ethical and communicative sex needs people to 'talk the talk', it also requires people to walk the walk and share their shortcomings and awkward experiences. Young people in this research responded well to practitioners and peers sharing experiences where sexual interactions and attempts at 'doing good consent' were awkward, did not go to plan or where they experienced rejection. I suggest that campaigns and educational programmes that present an 'ideal' example of enthusiastic and explicitly communicative consent need to be complimented by messages that acknowledge how difficult and awkward navigating consent can be for everyone (not just young people). Young people in particular need reassurance that people do sometimes get sexual negotiation wrong and can talk about and learn from this. Research and practice, that provide space for, and encourage this are of particular importance in the present socio-political climate.

While this project has worked with and responded to the knowledge and interests of young people aged 13-25 it is important for future research to address questions of consent, decision making and sexuality to younger age groups still. Children and young people learn how and when to say or perform 'no' in ways that are socially acceptable from early ages, thus it is essential to explore how dissent, resistance and consent are cultivated and restricted throughout a person's childhood. Judith Butler highlights the interplay between vulnerability and resistance (2012) and so work that seeks to understand how this is framed and enabled within the context of SRE and more broadly would contribute to a more critical pedagogy for sex education.

In addition to rethinking consent and dissent the process and findings from this project have highlighted some of the difficulties of doing participatory and youth lead research using existing structures of research support and ethics. During this project, it has become clear that contemporary research guidelines and processes to gain research funding or ethical approval are rooted in traditional and restrictive ideas about what constitutes research and therefore how to conduct it ethically. The film project and work with the citizenship class has highlighted

the challenges involved in participatory work where anonymity is impossible and where the researcher has to develop plans and think on their feet.

Participatory approaches should be seen as representing a different stance within qualitative research (Fine et al. 2001), providing a valid alternative to positivist research by focussing on the co-creation of experiences and findings rather than on generating generalisable data. It is important to work with those directly affected by the topics under research – particularly if the aims of the research are to develop solutions and recommendations for changes in practice and provision. Participatory research is a “political statement as well as a theory of knowledge” (Reason and Bradbury, 2011:10) and as such is personally challenging and a ‘learning curve’ for all involved. Academics argue for the validity of situated knowledges shaped by marginalised positions relating to gender, race, disability and sexual orientation. Yet academics often struggle to extend this to age, with younger researchers and children and young people rarely being able to set the agenda and to directly communicate their situated knowledges to those in power. The project described above was developed and designed *with* young people in order to ensure that the research, findings and outputs can usefully reflect their agendas, interests and everyday experiences and concerns. Participatory approaches to research *with* young people is vital to challenging adult and risk informed agendas in research and policy. More work is emerging which seeks to recognise and address this and I hope this thesis and work that follows it can contribute to this.

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Appendix A

Summary of Brook

The following information has been summarised from brooks website and can be viewed in full at www.brook.org.uk

What is Brook?

Brook is the UK's largest young people's sexual health charity. They have been providing sexual health services, support and advice to young people under the age of 25 for 50 years.

According to their charitable constitution Brook exists to:

promote the health, particularly sexual health, of young people and those most vulnerable to sexual ill health through providing information, education and outreach, counselling, confidential clinical and medical services, professional advice and training.

Brook's mission is to ensure that all children and young people have access to high quality, free and confidential sexual health services, as well as education and support. To enable them to make informed, active choices about their personal and sexual relationships so they can enjoy their sexuality without harm.

Brook Services:

Clinical and support services

Education and training

Advocacy, campaigning, lobbying and influencing

Brook offer these services in 20 regions throughout the UK.

The clinical and support services offered by Brook work within a quality assurance. Everything they do is informed and designed with the help of young people. They run 'Ask Brook', a confidential web chat and interactive text service which acts as a signposting service to inform young people about sexual health services in their area. It provides basic information and support on sexual health topics such as contraception, emergency contraception, pregnancy testing, abortion and sexually transmitted infections.

Brook seeks to influence opinion formers and the public about the reality and complexity of young people's lives, and to encourage a climate and culture in which young people's sexual health issues can be discussed openly and positively. They run training for professionals and actively lobby and campaign for sexual health services and sex and relationships education to continue improving. Brook also produces a range of publications for use by teachers, parents, youth workers and young people themselves on a broad range of sexual health issues.

Appendix B

Ethical Review Form

Ethical Review Application (ER/EW99/4) Elsie Whittington	
Project Title	Participatory processes with young people: an exploration of consent
Status	Approved
Email	E.Whittington@sussex.ac.uk
Phone No.	07865700483
Applicant Status	PG (Research)
Department	Social Work and Social Care
Supervisor	Thomson, Rachel
Project Start Date	16-Aug-2015
Project End Date	11-Sep-2017
External Funding in place	Yes
External Collaborators	No
Funder/Project Title	
Name of Funder	Brook Young people

Project Description

This research project will take a participatory action research approach to examine the structures and impact of youth participation at the sexual health charity Brook young people (hereafter Brook). This will be done through working with a group of young people on the identified issue of sexual consent. This research project comprises of two key stages.

The first will consist of running a six month participatory action research project on consent as part of Brook's participation provision. We will recruit between 6 and 12 young volunteers to participate in this project. I will seek to co-produce an account of sexual consent and negotiation that is rooted in young people's experiences and understandings by collaborating on a 'social action project' supported by Brook. This project idea has been developed collaboratively with the young volunteers at Brook and their participation workers. The project will be entitled 'My rules' and aims to develop 'everyday interactive ways of thinking about consent that are more practical than theoretical. They will have an emphasis on learning your own boundaries and developing interpersonal skills'. We (the young volunteers collaborating with me in this project) expect to make and produce 3 short films that can be used as part of an educational or training resource. The young volunteers who are recruited to take part in the 'my rules' project will be supported by me and the participation team at Brook to develop the project in a way that is meaningful to them and their everyday understandings of consent.

This project has been informed by the principles of PAR which involves the co-production of the research process. The project is underpinned by a robust ethical framework that is informed by the current state of best ethical practice in both research and youth participation as outlined in the ethical frameworks I have consulted in in planning this project such as ESRC guidelines, BSA ethics guidelines, Sussex research governance website, Brook safeguarding and participation policies and the NCB advice on research and working with children and young people.

The second stage of the research involves observation and analysis of the extent to which institutional and individual transformation around consent has or may occur as a result of the 'my rules' participation exercise. It is my intention to use the my rules project as a case study of how and to what extent 'youth participation' within Brook shapes it's institutional agendas and practices. The outcomes, emergent themes and findings from the 'my rules' project will be used as stimuli for interviews and focus groups/workshops with staff in different departments and areas of Brook. These will be arranged through the CEO and training teams in Brook. This approach was used by Ester McGeeney in an ESRC knowledge exchange project to disseminate the findings of her mixed methods research project on good sex to staff throughout Brook (2013).

My research aims and questions relating to this are as follows:

- To what extent do young people have an input in the policies and practice agenda of Brook? (What are the obstacles?) • Can the participation opportunities in Brook provide a space for critical reflection and input into the services Brook delivers?
- How does the organisation's definitions and teaching on consent relate to young people's understandings and negotiations of consent?
- Can findings from the project on consent contribute positively to Brook's work and to the promotion of sexual health?

In order to answer the above questions I expect to employ a variety of methods with staff, practitioners and volunteers within Brook these will be outlined in more detail below. The outcome of this research will form the basis of my PhD this and will also be fed back to Brook to to enable evidence based practice and institutional development.

Ethical Review Form Section A (ER/EW99/4)	
Question	Response
>> Checklist	
A1. Will your study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent or in a dependent position (e.g. people under 18, people with learning difficulties, over-researched groups or people in care facilities)?	Yes
A2. Will participants be required to take part in the study without their consent or knowledge at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places), and / or will deception of any sort be used? Please refer to the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct for further information.	No
A3. Will it be possible to link personal data back to individual participants in any way (this does not include identifying participants from signed consent forms or identity encryption spreadsheets that are stored securely separate from research data).	Yes
A4. Might the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in the everyday life of the participants?	No
A5. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, ethnicity, political behaviour, potentially illegal activities)?	Yes
A6. Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) be administered as part of this study and will any invasive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind will be used?	No
A7. Will your project involve working with any substances and / or equipment which may be considered hazardous?	No
A9. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses, compensation for time or a lottery / draw ticket) be offered to participants?	No
>> Risk Assessment	
A10. If you have answered 'Yes' to ANY of the above questions, your application will be considered as HIGH risk. If however you wish to make a case that your application should be considered as LOW risk please enter the reasons here:	

Ethical Review Form Section C (ER/EW99/4)	
Question	Response
>> Risk Checklist - Participants	
C1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable, or unable to give informed consent, or in a dependent position (e.g. children (under 18), people with learning difficulties, over-researched groups or people in care facilities, including prisons)?	Yes
C1. Is DBS clearance necessary for this project? If yes, please ensure you complete Section C.23a below.	Yes
C3. Will participants be asked to take part in the study without their consent or knowledge at the time (e.g. covert observation of people) or will deception of any sort be involved? Please refer to the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct for further information.	No
C4. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety, or produce humiliation, or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No
C2. Are alcoholic drinks, drugs, placebos or other substances (such as food substances or vitamins) to be administered to the study participants?	No

<p>C3. Can you think of anything else that might be potentially harmful to participants in this research?</p>	<p>Discussing sexual practice is considered a high risk or sensitive topic by the ethical review board. Although sex can be seen as a sensitive topic, the risk and level of sensitivity associated with discussing sex with young people will be lower with those aged 14+ than with younger groups where child protection laws would require immediate disclosure and action.</p> <p>While many people consider sex to be a sensitive and personal subject there is evidence that sex is becoming less of a taboo subject and that young people talk about it often and are exposed to sex through friends, family, relationships, school sex education, mainstream media and highly accessible pornography to name just some avenues. I am not suggesting that the subject of sexual health, consent and sex should be approached without caution and sensitivity, but I feel confident that the sensitivity and risks associated with this topic can be managed, particularly given my background in sexual health youth work and rape crisis support, and the fact Brook specialise in working on sex education and provision with young people, and will be supporting me to develop and facilitate this group research.</p> <p>In exploring consent I must anticipate that the possibility that the space will be used by young people for disclosure of non-consensual and traumatic experiences. This has been planned for, with clear ground rules concerning internal confidentiality within the group and clarity regarding my and Brook's participation workers responsibilities re safeguarding. I have considerable experience and training in this area and would be well positioned to refer young people for support as well as to access support for myself in the event of a disclosure.</p> <p>The participation and education structures at Brook offer a good space for conducting ethical research particularly with reference to safeguarding the young participants. I will be strictly adhered to their safeguarding practices in order to keep participants safe. It should be noted that a full time member of the participation team has been working with me and will be present in sessions.</p>
<p>>> Risk Checklist - Researcher(s) Safety and Wellbeing</p>	

C4. Does the project involve working with any substances and/or equipment which may be considered hazardous? (Please refer to the University's Control of Hazardous Substances Policy).	No
C5. Could the nature or subject of the research potentially have an emotionally disturbing impact on the researcher(s)?	Yes

C5a. If yes, briefly describe what measures will be taken to help the researcher(s) to manage this.	There is always a chance that a young person may become upset and make a disclosure that could, on top of the issues related to the participant, affect me emotionally. I have had safe guarding training and dealt with disclosures in past work and know that they can at times have an emotionally disturbing impact. I have experience working an a rape crisis charity offering support, listening and signposting services and am confident I can raw on my experience and training for this in the event that there is a distressing disclosure. I will have a disclosure procedure in place and will be able to access support from my supervisors and the participation workers at Brook.
C6. Could the nature or subject of the research potentially expose the researcher(s) to threats of physical violence and / or verbal abuse?	Yes

<p>C6a. If yes, briefly describe what measures will be taken to mitigate this.</p>	<p>It is highly unlikely that this will happen however, there is always a chance when working with a group of young people, and given the subject of research that an element of informal 'bullying' or abuse could be directed towards me from the young people.</p> <p>There are a number of ways to manage this, but the main way is through presenting the research and myself in an accessible and non threatening way and gaining a working rapport allowing the group to focus quickly on the task in hand rather than give time for the participants to pick up on any areas where they may be able take advantage of the research setting to cause upset. I have wide experience in working with children and young people from a range of backgrounds and feel confident that I can manage a research group. If however I feel threatened or uncomfortable I will terminate the workshop and call for assistance from the staff at Brook, my co-facilitators, or any other support staff present.</p> <p>Working independently with a group of young people can be stressful and hard work at times. In order to minimise any stress, or difficulty in running the workshop and engaging the participants I will have a member of the participation team sporting and co-facilitating with me who is known to the young people, but who is not in too senior role to feel threatening or imposing to the participants.</p>
<p>C7. Does the research involve any fieldwork - Overseas or in the UK?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>C7a. If yes, where will the fieldwork take place?</p>	<p>The field work will take place in London at different venues owned, used and maintained by Brook.</p> <p>These venues are likely to be community rooms, meeting rooms and offices at Brook, who have a number of sites throughout London.</p>
<p>C8. Will any researchers be in a lone working situation?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>C8a. If yes, briefly describe the location, time of day and duration of lone working. What precautionary measures will be taken to ensure safety of the researcher(s)?</p>	

<p>C9. Can you think of anything else that might be potentially harmful to the researcher(s) in this research?</p>	<p>Working independently with a group of young people can be stressful and hard work at times. In order to minimise any stress, or difficulty in running the workshop and engaging the participants I will have a support person from the institution with me who is known to the young people, but who is not in too senior role to feel threatening or imposing to the participants.</p>
<p>>> Data Collection and Analysis (Please provide full details)</p>	
<p>C10. PARTICIPANTS: How many people do you envisage will participate, who are they, and how will they be selected?</p>	<p>The 'My rules' project:</p> <p>The core group of 6-12 young people involved in the participatory action research will be between the ages of 14 and 25 - these are the ages that Brook specialise in working with. This is a wide age, however it will be beneficial to the research and inter-generational learning to have a variety of experience and knowledge of current education, and the different needs of young people. It is likely given the current demographic of young people who work alongside Brook on participatory project that the majority of these participants will be aged 16+ however I (and Brook) would like the opportunity to be open to all. All participation in the my rules project will be voluntary and supported by the participation workers and volunteers key contacts at the organisation.</p> <p>Upon completion of the My rules project the 2nd phase of the research will involve recruiting adult practitioners within Brook. Currently the number of adults who will be involved in this phase is unclear however it is hoped, by me and the CEO of Brook, that Brook Staff from different departments and regions will attend interviews and workshops as part of this participatory action research project - as shown below informed consent and voluntary elements of involvement will be given consideration to ensure either participation and any data elicited is done so openly and ethically. Since I will be based within Brook and working alongside the organisation, I will approach potential collaborators in the project by email, telephone or face-to-face depending on how introductions are made as I am integrated into the organisation. Any face-to-face or telephone introductions will be followed up by email.</p>

<p>C11. RECRUITMENT: How will participants be approached and recruited?</p>	<p>The My rules proejct: These young people will be recruited via Brooks volunteer recruitment process and word of mouth. The project 'My rules' they will be involved in has been developed in conjunction with other young people, but it will be made clear in recruitment material that this is a project that they will develop further once they begin. (see overview of the my rules project document for more details)</p> <p>The participation opportunity will be advertised on Brooks website and existing user group mailing lists.</p> <p>Young people will be invited to join the group if they apply, and meet the participant requirements - which are outlined in the supporting material. We will invite around 12 young people to participate with the expectation that numbers will drop over time, leaving group of around 6-8 'young project coordinators'.</p> <p>The activities and work involved with the 'my rules' project may involve working with other, already established, groups of young people to gain input on the consent videos and educational resources. In the event that this happens it will be made clear which part of their participation (if any) will be recorded for research data, they will be given the opportunity to opt out and/or request their data is not used. It will also be made clear that the project is a research project as well as a participation project so that gatekeepers and groups understand what their involvement may involve.</p> <p>Upon completion of the 'my rules' project the outcomes, emergent themes and findings will be used as as stimuli for interviews and focus groups/workshops with staff at Brook. Focus groups/workshops with staff in different departments and areas of the organisation will be arranged through the CEO. This approach was used by Ester McGeeney to disseminate the findings of her mixed methods research project on good sex to staff throughout Brook as part of a knowledge exchange project (2013). Recruitment of large numbers is likely to be difficult given time constraints of staff, the geographical diversity of work locations and a chance that staff may be unwilling to work with a researcher, who despite being embedded in the participation team, may be considered an outsider. I will make every effort to ensure the sessions are at times and in venues</p>
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	<p>convenient to staff as well as endorsed and encouraged by the CEO and heads of departments. Since I will be based within Brook and working alongside the organisation, I will approach potential participants in this phase of the project by email, telephone or face-to-face depending on how introductions are made as I integrate into the organisation. Any face-to-face or telephone introductions will be followed up by email.</p> <p>Running these focus groups with adult practitioners as a workshop is once again informed by my participatory action approach, but may make informed consent to participate an issue if they take place as part of mandatory training session possible informed consent from all participants will be gained, so I can record the workshops and use individuals responses to the visual data generated in the 'my rules' project as data for analysis. In the event that I cannot or do not get consent from all participants I will write up field notes, and reflect on the sessions. The very fact that the sessions were supported and enabled by Brook will in themselves be evidence of the institution making an effort to learn from youth participation. Equally if focus groups and workshops cannot be arranged, or are not attended this can also be considered as evidence regarding the obstacles to young people setting the agenda within Brook.</p>
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<p>C12. METHOD: What research method(s) do you plan to use; e.g. interview, questionnaire/self-completion questionnaire, field observation, audio/audio-visual recording?</p>	<p>My approach to this research draws from both practical and theoretical characteristics of feminism, social pedagogy and youth work. I would argue that these have a number of complementary and interconnected values not least a critical awareness of structural and social power dynamics and a commitment to social justice and social change. My commitment to these values in research and my interactions so far with Brook, and the young people they work with have encouraged me to take participatory action research (PAR) approach to my research. By taking a PAR approach It is my intention to combine research and practice to create a transformational model of participation ... which gives young people a voice and aims to 'generate dialogue and critical reflection on the possibilities and limitations of problems being addressed' (Nolas 2011:1196), in this case the concept and embodiment of sexual consent, and youth participation at Brook. Being embedded within Brooks participation team provides me with the ideal environment and structures to enable this.</p> <p>The my rules volunteers will be seen as collaborators in the research seeking to understand consent in the everyday and find new ways of communicating this to wider audiences. PAR is collaborative research, education and action used to gather information to use for change on social or environmental issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it.</p> <p>I'm using PAR because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -it is driven by participants (a group of people who have a stake in the issue being researched), rather than an outside sponsor, funder or academic (although they may be invited to help), - it offers a democratic model of who can produce, own and use knowledge, - it is collaborative at every stage, involving discussion, pooling skills and working together, - it is intended to result in some action, change or improvement on the issue being research <p>See: Pain, Whitman and Milledge (2011)</p> <p>The collaborative planning and feedback from the young people and participation staff I have worked</p>
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<p>7/8/2018</p>	<p>alongside so far has allowed me to develop a research project which I think will manage the expectations of the different stakeholders in the research, have a transformative outcome for us all and which has a realistic and manageable time scale and expectation of commitment from the young people and the participation workers who will become my co-researchers.</p> <p>PAR projects often employ visual and creative methods to create 'temporary publics and spaces for critical and reflective engagement with and data generation for certain topics' (Nolas 2015). I will use visual and creative methods as they can be more inclusive and 'young person friendly' and also allow for a more embodied and visual methodology than is provided by more traditional research methods (Thomson and Holland 2005).</p> <p>The My Rules project will consist of meeting with the volunteers regularly over a period of up to 6 months. The number of sessions will depend on the availability of the volunteers. The methods currently planned for the 'my rules' project are - brain storming, focus group/workshops, group body mapping, film making, photo elicitation. Audio and visual recording of sessions and the production of 3 short films. Field observation.</p> <p>The second phase will involve a combination of, focus groups/ workshops, 1-2-1 unstructured interviews and field observation, the outlines for these will be developed alongside my young collaborators as issues and key themes emerge from the My rules findings. Data from the 'my rules' project will be anonymised, reanimated and used as stimuli for discussions, learning and group interviews with staff as in McGeeny's knowledge exchange project.</p>
<p>C13. LOCATION: Where will the project be carried out e.g. public place, in researcher's office, in private office at organisation?</p>	<p>At different Brook centers across London, and at time in public spaces. I will be based At Brook and at an office in Sussex.</p>
<p>>> Ethical Considerations (Please provide full details)</p>	

<p>C14. INFORMED CONSENT: Please describe the process you will use to ensure your participants are freely giving fully informed consent to participate. This will usually include the provision of an Information Sheet and will normally require a Consent Form unless there is justification for not doing so. (Please state this clearly).</p>	<p>The project will involve the researcher working collaboratively with various young volunteers and staff members at Brook. Each stage of the project will involve group work and the creation of audio recordings and visual outputs. As such informed consent will be sought from participants in all activities and stages of the research. The initial consent from will be used as a prop for conversations about consent and participation in the project to ensure that the participants understand the project, and the research element, the realities of filming and withdrawal; and to begin thinking together about what consent means to them.</p> <p>Throughout this work I will ensure that participants are fully informed and able to consent freely to involvement in the research, by developing clear information about the research to go on the websites and to be used as 'information sheets' during recruitment (see supporting documents). This will state clearly the intentions of the research, the types of activities and research methods volunteers will be involved in, and their freedom to choose whether or not to participate in the first place and their right to withdraw and opt out of activities they do not feel comfortable taking part in. The nature of PAR and group work can make it difficult to gain informed consent, when the direction and exact activities of the research are not yet decided, hence the information sheet provides only an overview of the project and activities. There are arguments that rather than this being problematic it can increase respect and informed consent as a continuous process (Alderson and Morrow 2011:102). In addition to an informed consent I and Brook will gain form for individual participation it is my intention to create a group consent and working agreement which is devised and signed by all participants (Banks et al 2011). This will be visible at all times so that it can be referred to, and adapted in response to new activities, each session, ensuring continuous informed consent. Collectively creating a group agreement regarding consent, confidentiality, and anonymity should help to think through the realities of participation and sharing information to</p>
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7	<p>establish a safe space for self and group reflection and therefore informed and collective participation.</p> <p>The aims of the project will be fully explained and discussed with all Brook staff and volunteers participating in each phase of the project. Participants will be informed that we are creating audio-visual materials that will be made publicly available and that if they consent to appearing in these materials we cannot ensure their anonymity. Participants will also be informed that they can choose to participate in the project without appearing in the films if they wish to remain anonymous (i.e. through contributing to the design of the materials but not appearing in the films). Interested parties will be given written information about the project and will be asked to give their informed consent and complete a consent form.</p> <p>I recognise that I and Brook have a duty of care towards young volunteers that we will be working with and that they may be vulnerable due to their age or due to other circumstances in their lives. This will be taken into consideration when negotiating consent initially and for the duration of the project as resources are being developed and reviewed. Volunteers at Brook are well trained and supported by the organisation, and the My rules volunteers will receive the same support. The project will comply with Brooks DBS and child protection policies. As such we will also seek parental consent from participants under aged 18 - attached is a copy of the parental consent from that Brook use amended slightly to include the research</p> <p>Consent documents for phase 1:</p> <p>Volunteer application form (to register interest) Participant consent form for all My Rules participants Parental consent form (under 18s)</p> <p>Phase 2: Practitioner consent form</p>
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<p>C15. RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL: Participants should be able to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants should also be able to withdraw their data if it is linked to them and should be told when this will no longer be possible (e.g. once it has been included in the final report). Please describe the exact arrangements for withdrawal from participation and withdrawal of data for your study.</p>	<p>Participants will be clearly informed of the voluntary nature of this project, their participation is not mandatory and they do not have to attend every session. It will be made clear that volunteers may opt out of any activities and that they can stop attending the group at anytime they choose.</p> <p>The group nature of the data generation will make it difficult for participants who withdraw to request the full withdrawal of all of their data however in the event that a participant withdraws and formally request that their data is not used every effort will be made to remove data that they provided and which is identifiable their contribution to the group.</p> <p>I will make it clear that I can and will delete any individual contributions that they made to the project, discussions or feedback sessions. However due to the group nature of the project their group input will be more difficult to delete. In writing up I will not refer to them directly and where possible not use data, or refer to small group activities in which they were working.</p>
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<p>C16. OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES: If you answered YES to anything in A.1 above you must specifically address this here. Please also consider whether there are other ethical issues you should be covering here. Please also make reference to the professional code of conduct you intend to follow in your research.</p>	<p>PAR can be more ethical and inclusive than traditional research approaches and methods as it takes greater account of issues of power, rights and responsibilities, and the role of all stakeholders (Banks 2011:6). This is not automatic however and an active process of reflection, inclusion and transparency needs to be undertaken to ensure that the research is ethical and genuinely engaging to and with the research community (Cahill 2007, Kesby et al. 2005). There are some ethical challenges and considerations that are specific to PAR, such as the ethical tensions of group work, the often sensitive or political nature of the topic of study, collaborators researching their own community, and the tensions around anonymity, privacy and confidentiality within a collaborative and public project (Banks et al 2011, Love 2011).</p> <p>My research will have to negotiate the above tensions due to the sensitive subject matter, the age of potential participants and the group/public nature of the research intervention. Sexual consent is a sensitive and potentially high risk subject to be exploring with young people. Asking ourselves and young people what we think consent means is revealing (NCB 2014:2). Worries about disclosures, however should not stop people teaching and talking about consent (2014:12). As pointed out by Lee & Renzetti (1990:252) we cannot safeguard people by avoiding sensitive or controversial research. There is a general public and political belief that teaching about consent can be a way of safe guarding children and young people from sexual exploitation and sexual violence.</p> <p>The group nature of the research adds an additional dimension to worries about disclosures however I think that the group dynamic of the research is at the core of PAR approach particularly from the point of view of transformation and knowledge exchange. Collectively and publicly exploring consent, legitimises it as a topic for public discussion, breaking the act of silence that contributes to the perpetuation of sexual violence (Fenton et al</p>
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<p>7/8/2018</p>	<p>2014).</p> <p>Recognising that consent is a sensitive issue is important for ethical practice. In spite of the sensitive nature of the topic I think it important that this research is conducted as the potential benefits out way the risks. The context dependent nature of PAR means that is can be difficult to fit it within institutional review frameworks, which have generally be set up with more traditional research methods in mind (Flicker and Guta 2008, Love 2011). In order to limit and mitigate for the risks I will ensure that supportive structures are in place and that my research fulfils the expectations for ethical practice as outlined by the BSA and the Sussex ethical review board. See info above about consent forms and see addition documents on recruitment and consent.</p> <p>as noted in C1 my study involves participants who are considered vulnerable, and there are debates around whether those under 18 can give legitimate informed consent to takepart in research. I will have to undergo a DBS check for my research - I will address this in section C.6.</p> <p>With reference to the age of my participants I would argue that working with a younger age group is a positive ethical response to adult centred research and ethics. There is a significant body of literature which calls for young people to be more actively involved in research that is about, or which may affect them.</p> <p>There are supporting studies that show that many children and young people agree with this, but they feel there are not adequate opportunities for them to be involved. I acknowledge that my project will work with both a sensitive subject and a group which are considered vulnerable. I think that the project has been designed and developed in conjunction with staff and young people at Brook in such away that way that it is manageable, ethical, participatory and attentive to potential needs and sensitivities</p>
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>> Data Protection, Confidentiality, and Records Management	
C17. Will you ensure that the processing of personal information related to the study will be in full compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)? (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/policies/information/dpa)	Yes
C17a. If you are processing any personal information outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) you must explain how compliance with the DPA will be ensured.	
C18. Will you take steps to ensure the confidentiality of personal information?	Yes

<p>C18a. Please provide details of anonymisation procedures and of physical and technical security measures here:</p>	<p>Questions concerning anonymisation will be discussed and negotiated with participants. I will explain to participants why the anonymisation of data form part of a model of good practice in social research as detailed by ESRC and BSA enabling academic independence as well as protecting participants from the consequences of their contributions being in the public realm. I will however also recognise and explore whether and how participants might wish to be recognised as co-producers of the project outputs. My starting point is that there may be particular aspects of the research outputs in which participants identity is not hidden (for example video) and aspects where their identity is masked. Strategies for the animation of participant voices in social research are currently a site of innovation and these possibilities will inform our discussions (examples of such work are McGeenys Good sex project https://goodsexproject.wordpress.com/good-sex-the-film/ and the Dole Animators https://doleanimators.wordpress.com/play-film/ work). Care will be taken to ensure that links between anonymised and non-anonymised outputs do not undermine promises made to participants. Absolute confidentiality will not be promised and participants will be encouraged to think through the potential risks and pleasures of being involved in the research.</p> <p>In addition to an informed consent form a group agreement will be devised taking into consideration all of the issues above and ensuring that we all think through what individual and group expectations are as to how we work together, share our findings and experiences and ensure our own and others boundaries safety is upheld. An example of a group contract I have done in similar groups before is attached in the supporting documents. I find these agreements a useful tool for managing expectations of the group and unwanted behaviour it also enables group accountability and young people are also able to refer others to the agreement when they feel boundaries are being pushed or crossed. Additionally because it is had written and will be present in every session it can be amended and developed in moment when unexpected situations or conversations occur.</p>
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C19. Will all data related to this study be retained and shared in a form that is fully anonymised (separated from information that can identify the participant)?	Yes
C19a. If you answered "no" to the above question you must ensure that any limitations to full anonymity are detailed in the Information Sheet and that participant consent will be in place. If relevant, please outline limitations here:	
C20. Will the Principal Investigator take full responsibility during the study, for ensuring appropriate storage and security of information (including research data, consent forms and administrative records) and, where appropriate, will the necessary arrangements be made in order to process copyright material lawfully?	Yes
C20a. If you answered "no" to the above question, please give further details:	

<p>C21. Who will have access to personal information relating to this study?</p>	<p>The work done with the young people on the My rules project will be administrated through Brooks participation team and so the team will hold the young peoples details in accordance to their policies, which also adhere to the data protection act. The project staff will work in accordance with Brook's Child Protection procedures and any child protection concerns or serious crimes disclosed during the project will be reported to the relevant authorities in accordance with organisational procedure. This will be explained to all participants. I will not ask for, or hold any unnecessary personal information beyond what Brook requires of all young people they wok with (see Brook volunteer application form).</p> <p>The later part of the research involving adult practitioners is also likely to be administrated to some degree through Brook - however through a different department and any information I gain during the sessions with them will be kept private and confidential.</p> <p>The consent form will explain the limits of the confidentiality that we can promise to participants in the face of any serious concerns about safety.</p>
<p>C22. Data management responsibilities after the study. State how long study information including research data, consent forms and personal identification will be retained, in what format(s) and where the information will be kept.</p>	<p>All physical outputs from the study - such as spider diagrams, body maps, discussion outputs/write ups will be photographed and the originals destroyed due to a lack of physical space to keep them securely.</p> <p>Any other data collected - the digital records of the physical outputs, transcriptions etc will be stored securely in a password protected file, separately from any information that might make the participants identifiable. The personal information will be kept securely and in accordance with the data protection act, both by Brook and the Researcher.</p> <p>The films will be kept as part of the research data and records as above but also will be used by Brook who will keep an archival record available to sexual health educators and young people (and any interested public) via the website or attending educational sessions.</p>

>> Other Ethical Clearances and Permissions	
C23. Are any other ethical clearances or permissions (internal or external) required? Please see the help text (i) for further details	No
C23a. If yes, please give further details including the name and address of the organisation. If other ethical approval has already been received please attach evidence of approval, otherwise you will need to supply it when ready.	<p>I will be applying for new DBS checks through Brook and Sussex. Brook are able and willing to complete my DBS application and have already provided me with safeguarding and child protection training relating to their policies and practice (see certificate attached).</p> <p>I have contact with and regularly work with children and young people through East Sussex county council, Briton Yearly Meeting, United World Colleges of Great Briton and I also do some independent youth and child care work. All of these organisations and working environments have required me to undergo an enhanced CRB/DBS check, many of which will still be in date at the time of research. I am independently Ofsted resisted and am on the childcare register.</p> <p>My experience of the new online DBS system has been positive so far and I have usually gained clearance within 2-3 weeks. So it is unlikely that, if I need a new DBS certificate, this will hold up, or be problematic to my research my research.</p> <p>I can provide the CRB/DBS certificate numbers for the above organisations if required.</p>

Appendix C

- Sites and Activities

KEY	Work done with/alongside Brook Participation team	Work done with/ alongside Brook education team	Work done independently with groups accessed independently – pilot session	Work done independently with groups accessed through Brook
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Research site	Time frame	People directly involved	Activities	Data collected
Brook initial contact	September-October 2014	CEO Participation manager	Meetings	Field notes
Brook P+	1 st meeting 24 th October 2014 – Regular attendances and sessions at P+ Nov 2014-June 2015. Continued contact with team and last feedback from P+ 28 th July 2016	Brook Participation worker 9 Young people age 17-25: 3 young men, 6 young women	Field note reflections; Group discussions; Definition activities; body mapping; game/activity piloting and development; scenario development; social action project planning; tweeting [outline of activities and workshops documented in report for Brook]	Field notes Participant outputs - Spider diagrams - Consent Definitions - Body maps - Scenarios - Why don't people do consent - Game/workshops plans Film ideas
Brook Sex +	22 nd Nov 2014 and some follow up with participation workers	2 x Brook Participation worker 11 young people age 18-25: 3 young men, 8 young women	Field note reflections; Group discussions; Definition activities; consent continuum activities; scenario development; tweeting [outline of activities and workshops documented in report for Brook]	Field notes Participant outputs - Continuum - Consent Definitions - Scenarios - Social action project ideas -

Brook Lamb college	November – December 2014 Two sessions	Brook Participation worker 8 young people age 16: 2 young men, 6 young women	Field note reflections; group discussions; handshake activity and adaptations; definition tasks.	Field notes Participant outputs: Consent definitions
Youth group (BTN) [pilot group]	November 2015 1 session	3 x volunteer leaders 13 young people: 6 young men, 8 young women, 1 non-binary	Field note reflections; handshake game; discussion groups; mind mapping; developing campaign ideas	- Field notes
Women's group (BTN) [pilot group]	April 2015 1 session	5 young women ages 22-25	Field note reflections; group discussion; definition tasks; mind mapping; scenario development; body mapping; focussed discussion; feedback on activity.	Field notes Participant outputs - mind maps - Consent definitions Body maps

Brook Education team	October 2015 – July 2016 (First contact with A late September 2015, Last contact 29 th July 2016)	Education team lead 2 x education staff 5 x education sessional staff 2 x YP's on work experience: young man age 17, young woman age 15	Contact with Education team initially for access youth sites/venues → link with school and Youth club secured (see school and YC rows) Week of shadowing education workers. → participant observation easier in training spaces and 'back stage' like office – rather than watching them work... also proved V difficult to get a person and a day to watch anything... Participant observation – in the office. Informal conversations with education staff Planning and developing consent sessions with work experience people. Shadowing/delivery of session at willow house, and school Attendance at session worker training/check in session – followed by focus group. – audio recorded	Field notes Participant outputs form planning session with work experience young people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spider diagrams - Notes form discussion Notes form training session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus group transcript
Brook Willow House	Feb 2016 1 session	Education team lead Sexual health nurse 4 young men age 18	Participant observation – that turned into an ethnography/ session participation Field note reflections	Field notes

School	<p>October 2015 – Feb 2016</p> <p>Weekly session (minimum)</p>	<p>1 x Citizenship teacher 27 young women: age 14-15</p>	<p>Delivery of consent 'lesson' to whole class/ interactive research workshop including definition tasks, and discussion.</p> <p>Records of correspondence with teacher and regular 'debrief' after sessions.</p> <p>Support the students to develop ideas and do activates towards 'active citizenship' project on consent</p> <p>Small group sessions – consisting of group work, discussions, and project activity – audio recording</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I drew on scenarios, prompts, recent documentaries and videos, amongst others things to started discussion - I helped them to plan and find helpful information through sights and campaigns I am already aware of. - They showed me videos and sites they used/found useful <p>Participant observation at school consent conference → participant observation + session delivery for half an hour.</p> <p>Field not reflections on all the above</p>	<p>Field notes</p> <p>Participant outputs form full class session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definitions (10 words or fewer) - Reflections from the session <p>Participant outputs form group sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Film made by group x - Blog made by group 1 - Posters and info made by grp 3 <p>Small group session transcripts</p> <p>Photographic data/evidence from sessions and conference.</p>
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Youth Club (LDN)	<p>(first contact 13th October 2015)</p> <p>January 2016 – April regular attendance at Youth club follow up until June</p> <p>Final film showing and last session 17th June 2016</p>	<p>4 x youth workers: 3 women, 1 man</p> <p>22 young people age 13-18: 12 young men, 10 young women</p> <p>1 camera man</p>	<p>Ethnography/ participant observation</p> <p>Group discussion with youth workers in main club.</p> <p>Film project – small group discussions. Small group (4 max) and individual interviews – audio and visual recording over 6 weeks. Young people were involved in filming and interviewing each other, and me.</p> <p>Valentine's day activities in conjunction with Brook shadowing week.</p> <p>Launch of the film and pizza night.</p> <p>Field notes on all of the above</p>	<p>Field notes</p> <p>Transcripts from discussions, on and off camera.</p> <p>Some visual data – where discussion <u>have been edited</u> together as a cut screen. [film maker deleted unused footage]</p> <p>Consent film</p> <p>Photo evidence of activities</p>
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Appendix D

- Explanation of O2 Think Big

Think Big from O2 gives money and support to young people to help them make a difference in their community. Brook Participation workers supported me to Access think big, and think bigger funding in order to finance the social action video project.

The criteria for Think Big funding is that a project will be based in the UK and the person applying for the funding is aged between 13-25 years old. Initially someone can apply for think big funding for £300, and then have the opportunity to apply for £2,500 Think Bigger funding.

Think Big will support ideas that:

- Can be made into realistic and achievable projects
- Will have a positive impact to people outside of the project team

The project application for Think Bigger was as follows:

This time a lot more money, support and training are on offer so tell us about your project idea. What's it about and why does it need to happen? Why can Think Big help?

Based on our Think Big project we've decided we'd like to do a social action project about consent that raises awareness for other young people and which can be used to help people teach and talk about consent. Consent is a really importation issue for young people and it is something that isn't taught very well in schools. Also Brook have very little accessible importation about consent on their website and we'd like to develop information that is young person friendly because it has been created by young people. There has been lots of stuff about consent in the media recently and we'd like to do something which helps us and other young people know more about it, how to have respectful relationships and add to research and evidence that shows that young people care about consent.

We've planned to create a group called 'my rules' where we work together to develop 'everyday interactive ways of thinking about consent that are more practical than theoretical. There will be an emphasis on learning your own boundaries and developing interpersonal skills'. We hope to make and produce 3 short films that can be used as part of an education or training resource and raise awareness to staff and practitioners at Brook about what young people want and need from consent education. We will work alongside the Brook participation worker and a youth researcher to do this and the outcomes of our project will go up on the Brook website.

This idea has come out of the consent consultation workshops we've done this year. We want to develop our ideas and the activities we've made up so that they can be used at Brook to help teach about consent.

We will consult with other young people about what they think consent is and make 3 short films based on this. We want the films to be about different examples of everyday consent so that they can be watched by lots of different people.

To do this we need:

To recruit more volunteers to for the 'my rules' project and then will be able to make more clear plans about the content of he videos and educational resources we want to make.

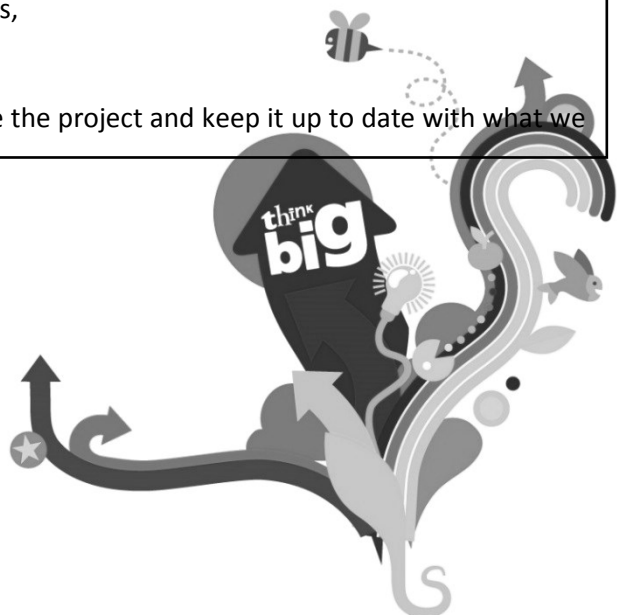
A space to work - we will use rooms at Brook but might hire a room for running workshops or making our films

A budget for travel expenses so no one is out of pocket for being involved

Someone who can volunteer their time to help make the videos

A budget to buy materials for the project - eg. lots of big paper and pens for group and creative work, snacks, props for the videos,

We will run a website or blog to advertise the project and keep it up to date with what we



Appendix E

- Scenarios

Developed with P+ and Brook Participation works for use in discussions.



1. Tom and Molly have been drinking at a house party and both are very drunk. They go to a room together to take drugs and end up having sex that neither of them remember but other people saw and told them about. This isn't the first time this has happened. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
2. Jenny is homeless and has been sleeping on the streets for 3 months, its starting to get cold and she is regularly shouted at and propositioned by men late at night. Duncan is a young man in his early 20's who occasionally stops and talks to her, one night when it is very cold he offers for her to sleep on his sofa. She asks him what the catch is but he says there isn't one. He buys her pizza and they have a few drinks on his sofa. Then he says she can sleep in his bed if she likes. Jenny says the sofa is fine. Duncan insists that she sleeps in his bed or back on the streets, she needs to show him how grateful she is by giving him a blow job at the very least. She does, he's nice about it and give her breakfast in the morning and says she can stay whenever she likes so long as she's grateful. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
3. Jenny moves her usual sleeping place and avoids the area for a while, It get's even colder, she's hungry and has a really bad few nights. She goes to Duncan's giving him a blow job is better than the streets and other men. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
4. Mark and Nina have been married for nine years and have sex every night before they fall asleep. It is very routine and they never talk about. The sex is over as soon as Mark comes and Nina never has an orgasm. Nina would rather read before sleeping but has decided having sex with Mark is worth it as it makes the relationship smoother. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
5. Kerry's 14 years old and has been told by all her friends that anal sex is the best sort of sex (although they've said it hurts a lot). They also said that if she doesn't try it she'll never really understand sex. This has made her really keen to try it but very nervous. When her new 19 year old boyfriend Stu tells her it's time that they try it out, she says yes even though she is unsure whether she wants to do it. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
6. Harrison and Mohamed have been in a relationship for 3 years and things are on the rocks. They're on holiday together, trying to get a bit of quality time and salvage the relationship, but they end up arguing a lot and decide that when the holiday is over the relationship is over. Mohamed has decided he doesn't want to have sex for the rest of the holiday as it might make things complicated. Harrison tells him this makes him feel undesirable, ugly and even worse about the whole thing. He hasn't paid £200


to go away and have a horrible time! They agree to try and have a nice time and go to museums and on some of the activities they had booked. When they are in groups and doing things they get on well. One night Harrison asks if it's ok to cuddle in bed because he's upset and confused, Muhammad is happy to do this and they fall asleep cuddling. In the morning Mohammad wakes up to Harrison stroking and caressing him. He gets hard pretty quickly and Harrison takes this as a sign to carry on. Muhammad feels really awkward because he knows how upset Harrison is, but this is not what he wants. He turns over instead of saying stop, Harrison carries on and is getting excited and quite physical Mohammed doesn't have the energy to stop it and lets Harrison do what he wants. After all they've had sex loads of times, what's once more going to do? **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**

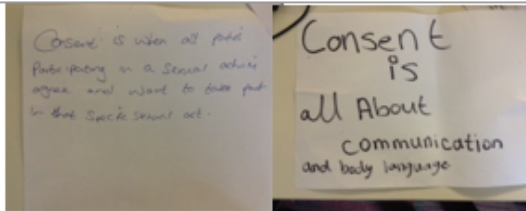

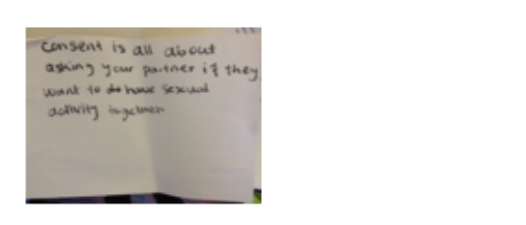
7. Jay and Fola both have learning difficulties, they are both living with their parents but attend the same care centre after school. They've been going out for a few months and are now publicly displaying affection for each other, they are getting quite physical, and the staff at the centre are concerned. They think that the couple might not understand the dangers of sex, and talk to Fola's family about putting her on hormonal contraception. The family agree that this is a good idea and Fola is taken to the doctors for the implant. After this the staff worry much less about Fola, and the relationship in general. Jay's family invite Fola over sometimes and have, on Jay's request, been leaving them unsupervised in his room. Jay can be quite controlling at times but he seems very happy around Fola so they leave them to it. When ever they are alone Jay suggests that they look at each others genitals. He always shows Fola his and then tells her that it's not fair if she doesn't show hers. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
8. After a few more weeks Jay suggests that they have sex because that's what people in relationships do. Fola agrees because she doesn't want to upset Jay and likes doing things that 'normal' people do. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
9. Joanne and Alexa have been together for a few months. They love their sex life together! One time after sex, when they are lying down relaxing, Alexa decides she wants to have sex again and starts to give Joanne oral sex. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
10. Kirsty met Pete at a club and went back to his after they'd kissed in the club. He fingered her in the taxi and then when she got back to his house she realised she had changed her mind and didn't want to sleep with him after all. When she told him he told her that she was a tease and she could at least give him a blowjob. She felt bad so she did. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**
11. Taylor and Alex have been together for 12 months. They have an active sex life and often spend the night at each other's houses. One night when they are having penetrative sex Taylor asks Alex to stop because it hurts. Alex is just about to come and carries on. **Is there an issue with consent? What is it?**

Appendix F

- Before the method log

Date, group, and Title	Activity (and) summary	<u>Completed?</u> Brief summary	
18 th Nov 2014 P+ London Body mapping consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brainstorming consent - Individual body maps of the day - Body Mapping - Draw round bodies - Assign each body a position within the negation of consent - Silent 'discussion' – writing and drawing thoughts, feelings and actions on to the bodies - Full discussion on what everyone had put up, how the task made them feel 	<p>2hr session on thinking about the body and consent.</p> <p>Did a brain storm on consent, followed by small 'my day' body maps to introduces the idea of thinking about how you feel, physically and emotionally <u>throughout the day</u> and why.</p> <p>4 Full size body maps and a silent discussion, considering the body in consent</p> <p>Each body:</p> <p>One seeking consent</p> <p>One being 'asked' for consent</p> <p>One in the middle of a sexual act who wants to withdraw consent</p> <p>One body that is feeling sexy.</p> <p>Interesting conversation about what is explicit 'non- verbal' consent? <u>Clearly</u> it happens but what does it look like? <u>and</u> is it cultural? - is it actively guiding someone to do something?</p> <p>Lots of discussion around the difficulty of withdrawing consent – and the practicalities of it.</p>	 

22 nd 2014	Nov	Brainstorming Consent.	Discussed mainstream ways of talking about consent. Very hetero when we talk about it – how can we have a positive and inclusive conversation about consent (this informed a lot of my BERA presentation)	
Be	sex	Defining consent:	Really interesting discussion about which words they associate with consent and how there is a difference and a clear spectrum from non-consent to passive consent to active consent.	
Positive group from all over UK		Looking at the dictionary definition of consent and thinking about how it relates to sex Take words from the definition and place them on a continuum of non-consent – positive/active consent. Discussions around what counts as consent when <u>is it</u> good and active and when is it passive? Group came up with additional words and then scenarios for certain words/levels of consent	Highlighted that <u>it's</u> a negotiation – look into this further? Points about regret came up – follow up with in grey area stuff?	
Defining consent and continuum work				

<p>20th Jan, 2015 Brixton Hill/ CHIP group</p>	<p>Day to talk about consent and plan a way of informing and engage other young people about it at their stall in college on the 3rd Feb</p> <p>Brain storming consent – thinking about why it's important and what they might want to inform other people about</p> <p>Looking at scenarios and seeing if there is a problem with consent in them</p> <p>Planning a quiz to engage students in consent at the Stall. It will find out what the other students already know about consent and if they <u>think</u> it's an important issue.</p> <p>Came up with definitions of consent to help them if/when people ask them questions about it</p>	<p>Mixed responses to the scenarios – all were very sex positive in their language. Good mix of real life scenarios and different types of relationships. Group had reasonable understanding of consent – an issue that was very new to them when Susy stated to work with them... could seem them developing understanding of why something might be an issue in the scenarios.</p> <p>Some <u>really nice</u> definitions came up – and was good that this group explicitly acknowledged the importance of communication. <u>Can't</u> have consent without communication. <u>Also</u> an good discussion on how body langue is important but also can be misleading at times eg. <u>drunk</u>.</p>	  
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3 rd Feb 2015 Brixton Hill group, Sexual health stall at college	The group will run an information stall, give out the C card and do the quiz with students.	<p>I was ill for this but got sent feedback from participate worker.</p> <p>People engaged well with the questionnaires as a good way of making people think about what they know and don't know about consent.</p> <p>The group facilitating the stand had a really positive experience. and engaged positively with students asking for help to fill in the questionnaire.</p>	
24 th Feb 2015 P+ London Developing consent related games	<p>Try out 3 games that can be used to make people think about the practicalities of consent. The aim/learning outcome of each one is that they make you think about:</p> <p>How to say now How to receive a no How to ask (without being pushy?) How to consider different personal boundaries.</p> <p>Hand shake game as explained in NCB sex education supplement 2014</p> <p>Body touch game</p> <p>And the relationship intimacy game</p>	<p>Great session! Young people enjoyed the interactive nature of it all and requested another session to develop more games.</p> <p>The hand shake game - well and was a great stimuli for discussions about how it feels to say yes/no.</p> <p>Body touch – in parterres one person asking to touch different parts of the body, the other person has to respond using yes or no. Lots of laughing. And again really great discussion. Also worked on adapting the game to see how it would work if you say 'maybe', don't say anything. Do the 'conversation' without speaking. How does the dynamic change when you ask 'why' someone said yes or not to being touched.</p> <p>The intimacy game – This game was the least developed, and most 'inappropriate' of the three and as such we decided to explain the game and give an example of how it might go with me and the participation worker. The aim/learning outcome of it wasn't clear</p> <p>Finished the sesisn with a discussion about other learnignoucomes it would be good to consider when develop games in the future. Also discussed how the handshake game and body touch game could be encourporated ans therire learnignoutcomes were the same.</p>	

	Get feedback on the games in terms of how fun and informative they are. How could they be adapted or developed?	Need to find another date to do more games.	
10 th March P+ London	Workshop on exploring the grey areas of consent. body language The role of ambiguity Establishing/assuming regret/hindsight	CANCELLED DUE TO BROOK MOVING OFFICE	
21 st April P+ London I <3 consent	Looking through the NUS I <3 consent campaign. We will look through and critique and adapt bits of it based on the workshops we've done previously which will (hopefully) have engaged participants in issues of consent enough to be critical 'consumers' of the workshop design and content... Which bits might we want to use to teach about consent?	Cancelled due to another organisation needing to use the group for a consultation	

<p>19th May</p> <p>P+ London</p> <p>Group design</p>	<p>Session/ working group to design the 'consent project' opportunity.</p> <p>Design a programme for the project; Choose a theme or activity for each session; Come up with a name for the group ; <u>Decide who they want to be involved?</u> – will it be an open/drop in group or a closed one? Figure out how much the young people want to be involved in facilitating the sessions?; Decide how we will advertise the opportunity etc.;; Talk about how we will record our progress. <u>develop a blog?</u> <u>the use of twitter</u> and other social media platforms – who will keep these up to date? Make a Budget for the project Elsie and participation worker will then submit the O2 funding application</p>	<p>This <u>was done</u> over two session. I sent a series of questions and ideas to the group and they discussed how they would like to approach the topic and came up with a series of ideas about what the projects could involve and what they think <u>it's</u> important to consider when thinking about and teaching consent to other young people.</p> <p>Then I met with the Participation worker to go through their ideas and think about what might be 'doable' as a research project. We also discussed the extent to which it would be possible to work with a less 'well informed grou'.</p> <p>Following <u>this</u> I did a session with the group where we planned 'my rules' social action project.</p> <p>The participation worker then supported me to apply for O2 Think bigger funding.</p>	
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Appendix G

- Overview Developing Film project with P+:

This overview of planning for the My Rules/Social action project was written in 2015 to support the Ethical review and also a version was sent to Brook staff in order to keep them up-to-date with the project

The current outline of my PhD project is split into two main activities. The first is the social action project on consent, which as I will show below has been, and will continue to be, developed in collaboration with young volunteers at Brook. The second activity for my research is to evaluate the extent to which the process and outcomes of the social action project align with and potential impact upon Brooks institutional practices, policies and strategic aims.

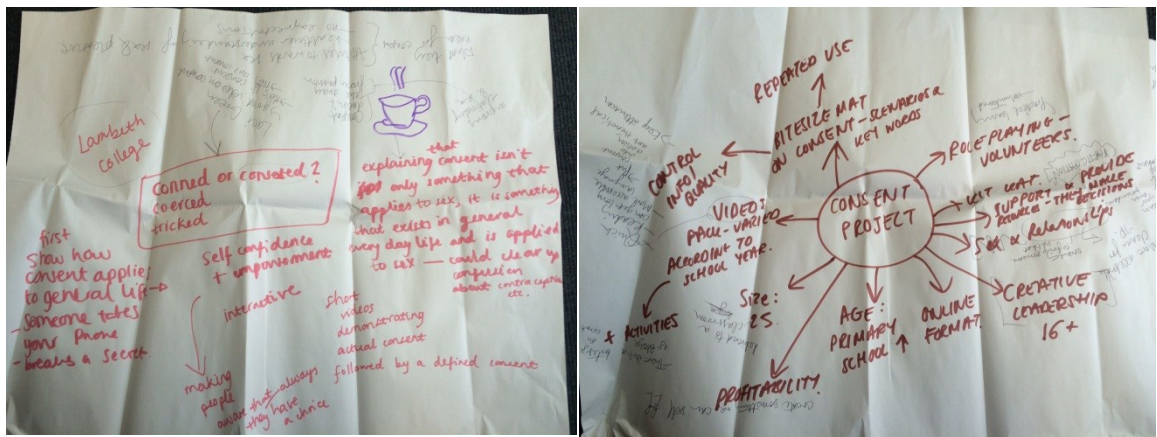
The first element of the project will be supported by Brook as a 'social action' project. They have committed to supporting me to develop and run a project on consent in conjunction with current and newly recruited young volunteers. My role in this project will be both facilitator, researcher and young volunteer. This has been made clear to the groups I have worked with already and will be formally and informally flagged up in any recruitment material and throughout the project.

Below is an overview of the 'my rules' project which will form the bases of phase one of my research. Recruitment material will be developed in accordance to Sussex ethical review expectations and Brooks young volunteer recruitment policy. Informed consent will be at the heart of this. The development, name, outline and person spec uses much of the original language and ideas from the young people in Brooks's participation groups. Over the past 6 months I have been attending and facilitating sessions with the participating groups that focus on consent. Gaining insight into what young people already know, what they want to know and developing activities and methods for teaching, talking and researching consent with young people.

The last two sessions have been dedicated to formulating a 'social action' project that will be both a participation opportunity within Brook, and a participatory action research site for me and the young people I'm collaborating with. Working alongside the participation worker and building on the learning we have experienced during my consent sessions so far the young people have created an outline for the project.

The first session was run by the participation worker, acting as a gatekeeper/intermediary for the project and ensuring that my presence wouldn't pressure the young volunteers into thinking too much about my research agenda. I sent some information, ideas and questions to the Participation worker detailing the aims I have for the research so that she could plan a session based on this and gain input and feedback from the young people.

In the first session with the participation worker the group did a number of activities to get them thinking about consent, why people do and don't do consent and what the barriers are to learning. They were then invited to think about what their ideal project on consent would be, and did a variety of activities informed by the questions on the information sheet.



Following this session the participation worker and I met to discuss the ideas, and pull out key ideas and themes from the planning session to present back to the group and gain more detail for the project.

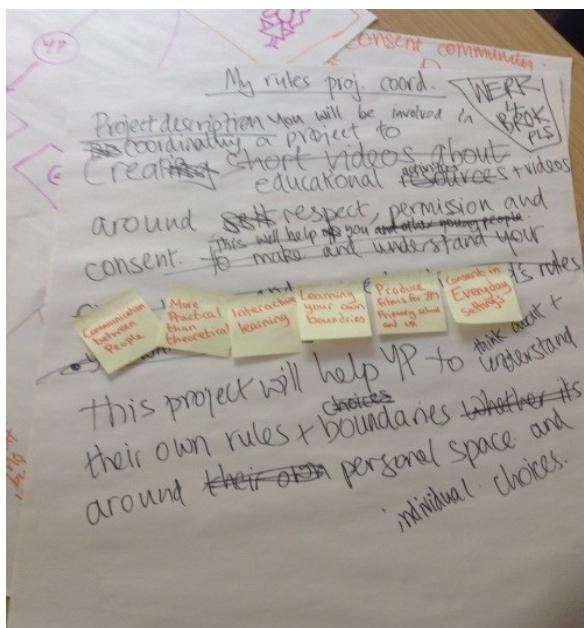


Figure 26 – pulling together the ideas from last week to create a brief/description of the group.

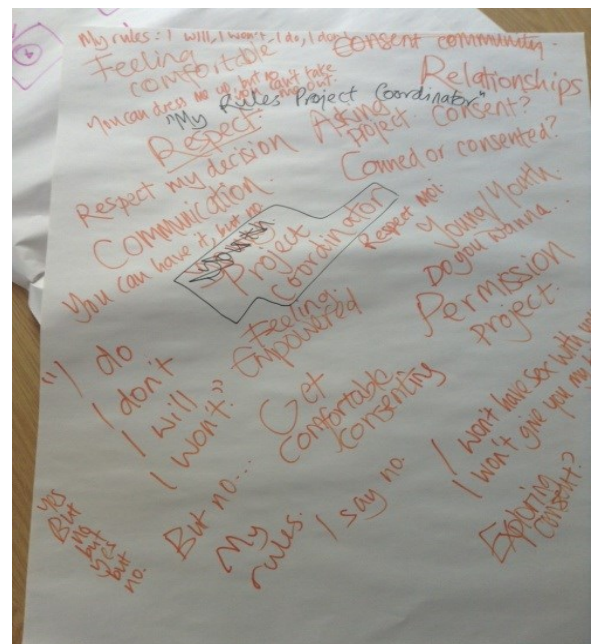


Figure 27 - Ideas for names and role title. My rules will be the project title

In the second session we worked with the young people to get a clear idea of the project, a name, role descriptions for recruiting people for the next project and idea for the inputs and outputs they hoped for. Working from the key ideas pulled out of the work they'd done the previous week.

Input	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
2 recruited My Rules project coordination references £2,000 Elsie's time Jesse's time Filming equipment A vols Susy's time 3 groups of YP Website editing	P+ consultation Training } 12 YP Support } Working with 3 groups of YP Filming Launch	3 Short-films Research 4 Elsie Biscuits P+ participation 12 YP participation "My rules" project 3x consent trainings	Better understanding of consent Coordination skills Filming skills Confidence Team work Learning about own + other's boundaries Networking Accreditations?	Brook - have info! on consent! Good resources for consent → impact for Brook + YP Social change More ppl know about consent. More embarrassing for teachers.

Figure 28 - logic mole to help us think about what will be involved in the project, and what will the outcomes be

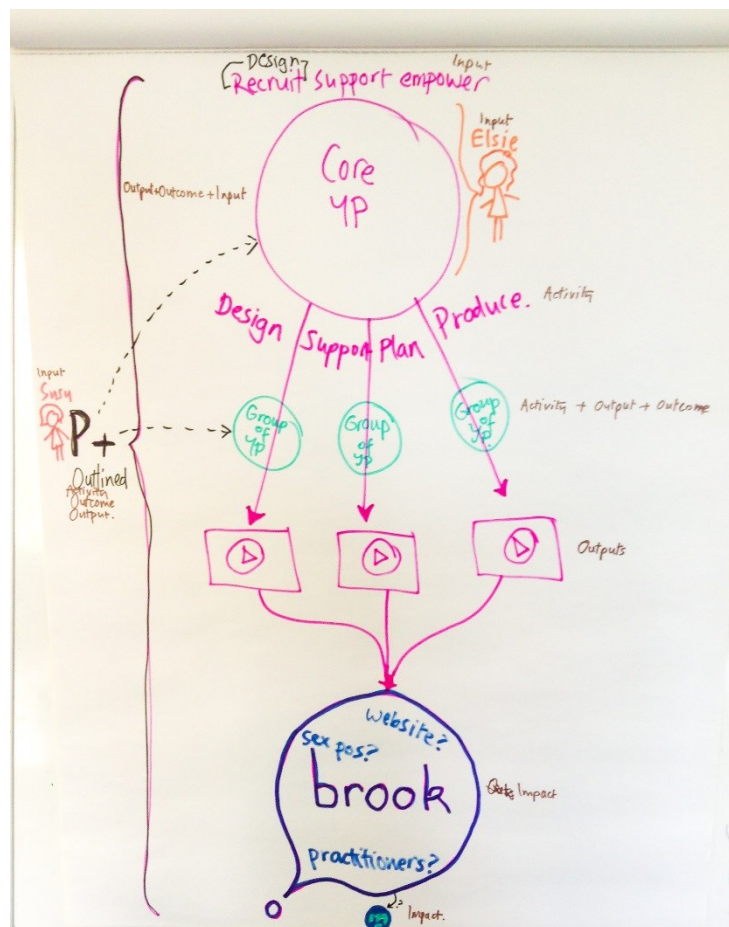


Figure 29 - neat visual of the 'my rules' project

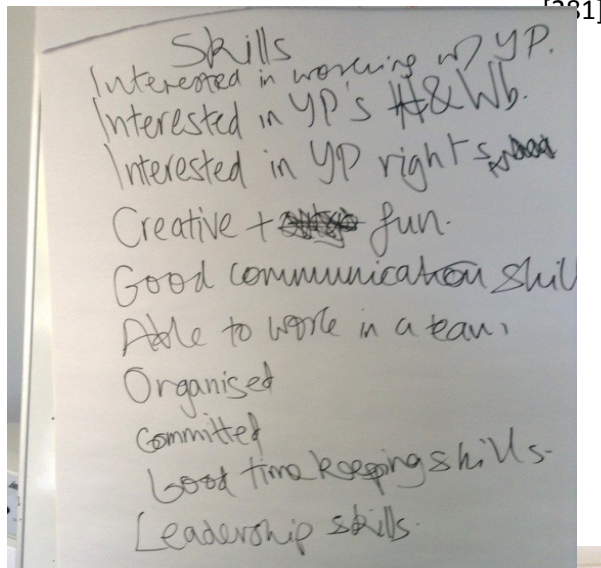


Figure 30 - the skills we would need for from the volunteers recruited to collaborate on the project with Elsie

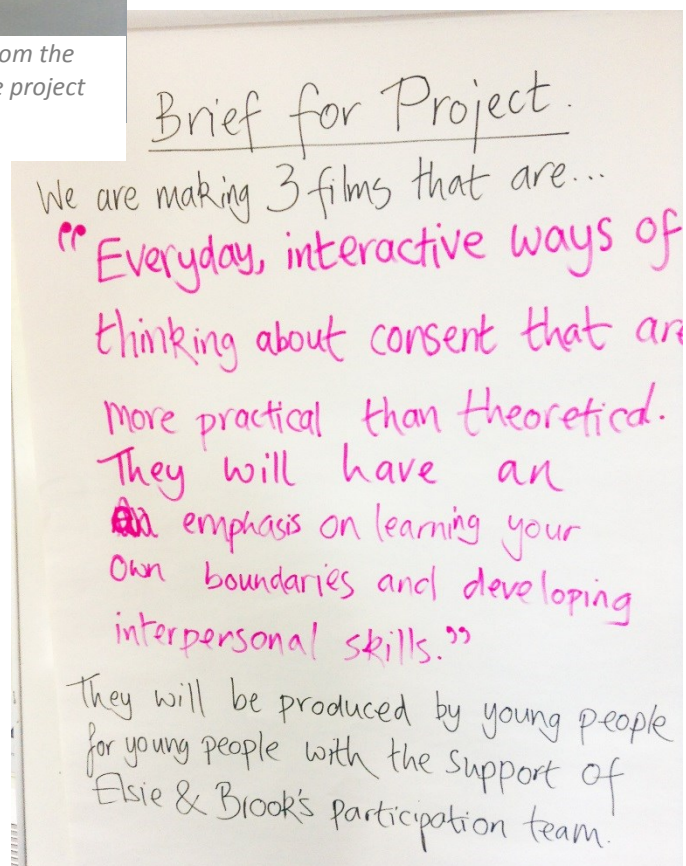


Figure 31 - neat (but not final) write up of project brief

The pictures above show some of the methods that have been used so far to develop the research project idea. These methods and collaborative and creative ways of working will be maintained throughout the 'my rules' project. All of the information and the outlines from this work will be typed up and presented on the Brook website and used to help advertise the 'my rules' project and generate interest so that people will volunteer to participate. See <http://www.brook.org.uk/our-work/category/involving-young-people> The aim of the project is that we may be able to create a website page specifically for 'my rules' and share out ideas and learning with a wider audience than those who participate in the 'my rules' project, similarly to how the 'be sex positive' campaign/project is currently set up see <http://www.brook.org.uk/old/index.php/sex-positive-home>

Appendix H

- Blog write up from Body Mapping session in Brighton

Mapping consent on the body.

Last week I held a workshop on consent and the body at the Art schizm gallery in Brighton. I was joined by five wonderful young women who consented to take part in my pilot and help me to develop my ideas and methods for thinking about and working with groups around the subject of sexual consent.

Once we had all arrived, moved the art stands from the centre of the room and got out cushions and blankets for making the space comfortable, we began by introducing ourselves and saying why we'd come to the workshop. I, of course, was there to practice facilitating the session, gain feedback, and also to hear about different people's ideas and experiences of consent. Going around the circle it became clear that everyone was enthusiastic if a little unsure about what they were going to learn, be expected to say, or not, and that they were all intrigued about body mapping. Body Mapping is a method I have engaged with through development studies, particularly in relation to people's journeys and experiences of HIV and the use of antiretroviral drugs. It has been used successfully as an educational tool and providing social support and personal awareness.

What I will describe as 'body mapping' later is quite different from the process mentioned above, however I still term it 'body mapping'. This is in part because I don't currently have the confidence to name it anything else, but also because the term describes exactly what we are doing; Mapping (in this case consent) onto bodies, explicitly recognising the body as the starting point of everything. Without the body we could not bring thought and feeling into materiality. Body mapping, I think, can provide a method by which to recognise and articulate, to some degree, the complexities of and relationship between thought, emotion, physical responses (affect), and action. Thinking, feeling and doing.

Back to the workshop. We collectively drew up a group agreement of how we were going to work that evening, taking into consideration issues of confidentiality, photo taking, the sensitive nature of the topic and balancing it with having fun and not being too serious. Following this we brainstormed 'consent' and very quickly came to the conclusion that it is an ambiguous and complex term, but also is something that we do, often without thinking, in so many areas of life. We considered how, in relation to sex, we think of consent in terms of

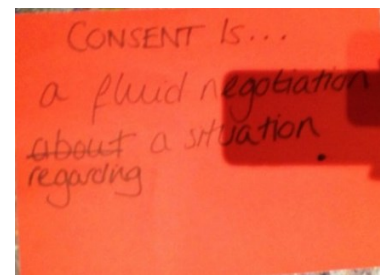
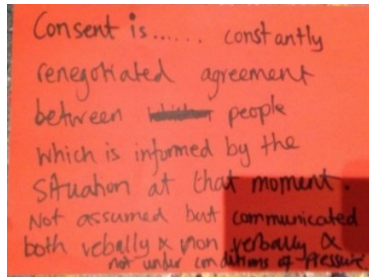
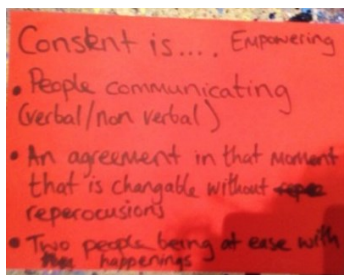


something a woman has to give to a man (we briefly highlighted that consent, when we think about it is often gendered and heteronormative), prompting questions about whether it is active or passive. One contribution to the discussion which has stuck firmly in my mind, not only because it spoke to my experience but it seemed that all of us in the room could relate to it in some way, was "I'm an adult woman and *I don't know* when I've consented to things...

sometimes I look back and think ‘actually did I want that? Was it ok?’ ”. By this point we hadn’t been going for very long, but it seemed that collectively we’d created a space where sharing our self-reflections could happen quite naturally.

Following these discussions and brainstorming we worked in pairs to come up with a definition of consent. A sentence, if possible, starting with ‘Consent is...’. Oooof it was difficult. How could we fit 20minutes of interesting conversation, in which we’d already highlighted the ambiguity, and tensions within the everyday acts of consenting to things, into one sentence? I’ve set this task at a few workshops before, but had never actually done it. My partner and I really struggled; we cheated and went for bullet points in the end as we couldn’t think of a neat way of encapsulating what we thought in a sentence. The outcome of this exercise was fascinating, all of us struggled with it, but there were common themes in all three suggesting that maybe consent might have a few core threads. Something for me to think about later. The words and phrases people chose were brilliant. Having spent the best part of two years thinking about and reading about consent it was refreshing to hear other people’s definitions which made more sense than the one on the dictionary, and which recognised that sex is different every time.

Consent is: ‘fluid’, ‘constantly renegotiated’, ‘communicated, verbally and non-verbally’.

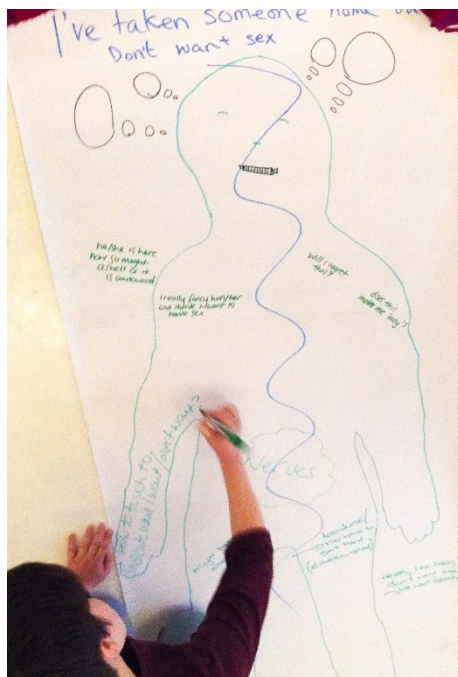


Now we had some definitions it was time to think about consent in action. We have sex with our bodies – we *do* sex. I think, we also ‘do’ consent. We had established that consent is communicated/negotiated/experienced both verbally and non-verbally, so then the body is a key part of the process of consent. Now for the body mapping. It took me sometime to explain what I hoped for this part of the session, and thanks to the feedback and the experience of doing it, I think I’ve got a better idea now for how to introduce it in the future. In other body mapping the body you draw and work on is *you*. It is very personal and an individual practice in self-reflection, so although there may be many people in the room you work alone until it comes to sharing what you have done. My aim in this workshop was to create a safe space in which we could consider consent *collectively*, as in reality consent is often relational. I wanted a space for sharing knowledge and experience but with out pressure to (over)share personal experience. In this, and in future workshops, I never have much more than an hour and a half with any group I’m working with so there will rarely be time to create a space in which personal body mapping can be done ‘safely’. This is something that I am thinking about more and hope to write about elsewhere. In short I wanted to put the body at the centre of discussion but didn’t want to make people feel uncomfortable talking about their own bodies and experiences of consent.

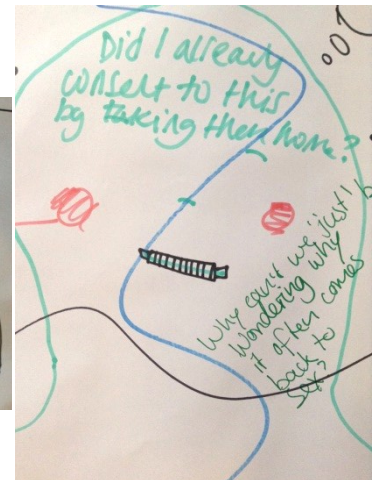
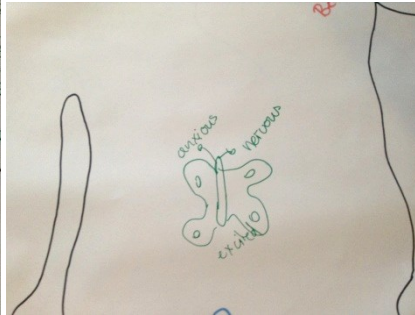
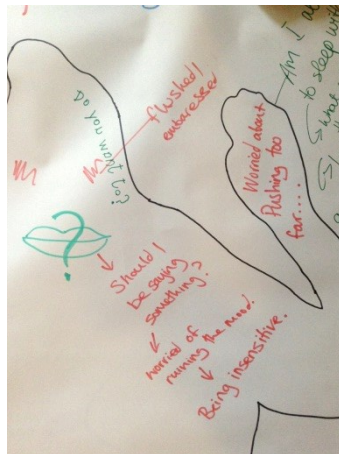
Given our conversations throughout the first half of the session we decided that we would consider the experience of two bodies. One on each ‘side’ of the same familiar scenario many people have experienced. One body had taken someone home with them, but did not want to have sex. The other body, we decided, had come home with that person and wanted sex. We decided to leave them genderless, however as we discussed later in the workshop we had subconsciously assigned them a gender when we assigned them the role, further highlighting the heteronormativity that permeates our understandings of consent, but also reminding me of

how hard it is to be 'neutral' and inclusive if something is not explicitly LGBTQ focused. Not assigning a gender or sexuality leaves us open to assigning them according to the social scripts ingrained with in us. *Of course* the body who wanted sex was the man and *of course* the body who didn't and who was 'having' to communicate a 'no' was the woman. How can I run these sessions in a way that actively allows or encourages us to disrupt these scripts, but which also doesn't put people off taking part and engaging with the issues?!

Anyway back to the bodies... I asked everyone to draw or write on each body any thoughts, emotions, physical feelings or responses they thought might be occurring for/in each body. I also suggested that they draw or write any external pressures they thought might be acting upon the bodies, outside of the body (I'm not convinced I explained that bit so well). We did this activity in silence, so that we had time to reflect, put ourselves in their shoes and respond how we wanted without worrying about how it came out.



After 10 minutes or so of silent(ish) expression, we brought the two bodies side by side and discussed some of the things we had written and drawn. Emotions, questions, and thoughts were the main things written and depicted on the bodies. What struck me about the bodies and our conversations was the similarities between each body despite being considered on different 'sides' of a situation. Both bodies felt, or were unable to communicate. They seemed to be silencing themselves, or being constrained by social scripts and expectations, worries about offending the other or ruining the mood. Something many of us could relate to but found ourselves surprised both we're silenced by the same pressures for different reasons. So communication wasn't happening. Both bodies were nervous, in their stomachs. Both flushed, with embarrassment or horyness, perhaps a bit of both... There was so much going on inside the bodies that in everyday sexual interactions are un-communicated and perhaps uncommunicable?



Despite setting up the activity in a way that frames the body as the canvas, the key component even, for framing sexual consent I was surprised how little acknowledgment or depiction there was of 'the body' within these bodies. I don't know why this surprised me, there is so much research which shows societally we are ill prepared to recognise ourselves as bodies, take ownership of and embody our desires and actions (Holland et al. 1994). It's hard. How often do we think about what is going on in our bodies, and even if we do think about it we are limited by language in what we can articulate. As Holland et al. so eloquently pointed out our dominant culture has no 'acceptable' "ways of discussing sex which are not clinical, obscene or childish... The available language is one couched in terms of relationships [...] or in euphemisms and obscurities [...] in which bodily sexual activities become veiled" (24).

The body mapping provided a visual representation of a body. The exercise allowed us to write *and* draw on the bodies. Interestingly the emotions and the thoughts were all written, but the few references to the body, the physical, were drawn. I think this is a practical demonstration of the limits of language Holland et al. are referring to.

So what was going on physically? The obvious things were there – an erection/an excited or throbbing vulva, flushed cheeks, stiffness and tense muscles, a nervous tummy. A number of these were added by me, so perhaps my comment above just shows that after two years of thinking about consent and the body you might be able to articulate the body through pictures, but I suspect that they would have been there if I hadn't got there first! Next time I'll make an effort not to jump straight in and draw a willy so someone else can.

But what wasn't there? There was a whole body to look at, to fill in. So far we'd gone quite surface, quite external only the depiction of butterfly's in the stomach, and tense/stiff muscles were physically internal. I'm not expecting an anatomically correct drawing of the intricacies of the body but surely there is more going on, we just don't know how to tune into it and acknowledge it. What about our breath – that gets faster, shallower when we are in the midst of navigating consent and sex. Our chests might get tight, our mouths may become dry with anxiety or excitement, parts of us might itch, twitch, tingle or throb? There are lots of things that happen so lots to think about, but we don't – and we didn't, even when the body mapping exercise in theory provides an 'ideal opportunity' to *think* about and articulate the body. But perhaps it's not the ideal opportunity.. and perhaps, well not perhaps, it takes *time and practice*. I've only thought about these things while reflecting on what wasn't represented, so maybe that's the starting point for next time I do this. The first question after discussing the significance

of what we have written and drawn will be to ask 'What is not there?' 'What have we missed?', and discuss more and then add to the bodies. Something we did a little this time around but not as much as perhaps we could have, but it all takes practice. I'm learning as I type right now, reflecting on what we did and considering how to make it better and generate more knowledge, collectively and constructively.

Back in the room - after our discussions we closed the session by going around and saying one thing we've learnt, or that surprised us in this session, and something that we might take away and try to practice or be more aware of in our everyday lives. It was lovely to hear that everyone had enjoyed the session and found it a great opportunity to discuss something that we don't often discuss in everyday conversation. It seemed we had all learnt something new and approached consent in a new way. We'd considered how consent is present in so many areas of lives apart from sex and how it can be difficult to navigate, and sometimes recognise. We'd given visual representation to how consent and desire can 'get lost in confusion and in your own body' before we even get to the point of communicating to someone else... It was such an interesting session, and it felt like we all had lots to take away and think about. I felt compelled, when we finished, to say that consent is difficult and that we don't and can't always get it right, for ourselves or the other person/people. Seeking consent and considering what we actually want makes us vulnerable. And while it can be a sign of strength to do this it's not easy and how we do this, and how we feel about it, will differ from time to time.



So there we have it... a session on consent and the body. What a way to spend a Wednesday evening. After this we had about 20 minutes to feedback in which we discussed what worked, what didn't work so well and whether or not there was enough space for self-reflection as well as group reflection. We discussed running a session building on this one, where we did more personal work, and also doing the workshop as a mixed group, and perhaps me running the session with a group of men. All things for me to think about and see what happens. Then as with any good workshop, I got everyone to help me tidy up. Upon leaving we had some jokes about if and how we wanted to hug each other goodbye, with some 'enthusiastic yes's' giving way to embraces all round.

Thanks to those who participated in this workshop, I hope that what I've written is a fair representation of what happened.

Appendix I
- Ethical review amendment

From: Antony Walsh
To: [Janet Boddy](#); [Elsie Whittington](#)
Cc: [Jayne Paulin](#); [Rachel Thomson](#)
Subject: RE: Ethical review amending - Elsie Whittington
Date: 22 April 2016 13:34:36
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Dear Janet

I am happy to approve the proposed approval of the amendment as stipulated. Kind regards
Antony



Dr Antony Walsh

Research Governance Officer Research and Enterprise Services University of Sussex

E: antony.walsh@sussex.ac.uk T: +44(0)1273 872748

Internal Extension: 2748 <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance>

Falmer House University of Sussex Brighton BN1 9QF

From: Janet Boddy
Sent: 22 April 2016 13:28
To: Elsie Whittington <ew99@sussex.ac.uk>; Jayne Paulin <J.E.Paulin@sussex.ac.uk>
Cc: Rachel Thomson <R.Thomson@sussex.ac.uk>; Antony Walsh <Antony.Walsh@sussex.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: Ethical review amending - Elsie Whittington Dear all

Thanks for passing this on to me. While we cannot issue a retrospective approval (this is university policy) I think the key point here is the need to make a situated ethical decision in the field, and that this was the basis for including the three 13 year old participants. In the circumstances, and given that all the CREC approved procedures were followed with these three participants, my judgement is that it would be ethically appropriate to include their data. To exclude them would arguably raise a different ethical problem (in that Elsie would not be doing what she promised when they gave consent). I would therefore recommend that (a) you go ahead and include the three participants' data and (b) that you could include this email correspondence as part of the record of ethics approval for your thesis, so the decision is transparent for your examiners.

I should, however, also note that I work with Elsie in our research centre, CIRCY, and so while I am not involved in her PhD research I am not wholly independent. For that reason, Antony, could you add a view please as RGO, to confirm whether you are happy with my proposed approval of this amendment.

With thanks and best wishes Janet

Janet Boddy

Professor of Child, Youth and Family Studies

Director, Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY)

School of Education and Social Work, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9QQ

Tel: +44 (0)1273 872 768

Web: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/circy>

See my latest paper, *What Kind of Trouble? Meeting the Health Needs of 'Troubled Families' through Intensive Family Support* in **Social Policy and Society**, available at <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=9989852&fulltextType=RA&fileId=S1474746415000494>

From: Elsie Whittington

Sent: 22 April 2016 12:20

To: Jayne Paulin <J.E.Paulin@sussex.ac.uk>

Cc: Rachel Thomson <R.Thomson@sussex.ac.uk>; Janet Boddy <J.M.Boddy@sussex.ac.uk>; Antony Walsh <Antony.Walsh@sussex.ac.uk>

Subject: RE: Ethical review amending - Elsie Whittington

Ok thank you,

Janet and Antony please let me know your thoughts and how best to proceed. I hope to hear from you soon

Elsie

From: Jayne Paulin

Sent: 22 April 2016 12:09

To: Elsie Whittington <ew99@sussex.ac.uk>

Cc: Rachel Thomson <R.Thomson@sussex.ac.uk>; Janet Boddy <J.M.Boddy@sussex.ac.uk>; Antony Walsh <Antony.Walsh@sussex.ac.uk>

Subject: RE: Ethical review amending - Elsie Whittington

Elsie

Thanks for the email. I think you would need to take advice from the Chair of the CREC or the University's Research Governance Officer, particularly if you are asking for retrospective changes.

Jayne

From: Elsie Whittington

Sent: 22 April 2016 11:48

To: Jayne Paulin <J.E.Paulin@sussex.ac.uk>

Cc: Rachel Thomson <R.Thomson@sussex.ac.uk>

Subject: Ethical review amending

Dear Jayne,

I'm writing to ask advice about my research ethical review for 'Participatory processes with young people: an exploration of consent', and to see if it may be possible to amend a small section of it retrospectively.

I gained ethical approval for my participatory research project with young people last July, and have since worked with around 100 young participants.

When I originally submitted my form I put the age of my participants as 14-25. One of the sites I have worked on was a youth club attended by young people aged 11-23. The project that I was

supported by Brook to run here was an open one. The youth club staff encouraged me to make my project open to anyone who was interested and were keen that some of the 13 year olds they work with should be involved as it would provide a good learning opportunity for them. As you will have seen in my application for ethical review I think that research is a public good, and have developed this research in a way that it can provide teaching and learning spaces for young people. My experiences as youth worker means that I have worked with a wide age range over time and with hindsight I feel I should have applied for approval to work with young people aged 13 and up rather than aged 14.

This particular section of the project at the youth club was run in such a way that young people involved understood the research nature of the project and parental consent for young people under 16 was sought from all involved. Of the 28 young people I worked with directly at this site 3 were aged 13 (1 boy and two girls). I know that my application stated that I would work with 14 and up but in the context of this project I, and the youth workers supporting me, felt that it would be unethical to exclude these three young people from participating in the project.

I followed the same process with these 3 young people as I did with other participants and they enjoyed their involvement in the projects and contributed a lot towards the final output, which at this site was a film.

I am now editing the film for use by Brook, and I am also beginning my data analysis. I wanted to know if you would advise that I exclude the data produced by the 13 year olds or if I might be able to amend my application to include their contributions. Brook works with young people of any age and they, and the youth club I worked in support me to ensure that the research project was delivered in an ethical and participatory way. While 13 can be considered 'young' to be involved in a project about sex and consent there is no legal, ethical or safeguarding reason to exclude 13 year olds from this project. And the young people involved have feedback that they enjoyed the process and have learnt a lot from working with me and other young people.

If the ethical committee require me to I can exclude these three young people from my data and analysis. It would be useful to get your feedback and or a decision about amending my ethical review form, or excluding the 13 year olds data as soon as possible so that I can move forward with my project and analysis.

I hope to hear from you soon Elsie

Elsie Whittington

Teaching and Research Assistant

Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth School of Education & Social Work

Essex House - Room 131 University of Sussex Brighton BN1 9QN, UK 01273 872845 (x2845)

Appendix J

- Film Questions

These were the questions that the young people chose and asked on another for the film project.

What is consent?

What is the minimum age someone can give consent?

Are there any non-verbal ways to give consent?

Are you able to take back consent once it's given it?

Can someone give consent if they're drunk?

(What if they are both drunk? What if one is drunk and the other isn't?)

What age should young people learn about consent?

As a young person can you come up with a universal definition of consent?

What do you think it's important other young people know about consent?

Appendix K
- Safeguarding Certificate

Certificate of Attendance



This is to certify that

Elsie Whittington

has attended

Level 1 Safeguarding Training

on Monday 3rd November 2014

Signed: Simon Blake & Sue Burchill Date 3/11/2014

Name Simon Blake & Sue Burchill

Position Chief Executive & Regional Nursing Lead (South)

Appendix L

- Example Consent forms

Example of participant consent form used with different participant groups. The title, and some of the contact information was changed according to the venue.



University of Sussex

Centre for Innovation and Research
in Childhood and Youth



CONSENT FORM
School Citizenship Consent Project

Name of University Researcher: Elsie Whittington email: ew99@sussex.ac.uk
Name of Project Supervisor: Rachel Thomson email: R.Thomson@sussex.ac.uk
Name of Participation Worker: Susy Langsdale email: S.Langsdale@brook.org.uk

Elsie is a researcher at the University of Sussex in Brighton who is working with Brook to find out what young people know and think about sexual consent. One of the aims of her project is to develop an understanding of consent by working with young people in different settings and supporting them to actively think and talk about consent.

Information gathered by Elsie when she is working with young people is likely to go on Brook's website and will be shared with staff at Brook for training and development. If you are identifiable in this information Elsie will check with you first if this is ok.

The activities, discussions and outputs that you and Elsie are involved with will be part of the Research. They will be written up and analysed for the PhD Thesis and in future publications for other academics, youth workers, adults and young people working in sexual health education and provision.

We will go through and discuss this form together to make sure that you and the researcher both know what is expected of each other during this project, and what you feel comfortable discussing and taking part in.

Please tick or initial each box and sign on the other side of the paper:

1. I understand Elsie's role as a researcher in this project, and that she will record and document bits of the project for her research. ☐
2. I understand that parts of this project may be put on the Brook website, and used in a blog or on social media ☐
3. I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from it at anytime without giving any reason. ☐
4. I understand, if I decide to withdraw, it may be difficult to remove all my input from the project but that anything that could be identified as mine will be deleted ☐

P.T.O

5. I acknowledge that anonymised extracts of what I say during sessions with Elsie might be used in work with Staff at Brook and in academic publications and presentations or similar. ☐
6. I am willing to have more discussions about my consent and participation in the Elsie's research to make sure that all the volunteers have come up with and uphold the group boundaries and expectations. ☐
7. I agree to be respectful of other people taking part and maintain the confidentiality of the session ☐
8. I am willing to take part in this research and social action project. ☐

By signing below I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that my personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Signed: _____

Print name _____ Date _____

By signing below I agree to support this project and uphold any agreements and boundaries that we create (now or during future discussions). I will do my best to keep you informed about the research and what happens to the information I collect after .

Researcher signature _____

Print Name _____ Date _____

Any notes or comments from going through the form:

Appendix M

- Photo/video release form

Digital media consent form



I _____ give my permission for a photograph/video

of me to be taken by Brook as Part of Elsie Whittington's PhD research. I understand that this digital media will be used by Brook and Elsie, and its chosen representatives, in publicity materials and also in the media and that I will be identified as a user or beneficiary of Brook's services.

I am _____ years old.

If you are happy to have your name used in publicity materials, please tell us how you would like to be referred to. If you are not happy, please leave this box blank: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Consent from parent/carer (if under 16)

Name of parent/carer: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

FOR BROOK USE:

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____



Appendix O

- From Findings to Practice: Brook Learn

In collaboration with Ester McGeeney, Laura Hamzic, Brook, One Click, Rachel Thomson and Ben Fincham, and with Funding from Sussex Impact Acceleration Fund the work presented in this thesis has also contributed to four modules as part of Brook's online training course for educators called 'Brook learn'. The content of the Brook Learn modules seeks to provide reassurance that teachers can and should deliver more critical sessions that explore the values, morals and ethics around sex and relationships as much, if not more, than the legalistic and public health framings of 'risk'. Each module directly relates to a key finding from this research and draws on activities, data, and learning that have been co-produced during this PhD research. I encourage readers to sign up to the module to get a feel for the resource. This can be accessed via: <https://learn.brook.org.uk/>. I will briefly outline each module as follows and show how the findings from this research have been put into practice.

Module 1: The meaning of consent:

The Thesis has established that consent is an ambiguous concept and it is useful to deconstruct it in educational sessions. This module addresses the questions of 'what is consent? what is sex? How does gender play a role? and why is it all so complicated?'. The key messages in this module and the learning objective for the session plans provided are about acknowledging that consent is an ambiguous term and that the ways we talk about sex and consent are gendered. In particular the findings and activities presented in chapter five and six are put to work in this module. My findings related to the persistence of heteropatriarchal norms in the narratives that young people draw on are addressed in this module through activities which highlight the terms that are used to judge people of different genders and how this may influence decisions to engage in sexual activity. This provides educators with confidence to acknowledge that consent is a complicated subject but that it is important to engage with it more critically.

THE MEANING OF CONSENT

So, what does 'sexual consent' really mean?

In the eyes of the law, consent is the agreement between participants to have sex or engage in a sexual activity.

All involved must have the freedom and capacity to make that decision. Engaging in a sexual act without the person's consent is a criminal offence and is considered sexual assault or rape.

The wording of the law still doesn't adequately distinguish between wanting something and giving in to it. What's more, it introduces further problems by saying there must be freedom and capacity to make that decision, without explaining what that really means.

Don't worry - we'll investigate this further in the next module!

IS THE WORD 'CONSENT' APPROPRIATE?

brook UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX Home Menu 5/12

Module 2: Myths and the law

This thesis has highlighted the limitations of consent education that starts with and focuses predominantly on the legal standard of sexual consent. However, the literature and policy highlighted in chapters two and three, and the findings presented in chapters five and six suggest it is necessary to engage with and explain the law clearly. This module provides a timeline of consent and shows how we have come to the present legal definition. It also provides a series of myth busting activities which highlight the misconceptions related to consent, gender and age. Educators need to know and feel confident about the legalities of consent and how young people's competence to consent is considered differently according to three age brackets. This can help them to acknowledge youth sexuality as 'legal' but also address safeguarding concerns relating to competence and power relations across different ages. This module contributes to neat and tidy definitions of what consent is before deconstructing it and moving towards a conversation about negotiation in different contexts.

Module 3: The Consent Continuum

The consent continuum developed in this thesis is a significant contribution to both academic and practice literature. In this module the continuum is used to help people understand the limitations of a yes/no model of consent and to scaffold discussion about the different shades of grey that young people are interested in exploring. The activities in this module are based on scenarios written by and with young participants and provide everyday and less extreme examples of sexual violation for consideration. The continuum enables educators to take the 'risks' associated with engaging with grey areas and 'what if' questions. The continuum is an ideal tool for encouraging young people to think critically about where they might place a scenario and why, and encourages attention to context. Rather than suggesting a placement is 'incorrect' it is possible to ask or consider what might need altering for the encounter to be moved up or down accordingly. While developing this module we have acknowledge the concerns teachers may have about engaging with grey areas and not providing 'clear' answers about whether something is consensual or not. The training, based on this research, advocates

that engaging in the grey areas is a key part of building young people's skills for recognising and communicating boundaries and desires.

THE CONSENT CONTINUUM

Building your Consent Continuum

Think about where you feel the yellow behaviours belong within the new Consent Continuum categories.

RAPE	NON CONSENSUAL SEX	PASSIVE CONSENT ?	ACTIVE CONSENT ?

DRAG AND DROP THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTIONS INTO WHERE YOU FEEL THEY BELONG...

- Communication and negotiation occurs
- Sex may have been unwanted and forced but it wasn't violent
- There is mutual desire
- There may be some desire from at least one person
- Sex is wanted but explicit consent is neither sought nor given
- One partner feels obliged to have sex
- Aversion to sex was not made explicit
- Explicit resistance and/or use of force
- Consent is explicitly sought and given
- Clear violation of boundaries

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Module 4: Communicating consent

The final module focuses on communicating consent and recognises that people rarely seek or give explicit verbal consent. In providing scenarios, that were developed by Ester McGeeney and Educators at Brook, this module highlights the different ways that people can and do communicate desire, ambivalence, disinterest and unsureness. This module encourages people to think about what feelings may be occurring in different interactions and shows how feelings and desires can be communicated and negotiated verbally, non-verbally, explicitly and implicitly as suggested by Muelenhard and Peterson 2005, and confirmed by my participants. While produced under the title of 'consent' this module draws on the finding from chapters six and seven and focuses on *process of sexual negotiation*. The scenarios in this module showcase awkwardness, ambiguity and ambivalence as elements of sexual negotiation.

COMMUNICATING CONSENT

What do YOU want?

Let's start with you. Practising good consent involves checking in with yourself and thinking about your feelings, emotions and body.

CLICK ON THE BUTTONS FOR EXAMPLES OF HOW SOMEONE MIGHT FEEL WHEN THEY'RE ABOUT TO HAVE SEX

- MENTAL: 'WHAT AM I THINKING RIGHT NOW?'
- EMOTIONAL: 'HOW AM I FEELING RIGHT NOW?'
- PHYSICAL: 'HOW'S MY BODY RESPONDING?'

- REPULSED
- LONGING TO BE TOUCHED
- UNCOMFORTABLE WITH SOMEONE TOUCHING ME
- VULVA / PENIS IS UNAROUSED AND DRY
- I'M HOT
- MY HEART IS POUNDING
- VULVA / PENIS IS SWOLLEN AND WET
- I WANT TO BE CLOSE TO THIS PERSON

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The findings I have presented and their incorporation in training materials and teaching resources are timely given the success of recent campaigns and research that has called for Sex and Relationships Education to be compulsory. The Social Work Bill comes in response to pressure from these campaigns and as part of a more integrated approach to safeguarding where SRE has been cited as one way in which young people can be equipped with the skills and knowledge to protect themselves from, or recognise if they are subject to exploitation, grooming or violence (Greening 2017). However, this research has foregrounded the importance of conversations and educational intervention that focuses on the less extreme and more mundane element of consent, and sexual violation. The modules above can contribute to a wider project in safeguarding however they do so by focusing on 'ordinary' sexual encounters that young people can relate to.

"If sex education is going to ask young people for something more than compliance, if we imagine that sex education could host a conversation about the varieties of yes-saying and no-saying (Butler 2011), then we will need to begin with a conceptualisation of sexuality that ventures into the realms of surprise, uncertainty, ambivalence, love and violence; otherwise there is no difference between education and the law."
(Gilbert 2018:277)

These modules are not without their limits, and do not incorporate all of the research findings. However it is hoped that they will encourage educators in all kinds of institutional contexts to depart from teaching about consent based on binary and legalistic frameworks and give them the confidence and tools to enable more critical and youth centred consent education. While there is much more to be done to make SRE fit for the 21st century this thesis and more practically the outputs produced in collaboration with young people and educators have contributed to an evolving body of knowledge and practice that seeks to cultivate a more ethical sexual culture. I look forward to building on this work.