Recognition, representation, and relationships: how the UK Relationships and Sex Education Curriculum (2020) can meet the needs of and offer representation to young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people with LGBT+ identities.

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) became mandatory in all secondary schools in England in September 2020. Prior to this, delivery of RSE was neither compulsory nor consistent across England, meaning student experience differed widely. Added to this is a climate of prohibitive legislation surrounding the teaching of homosexuality, leading to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) young people to often be excluded from RSE. Special schools were also often behind mainstream schools in their delivery of RSE curricula, causing a disparity between disabled and non-disabled young people (OFSTED, 2013).

This thesis takes as its starting point the idea that comprehensive RSE should allow all young people to 'interact with each other as equals' (Fraser, 2000, p. 36). Through a Critical Discourse Analysis, it analyses its representation of young LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse at a text level. A series of phenomenological interviews examine previous experiences of young people who did not benefit from the statutory curriculum to offer a case for the need for inclusive RSE. These two elements are then combined into suggestions for practice for teachers and facilitators delivering the curriculum.

This investigation makes an original contribution to research through its examination of how Relationships and Sex Education and its inclusivity contribute to young adults' experience of participatory parity and their ability to interact with each other as equals. The findings have implications for curriculum design, social representation, and classroom practice.

Keywords: Relationships and Sex Education, Disability, Curricula, Critical Discourse Analysis.

Contents

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus

LGBT+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

RSE Relationships and Sex Education

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

STI Sexually Transmitted Infections

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

Thank you to those who made this thesis possible – to my supervisor Dr. Sue Cranmer, and to the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

To my participants who shared their experiences of RSE so beautifully and bravely, thank you. I hope your stories help to move the wheels of change.

An immeasurable thank you to my wife, Maz, who listened to the intricacies of this thesis on repeat and who knows it almost better than I do. To my parents, friends and colleagues who offered support in the most difficult moments, thank you. To my friends who are also academics who shared their secrets, thank you (especially the wonderful Dr. Ameera Ali).

To the prohibitive legislation and school system that ensured that my own RSE could consist of, verbatim, ‘Jesus says no’, the strangest thank you of all. Thank you for illuminating the depths from which this thesis aims to climb.

And to those I have invariably forgotten to thank by name, thank you all.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Prior to September 2020, there existed no standardised curriculum for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) across England in maintained, special and independent schools collectively. Maintained secondary schools have been obliged to teach about HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections, and to follow the National Curriculum which covers reproduction in the curriculum for science. Parents have historically held the right to withdraw their children from any lessons about sexual health, sex, or relationships without any responsibility upon the school to ascertain the wishes of the child, inclusive of them reaching age sixteen, the UK age of sexual consent.

This means that, as it stood in August 2020, a young person could legally be able to consent to sexual acts, but have access to very fragmented information about relationships and sex and have access to any of this education refused by their parents on their behalf.

From September 2020, a new statutory curriculum for RSE was adopted in maintained, special and independent schools across England which aims to embed a considerably more comprehensive statutory curriculum, which includes the teaching of same-sex relationships. Due to the disruption to the school term caused by the closures during the period of lockdown following March 2020, schools were granted a grace period of one academic term in which to implement this new curriculum, to allow some flexibility in catching up on time lost in other curriculum areas over the spring and summer terms.

This research takes the curriculum launched in September 2020, and its accompanying Statutory Guidance, written in 2018, as a starting point. The focus of this thesis is to examine the ways in which this curriculum is able to offer representation to and be inclusive of young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or additional (LGBT+) identities. In particular, the aim is to investigate whether, by experiencing an RSE curriculum that is inclusive to and representative of their needs and identities, this population can be considered to experience a greater amount of participatory parity as adults.

The originality of this research stems from the consideration of inclusivity and the intersectionality of disability and sexual orientation or gender identity within the context of RSE. By looking at how representation within a curriculum allows young people to feel equally included in that curriculum, we can consider how representative teaching in relation to LGBT+ and disability status can offer young people the opportunity to participate equally in adulthood with their peers.

1.2 A note on the term ‘young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people’.

Before considering the literature surrounding this topic, I would like to make a note about the use of the term ‘young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people’ in contrast to the term ‘young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)’. ‘SEND’ is a term that will present itself several times in both the literature surrounding this research and in the policies studied to conduct the research. We will define it more clearly within the literature review. However, it will

not be used by the researcher to describe the population studied in this thesis. Originally, the term ‘with SEND’ was used, and is present in the interview questions presented to participants as visible in the appendix. The researcher was originally uncomfortable with the term due to the focus on person-first language and its alliance with the medical model of disability (discussed further on in this literature review), however I made the decision to keep the language aligned with the policy considered in the thesis.

However, during the research and as a result of participant feedback, I have taken the decision to use the phrase ‘young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people’ instead. A participant in the interview phase of this research voiced their dislike for person-first language, saying of the term ‘person with special educational needs and/or disabilities’, “I know that it’s used in schools but …I think special needs is a really problematic term rooted in ableism and … I just hate the language, I would definitely describe myself as disabled and I think disabled is a really important term for us to utilise in seeking liberation”.

Participants also described a difference in their experience as neurodivergent or neurodiverse people in comparison to their experience as disabled people (several participants identified as both). They also experienced discomfort with their neurodivergence being perceived by others as a disability.

The Education and Training Foundation feel that ‘the neurodiversity paradigm emphasises looking at SEND learners primarily in terms of their gifts and abilities, and uses these strengths to help them deal with their challenges’, allowing for a more strength-based approach to learning needs.

The overall aim of this thesis is to represent and advocate for the young people interviewed, and it is for this reason that I have decided to use two different terms

throughout this thesis. To honour participants' views and desire for liberatory language, I will use the term 'young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people' to refer to them or this population of young people in general.

However, to reflect that 'SEND' remains a term used in educational practice and policy, when referring to policy, educational documents, or literature, I will use the term 'young people with SEND'.

1.3 Key terms

In this section I will define the key terms used throughout this thesis with reference to the literature used. The term LGBT+ and its complexities will be discussed further in chapters two and five, but here I will define the terms: SEND and disability, neurodiversity and neurodivergent, and participatory parity.

1.3.1 SEND and disability

This thesis uses the Department for Education's definition of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disability. For this thesis, then, Special Educational Needs and/or disability equates to:

'xiii. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

xiv. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

• has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or

• has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.' (Department for Education, 2015, pp. 15-16)

This being said, a further discussion on what disability may mean to participants, and how and why they may choose to self-define that way, is offered in chapter two.

1.3.2 Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence

As discussed in section 1.2, the terms neurodivergent and neurodiverse have been selected for use in this thesis in order to better align with the terms preferred by participants. Both of these terms were coined in the late 1990s by Judy Singer, who explains in her published blogs on the term that ‘neurodiversity refers to the virtually infinite neuro-cognitive variability within Earth’s human population. It points to the fact that every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs" (Singer, 2020, para. 32) while neurodivergent refers to "the significant percentage of humans who are increasingly recognized as differing cognitively from Neurotypicality" (Singer, 2019. para. 3).

1.3.4 Participatory Parity

This thesis takes the view that good RSE should aim to increase the experience by all young people of participatory parity, a phrase coined by Nancy Fraser that describes the operation of a societal framework that ‘permit[s] all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers’ (Fraser, 2003, p. 36).

1.4 A History of Relationships and Sex Education in England.

First of all, it is important to look at how we arrived here. What trajectory has Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) followed in England? In general, Relationships and Sex Education has a tendency to lean towards one of two outlooks: comprehensive or conservative (Shannon, 2016), and to focus its energies

upon prevention – of both Sexually Transmitted Infections and unwanted pregnancies (Kantor & Lindberg, 2020).

Relationships and Sex Education has been, at best, a fragmented curriculum in England, with schools offering varied content and devoting varying amounts of time to delivering it (OFSTED, 2013). As previously discussed, although maintained schools in England have to teach sex education, there has been no defined curriculum for this. Special Schools and Independent Schools are able to teach different curricula, which means that there is little to no standard RSE for young people of secondary age.

In addition to this, Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which forbade the 'promotion' by schools of homosexuality in England has cast a long shadow in terms of affording hetero and homosexual relationships the same credence in terms of relationships and sex education, especially in terms of attempting to challenge the idea of heteronormativity in schools (Greenland and Nunney, 2008).

The 1980s and 1990s were a time during which Sex Education received significant legislative attention. The 1993 Education Act made both parent withdrawal from Sex Education legal and biological Sex Education compulsory, whilst rendering education on HIV, contraception and STIs non-mandatory. During this period 'sex education policy, and more broadly policy related to the rights and needs of the child, received a great deal of legislative attention … with AIDS' emergence affecting, but not instigating, interest in these topics' (Elizabeth 2021, p. 282).

This leaves RSE on a fractious and inconsistent footing. Within both the adult and school-age population, a wealth of different experiences of RSE exist, as do varying opinions on its value. Let us consider the evidence in favour of high-quality RSE in schools.

Pound et al. (2016) found that RSE was ‘vital to improving young people’s sexual health’ (Pound et al., 2016, p. 1), but that a third of schools lacked good RSE. A difficulty that we can posit, due to the lack of a standardised curriculum, is the degree to which schools before the introduction of the 2020 curriculum have been able to offer a curriculum that is comprehensive enough to meet the needs of young people.

UNESCO (2018) produced a report in which it described Comprehensive Sex Education as: ‘*A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives*.’ (UNESCO, 2018, p. 16) However, like all curricula, access to the RSE curriculum is not necessarily equal for all.

Taking then, where the landscape of RSE lay on the eve of the new curriculum, it is important to recognise that, despite Relationships and Sex Education being theoretically mandatory (in so far as covering Sexually Transmitted Infections and the act of reproduction), there have been many ways in which access to information has been denied.

Faith schools are not obliged to teach any further than the two required topics, and, often, choose not to do so. A 2018 report found that 77% of faith schools in England teach RSE according to scripture, which often distorts their teaching around same-sex relationships, contraception, abortion and even menstruation (National Secular Society, 2018).

In terms of the requirement to offer Relationships and Sex Education, the Learning and Skills Act 2000 made it obligatory for all schools to offer some form of this but does allow parents the right to withdraw their child. The act states that young people with SEND should be actively involved in this form of education, but there is no formal government curriculum or guidelines (until the introduction of the draft curriculum) as to what relationships and sex education should include, or how to discuss these topics in a way that allows equal participation for students with SEND.

In 2013, OFSTED reported that Relationships and Sex Education needed to be improved in half of all secondary schools, whilst a 2009 survey revealed that only two-thirds of special schools made attendance at Relationships and Sex Education classes compulsory (Garbutt et al., 2009). This climate of inconsistent and, in many cases, ineffective Relationships and Sex Education led to a Department for Education Consultation on Statutory Guidance for RSE, and, ultimately, the decision for Compulsory RSE to be introduced across England September 2020.

The draft curriculum for statutory RSE does make concession for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, stating that:

'*Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education must be accessible for all pupils. This is particularly important when planning teaching for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities as they represent a large minority of pupils..' (Department for Education, 2017).*

The glaring gap in the draft statutory guidance for delivery of RSE in state schools, however, is the adaptation of the curriculum for young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people who consider themselves to have LGBT+ identities. In April 2019, the UK government ruled that RSE must include reference to LGBT+ relationships, a great stride that goes some way to repairing the damage

done by Section 28. However, it is still notable that there is no specific reference to adapting this content to those with SEND. This causes two potential issues. The first is that, for some young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people, the delivery of the curriculum itself may be inaccessible. The second, is that it could be argued that relationships that take place on the LGBT+ spectrum bring with them a social dynamic that still differs from those of heteronormative relationships, and that relationships that also experience the potential challenges that Special Educational Needs or Disability can bring may also need to be approached with differences of communication, and perhaps physical adaptations. It is from this starting point that I want to explore how a comprehensive RSE curriculum could address the balance of representation and recognition that is currently tipped very much against young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people with LGBT+ identities.

This brings us to the starting point for this research, and the questions that it aims to address:

1.5 Research questions

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate how the new (2020) RSE curriculum addresses inclusion and representation for LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse students. In particular, I aim to investigate whether a curriculum that addresses and increases inclusion and representation for these groups can be said to contribute to the experience of participatory parity as adults. I will also consider the implications of addressing inclusion and representation on classroom practice, and how a measurable framework of best practice can be achieved to ensure that the aim of allowing LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or

neurodiverse young people to feel included and represented in the curriculum is present in all school cultures teaching RSE.

1.5.1How does the new RSE curriculum address inclusion and representation for young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse LGBT+ people?

A critical discourse analysis of the new curriculum in terms of inclusion and representation for LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people looking at: vocabulary used to describe both disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse and LGBT+ identities; topics included in the curriculum; recommended practice and any guidance given specifically on how to include these populations.

1.5.2 How does inclusion and representation at a curriculum level contribute to the experience of participatory parity for LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people as adults?

This section of the research will offer a theoretical linking of Fraser's theory of participatory parity and school curricula as a conduit to social justice. With specific reference to the ways in which UNESCO recommend Comprehensive Sexuality Education as a global aim, this research question seeks to address how being represented in a curriculum can allow young people of a marginalized group to achieve participatory parity as adults, with RSE curricula as an example. This will be

confirmed by a phenomenological study consisting of interviews with self-identified disabled and neurodivergent and diverse and LGBT+ young people recruited from local youth groups and social media.

1.5.3 What are the implications of both the critical discourse analysis and the phenomenological study on classroom practice for educators seeking to encourage inclusion and representation when implementing the new RSE curriculum?

This section of the thesis will consider the implications of the first two questions for educators. If this curriculum is to offer inclusion and representation to this population, what implications does that have on classroom practice? At present SEND young people are often educated in smaller groups for mainstream subjects but not for RSE. Does this practice offer true inclusivity? Will the experience of the young people interviewed suggest that differentiation or quality teaching first need to be adapted for RSE teaching? What implications might there be for whole school cultures, in particular faith schools, free schools and academies, and special schools? How can professional development and observation practices be developed to ensure inclusion and representation is present in the delivery of this curriculum across a range of school cultures?

This research, including a phenomenological study conducted with LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people aged 16 and over, will investigate how the needs of this population are, and can be, served by a RSE curriculum for all, and how it can offer inclusion and representation to them.

In addition, I will be looking at the implications for classroom practice for schools seeking to implement the curriculum in an inclusive and representative way and offering recommendations of ways in which good practice can be transferred across school cultures, including to meet the needs of faith schools and special schools.

This is a piece of research that is important as Relationships and Sex Education moves forward in England. Previous research into RSE for young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people has often focused on the need to protect this population from experiencing abuse (Garbutt, 2009), (Mencap, 2001), This research will not focus solely on how we can protect young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people from abuse, nor to conceptualise a curriculum that deals exclusively with 'SEND' issues. Rather, I want to investigate how the new RSE curriculum can help young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people with LGBT+ identities to 'realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships' (UNESCO, 2018).

By speaking to young people who have experienced the scattered and unstandardised Relationships and Sex Education, and who can discuss how this has impacted upon their understanding of their relationships and identities as young adults, we may be able to see ways forward that allow the next generation of young people who are LGBT+ and disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse to enjoy a better experience.

This thesis draws heavily on the theoretical framework of participatory parity and recognition. Whilst much work has been done in this sphere, this thesis will consider largely the work of Nancy Fraser.

Fraser (2013) proposes a three-dimensional theory of social justice: recognition, representation, and redistribution. Whilst redistribution is a tenet largely rooted in the

economic, it will still be addressed in this thesis as the current lack of provision for RSE for young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people with LGBT+ identities could, in itself, be considered to be an issue of redistribution. However, the main concerns of this thesis will be the concepts of recognition and representation, and how they can be seen to be lacking in RSE curricula for young disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people with LGBT+ identities. More on Fraser's work and other relevant theoretical frameworks will be discussed in Chapter three.

With research questions in mind, a theoretical framework through which to view them, and some context of the historical development of RSE in England, let us look at the current landscape of literature surrounding this topic in more detail.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

To fully appreciate the landscape of the literature surrounding this piece of research, we will need to consider several different areas of literature. To situate research question one in the context of current research, we will need to consider literature around Relationships and Sex Education; notions of disability; the models of disability and their relationship to education; critiques of inclusive education. This will provide an understanding of the educational context in which the current RSE curriculum sits and allow us to analyse it for representation based on this.

To allow us to answer question two, we will need to consider participatory parity and its significance for marginalised communities; relationships and sex education for LGBT+ students; relationships and sex education for disabled students and how disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse adults experience their sex lives.

Let us begin by considering key concepts and debates within relationships and sex education.

2.2 Relationships and Sex Education

As explored in chapter one, relationships and sex education has undergone a long journey to being statutory. In England, this has been the case from September 2020, whilst other developed countries such as the USA have still not arrived at a coherent notion of either the need for mandatory relationships and sex education, nor the content that should be delivered.

The Statutory Guidance for Relationships, Sex and Health Education (2018) explains that ‘high quality, evidence-based and age-appropriate teaching of

[relationships and sex education] can help prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life' (Department for Education 2018, p. 8).

Scholarship surrounding relationships and sex education proports that it is 'supposed to provide adolescents with the information and skills they need to navigate relationships, understand sex and sexuality, and find the resources they need for obtaining additional information and relevant health services.' (Kantor & Lindberg, 2020, p. 145), that it 'involves the acquisition of information and the opportunity for young people to explore and develop their attitudes, beliefs and values as they relate to gender and sexuality, sexual and gender identity, relationships and intimacy.' (Thomas & Aggleton 2016, p. 14). If RSE is the vehicle for young people exploring and developing their attitudes and beliefs, especially around their sexual and gender identity, then representation of multiple sexual and gender identities is vital to encourage this period of exploration in young people.

School-based RSE in particular, can be considered 'vital for navigating… changes, safeguarding young people and helping to combat child sexual abuse and exploitation' (Pound et al., 2017, p. 1). Whilst we must exercise caution when drawing links between sexual and gender diversity and sexual abuse in order to avoid perpetuating potentially harmful stereotypes, sexual abuse can take a variety of forms. Diversifying school based RSE to reflect a variety of sexual acts can both widen young people's understanding of the richness of sexuality in general, and allow young people to widen their understanding of what constitutes abuse and exploitation.

There are criticisms of relationships and sex education, too, despite the advances. With no current experience of mandatory relationships and sex education in England to be drawn upon, there are 'concerns about disparities in the content

and quality of provision, disparities that might partly explain the social inequalities observed in sexual health' (Pound et al., 2017, p.1), and that current, liberal approaches to relationships and sex education curricula 'fail to appreciate the moral complexities of young people's sexuality and relationships' (Heyes, 2019, p. 165).

We can see that whilst there are recognised positive aspects to a robust RSE curriculum, this curriculum would need to be representative in order for these benefits to be shared by all young people who experience it. There are also still disparities globally and nationally within RSE, and this places even more need on the curricula in place to commit to teaching in a way that reaches and enriches the lives of all.

2.3 Notions of Disability.

Disability is a concept that is difficult to define, and much depends upon the model of disability being used.

The two dominant models of disability include the medical model – viewing disability as a medical phenomenon, treatable through medical or technical means and maybe preventable through biological engineering or screening – and the social model – that perceives disability as lying in the social barriers and obstacles that arise from an impairment, not in the impairment itself.

However, even in the social model, the presence of impairment is important because, without it, disability could become a catch-all term for all aspects of oppression, rather than focusing on the oppression that is caused by experiencing a physical or mental impairment within the contemporary construction of society.

The social model has its roots in the work of the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). This network was formed after Paul Hunt, a former resident of the Lee Court Cheshire Home, wrote to The Guardian newspaper in 1971, proposing the creation of a consumer group of disabled residents of institutions. This organisation modelled their aims on those of anti-apartheid campaigners in South Africa. ‘In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society’ (UPIAS, 1975).

There is a danger, however, in considering disabled students as segregated today as this probably does not help us to conceptualise the vast majority of students and young people we are considering in this research, especially when considered in conjunction with the Department for Education definition. The vast majority of young people with SEND are educated in mainstream provision - overall, pupils in secondary schools with SEN account for 32.0% of all pupils with SEN in 2020 (Department for Education,2020). Whilst the Department for Education categorises these young people as ‘SEN’ rather than ‘SEND’ in their statistics release, they do not record young disabled people separately, so we may infer that some of this 32% of young people educated within mainstream schools could potentially also be disabled. This means that it is important that representation and inclusion of disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people be considered holistically across the curriculum, to reinforce the idea that people who identify as disabled do not exist out with the population as a whole.

What is arguably most important is that we are able to arrive at a conception of disability that is fit for purpose within the frameworks provided by a traditional

education system. Whilst there remains debate between which model can represent the concept of disability most fully, ‘we must move beyond the disputes focusing on the nature of disability and instead, shift our focus to what we can do for people with disabilities by using the best conception of disability available to us’ (Riddle & Bickenbach, 2014, p. 22). This suggests the potential to move towards a definition that offers a degree of ‘line of best fit’ between a multitude of experiences. There are some disadvantages to arriving at this working definition of disability, as ‘some people are bound to disagree on the concept being endorsed,’ (Riddle & Bickenbach, 2014, p. 22). We may, therefore, never be able to sum up the complexities and richness of disability within a singular definition, but we can strive to attain a definition that encompasses the experiences of as many disabled experiences as possible.

It is important, when defining disability, not to place too much focus on confining ourselves to the use of a single model. The use of a strictly social model can often ‘so strongly disown individual and medical approaches that it risks implying that impairment is not a problem’ (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 218). We must also remember that whatever model we choose to use as a conceptual framework for disability, the experience of disability is present in the lives of real young people in real educational settings throughout the country, and it is important not to lose sight of this. The social model can be said to be ‘unhelpful in understanding the complex interplay of individual and environmental factors in the lives of disabled people’ (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 220).

This means that, in representing disability within any curricula, we should be mindful of the wealth of experiences of young disabled people and the unintentional ignorance their able-bodied peers may have to these. We should be mindful that

young people will experience varying levels of isolation, difficulty and ostracization due to their disability status. Despite this, it is important not to add to the 'inspiration porn' (representation of disability as a form of disadvantage that can be overcome for the titillation of other people/observers', Grue, 2016, p. 838) narrative of disability and to reinforce narratives of disabled pride and liberation.

However, we must arrive at a definition of special educational needs and/or disability, at least for the purposes of this study. Let us take as a starting point the definitions contained within the legislation:

'Special educational needs (SEN)

xiii. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

xiv. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

• has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or

• has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.' (Department for Education, 2015, pp. 15-16)

The Equality Act (2010) also offers a workable definition of disability as it applies to school life:

'You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

What 'substantial' and 'long-term' mean

- ‘substantial’ is more than minor or trivial, e.g., it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed
- ‘long-term’ means 12 months or more, e.g., a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection.’ (Equality Act, 2010).’

As we will see later in this chapter, the legislative landscape surrounding young people with SEND will often use these definitions as a starting point for access to assessments and/or, support, and therefore we will assume that young people who identify as disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse will most likely fit this criterion, at least by their own definition.

2.3.1 Models of disability in reference to education.

As disability is difficult to define, and as there is an element of the definition which people choose to self-identify into, we have to be careful about how we categorise disability. Shakespeare (1996) considers that the notion of identifying disabled populations can be both an active and reflexive verb. Others can identify disabled people due to the results of impairment or medical diagnoses, and people can, on a reflexive basis, self-identify as being disabled.

At first glance, the educational landscape in England appears to be compatible with a social model understanding of disability. The SEND Code of Practice, underpinning the education of young people with SEND, calls for a ‘focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning’ (Department for Education, 2015, p. 20) and recognises as its aim that young people with SEN and disabilities ‘achieve their ambitions and the best possible educational and other outcomes, including getting a job and living as independently as possible’ (Department for Education, 2015, p. 24). However, there is a caveat to these noble aims. To be

defined as having SEN or a disability, young people must be in receipt of a medical diagnosis or formal assessment of Special Educational Need. In fact, the Code of Practice puts some of this responsibility on to local school authorities, who 'must carry out their functions with a view to identifying all the children and young people in their area who have or may have SEN or have or may have a disability' (Department for Education, 2015, p. 23).

Of course, there is a valid argument that local authorities and schools cannot support those who they cannot identify, but the reliance on formal diagnoses of SEND somewhat diminishes the social and cultural aspects of disability explored by Shakespeare: that is, that someone could have an impairment and not feel disabled, and someone could feel disabled and not have a visible impairment.

In terms of education, and, particularly, in terms of relationships and sex education, this cultural aspect of disability could pose problems for young people. Whilst young people with what is considered culturally a 'visible' disability such as cerebral palsy, downs syndrome or a developmental condition that affects their physical presentation, could easily find themselves in the category of disabled people who are infantilised and presumed not to need as robust a curriculum of relationships and sex education, young people with long term conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart conditions may find that there is little to no provision in their experience of relationships and sex education for the ways in which their impairments may affect the development of their relationships and/or sexual development.

Therein lies an issue with the social model, or the cultural element of disability. Whilst we can understand, through the social model of disability, that children and young people with SEND can consider themselves to be disabled by the socio-

cultural and political structures that surround them, we can also offer the opinion that not all are *equally* disabled by said structures or appreciate that element of disability equally. It is important, then, to be mindful of both the legal and cultural elements of disability in reference to education.

Whilst, therefore, there is an element of cultural identity to it, disability is an issue that educators need to be able to navigate practically. Bolt (2018, p. 11) notes that ‘tutors and students are encouraged to engage with disability as an isolating, hurtful, and joyful experience that transforms aesthetics and pedagogics; merits multiple levels of representation; and offers true potential for community via navigations across the normative divide.’

This may be true, but there is an argument that, in order to reach the ‘joyful experience that transforms…pedagogics’, one may first have to successfully navigate, and enable students to navigate, the 'isolating' and 'hurtful' experience of SEND young people.

Which brings us again to identification. Within Shakespeare's (1996) models of identifying disabled people, there is one that sees ‘disability as the outcome of impairment’ (Shakespeare, 1996, p. 95). This definition, the medical model, focuses on the biological and sees disabled people as ‘that group of people whose bodies do not work; or look different or act differently; or who cannot do productive work,’ (Shakespeare, 1996, p. 95). As educators, this method of identification is often what we are presented with when we are given the school's SEND register to work with when planning for differentiation. We are often given an Individual Learning Plan which sets out a student's difficulties or deficits. We may be given extracts of an Education, Health and Care plan offered which allow us to see the 'outcomes' that the student is working towards. Education Health and Care plan outcomes can

sometimes be seen as separate from and additional to the wider learning aims of the subject we are teaching. For teachers, however dedicated they are to representing all students in their teaching, this places the child or young person within the context of their medical limitations, often before the teacher has even met the child or young person.

The social model of identification, then, would see disability ‘as the outcome of disabling barriers imposed by environmental or policy interventions. It suggests a strategy of barrier removal, or education to remove prejudice, with the goal of inclusion’ (Shakespeare, 1996, p. 96). This is a much more validating way in which to perceive a child or young person. However, it is likely that, without the documentation provided to teachers that identifies children and young people as SEND via the existence of medical evidence that 'proves' it, teachers would perhaps argue that they would not be able to immediately recognise, and thus strive to include, SEND young people in their class. This argument can be challenged by standard working practices within Higher Education, where support plans often focus on the strategies and support that tutors can offer without emphasising medical ‘evidence’, meaning that tutors do not see any private information about a student. It is, however, worth considering that such as support plan is often only issued after evidence of need has been submitted to a university disability service, further perpetuating the need to ‘prove’ disability status.

Much of this conflict between the two models when it comes to implementing them within an educational context can be attributed to the 'dilemma of difference' (Norwich, 1993). Elaborating on his 1993 work, Norwich explained that the basic dilemma is ‘whether to recognise, or not to recognise, differences, as either option has some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation,

rejection or denial of opportunities' (Norwich, 2008, p. 287). This applies to children and young people with SEND as governing bodies, local authorities and schools need to reconcile these dilemmas in regard to 'identification (whether to identify and how, or not), curriculum (how much of a common curriculum was relevant to them) and placement (to what extent they learn in ordinary classes, or not)' (Norwich, 2008, p. 287). In practice, this dilemma can be seen as a replication of the consideration between using the medical or social model to identify and understand disability. Schools, as organisations functioning within a framework which demands the need for quantitative assessment of outcomes, must be able to measure the ways in which they have met the needs of their Disabled and Neurodivergent and/or Neurodiverse population. However, they also need to be able to provide an environment in which Disabled and Neurodivergent and/or Neurodiverse children and young people are able to feel welcome, valued and supported. There are occasions on which these two objectives cannot help but be at odds with one another.

As this thesis focuses largely on the experience of and language used to describe young Disabled and Neurodivergent and/or Neurodiverse people in schools, the literature reviewed as a basis does not include a large portion of current debates around disability studies or critical disability studies. In the wider community, greater debate around models of disability surround the experience of disability, but this is not considered in this literature review, as these debates are yet to influence school language and/or policy.

2.4 Critiques of Inclusive Education

This brings us to the debate surrounding inclusive education. If relationships and sex education is to contribute to addressing inclusion and representation for both LGBT+ and SEND students, then we must examine the ways in which education is (and, to an extent, ever can be) inclusive.

Inclusive education globally is reinforced by the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) and by the Salamanca Statement (1994), which called for inclusion to become the norm (CSIE, 2020). Inclusion as we currently think of it in the UK - with reference to the inclusion of those with SEND – was influenced by

Mary Warnock's 1978 report. This report, commissioned by Thatcher's Conservative government to ‘review educational provision in England, Scotland and Wales for children and young people handicapped by disabilities of body or mind, taking account of the medical aspects of their needs, together with arrangements to prepare them for entry into employment; to consider the most effective use of resources for these purposes; and to make recommendations’ (Warnock, 1978, p. 1).

Much of the focus of the Warnock report centred around the location of the education of children and young people with SEND, and established into written recommendation the notion that ‘the majority of children with special educational needs will have to be not only identified but also helped within the ordinary school’ (Warnock, 1978, p. 95).

The language of the Warnock Report now seems shockingly outdated. The references to young people being 'handicapped' have long since been considered to be offensive and reductive. Much of UK society agrees upon use of the term 'disabled', if not quite the cultural reaches and connotations of the term. However, it is important to recognise that the Warnock Report constitutes the seminal

intervention into the education of young people with SEND in the United Kingdom. Despite its language, the report cites as its motivation ‘a widely held and still growing conviction that, so far as is humanly possible, handicapped people should share the opportunities for self-fulfilment enjoyed by other people. This recognition of the right of the handicapped to uninhibited participation in the activities of everyday life’ (Warnock, 1978, p. 99) and finds that, when it comes to the education of young people with SEND

‘the quality of the education offered to them is in some respects less satisfactory. In particular, it is sometimes limited in scope and in the challenge which it presents to individuals’ (Warnock, 1978, p. 205).

It being a seminal piece of research, of course, does not grant the Warnock Report immunity from criticism. Warnock herself, in fact, when revisiting the report, did not look on its recommendations for inclusion favourably. In fact, she said in 2005 that ‘. . . possibly the most disastrous legacy of the 1978 Report . . .’ (2005, p. 20), since, as she goes on to say, ‘there is increasing evidence that the ideal of inclusion, if this means that all but those with the most severe disabilities will be in mainstream schools, is not working’ (Hornby, 2005, p. 32).

This focus on inclusion referencing the education of all young people, where possible, in the same schools, is one that has often made its implementation difficult in practice. Whilst much research agrees on the tenet of allowing young people with SEND to be educated alongside their peers without SEND ‘there is, as yet no consensus about what inclusive education is or how it should be implemented in schools’ (Bates et al., 2015, p. 1929)

Policy can often further complicate the issue. The SEND Code of Practice takes, for children and young people with SEND, the starting point of 'the general presumption of mainstream education,' (Department for Education 2015, p. 28) whilst UK education charity and campaign group Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE) offers as a definition of inclusion: 'education that includes everyone, with non-disabled and Disabled people (including those with 'special educational needs') learning together in mainstream schools, colleges and universities' (Alliance for Inclusive Education website, 2020).

It is difficult to criticise the concept of inclusive education. Particularly when we consider that 'theories of inclusive education state that students with disabilities shall be entitled to full membership in regular classes together with children from the same neighbourhood in local schools' (Haug, 2016, p. 208). This theoretical understanding of inclusion could, in turn, be said to go some way to attempting to achieve participatory parity, which we will explore in greater detail later. However, what these well-meaning concepts fail to adequately offer is a practical road map to achieving said concept.

Education staff often bear witness to the dichotomy between wanting to offer an educational experience that allows all children and young people to participate and thrive equally, and the physicality of inclusion. Research carried out with staff in both mainstream and specialist provision has often proven this. When surveyed, staff in both mainstream schools and special schools agreed that not every child with SEND was best suited to education in mainstream. For mainstream staff, it was due to perceived difficulties from the SEND child that were 'impossible or unreasonable to expect them to deal with within regular settings' (Croll and Moses, 2000, p. 6),

whereas special schools perceived the deficiencies of the mainstream environment as the problem.

OFSTED also report that, since the introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014) and SEND Code of Practice (2014), inspections continue to reveal a lack of ambition for pupils with SEND and that only a tiny number end up in long-term employment after education (OFSTED, 2021). This would suggest that inclusive education, even when provided for within legislation, is still facing challenges.

When asked about how they experienced inclusion in their classroom, staff often said that they fell into the trap of categorising different types of SEN and disability as either 'easy' (including physical, sensory and speech or language difficulties) or 'difficult' (including emotional and behavioural difficulties, autism and low incidence SEN that required high amounts of teacher input) to include fully in a mainstream classroom setting (Evans et al., 2002).

Teachers still experience a lack of confidence around inclusion when it comes to young people with additional needs in the classroom such as disability, often citing reasons such as not having an appropriate environment to accommodate physical or relative emotional disability, large class sizes making individual focus difficult (Ferriday & Cantali, 2020). Some teachers also report a feeling of contradiction between education and school policy regarding inclusion and school focus on achievement and progress in individual curriculum areas (Essex, Alexiadou and Zwozdiak-Myers 2021).

Having examined the literature surrounding relationships and sex education in general, and considered the ways in which we may choose to define disability both socially and in an educational context with some understanding of the debates surrounding the pragmatics and limitations of inclusive education, we may begin to

look at the outcomes we wish to achieve by making relationships and sex education more inclusive.

2.5 Participatory Parity and Marginalised Communities.

A principal outcome that we may hope to achieve through education (particularly when we situate that education within a context of social justice), is the preparation of children and young people to live a fulfilled life as an adult. This aim that education often holds of preparing children and young people for adulthood aligns itself with the framework of participatory parity, a phrase coined by Nancy Fraser that describes the operation of a societal framework that 'permit[s] all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers' (Fraser, 2003, p. 36).

Fraser clarifies this with the explanation that 'participatory parity simply is the meaning of equal respect for the equal autonomy of human beings qua social actors' (Fraser, 2003, p. 231). This research takes this framework as an ideal outcome of education, and, in particular, relationships and sex education. Later, we will examine the ways in which young people who belong to both (and, to an extent, either of) the LGBT+ and SEND population face barriers to experiencing participatory parity in their adult lives. First, however, let us examine the theoretical ideals of, and potential barriers to, participatory parity.

To understand fully what we are hoping to achieve through participatory parity, we need to understand Fraser's model of social justice a little better. Traditionally, Fraser has advocated for a two-dimensional model of social justice that offers justice in terms of redistribution of money and resources and recognition of cultural or social identity. Later, she refined this model to include representation, as 'theories of justice

must become three-dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation alongside the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition' (Fraser 2009, p. 36).

With or without the added element of representation, Fraser has long since favoured the argument that simple redistribution of wealth or assets does not serve to address social imbalances, and has suggested the development of a 'critical theory of recognition, one which identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality' (Fraser, 1995, p.69).

If we consider, then, Fraser's original claim that social justice needs to occur along the axes of both redistribution and recognition to be successful, we can claim that 'participatory parity is sufficiently rich in moral substance to adjudicate conflicting claims - for both the recognition and distribution dimensions of justice' (Fraser,2003, p. 230).

Participatory parity, for Fraser, is almost synonymous with justice. In fact, she says that 'the most general meaning of justice is parity of participation' (Fraser, 2009, p. 36). This concept of participatory parity, so central to Fraser's understanding of justice, is something that requires further attention. We know already that, in practice, it allows all adult members of a society to 'interact with one another as peers' (Fraser, 2003, p. 36), but what link does that have with justice? For Fraser, 'according to this radical-democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life' (Fraser, 2009, p. 36).

For the sake of this current piece of research, we will agree with Fraser that this is indeed one of the central tenets of social justice: the equal participation in social

life of all adult peers. But what bearing does being a member of the LGBT+ or SEND community, and the experience of relationships and sex education have on this experience of social justice?

In regard to the issue of identifying as LGBT+ or disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse we must turn our attention to the axes of representation and recognition.

Recognition, first of all, is a sphere of justice that can be both economic and political. In economic terms, it occurs when a group is denied resources on the basis of belonging to that group. Whilst 'the political dimension of justice specifies the reach of those other dimensions: it tells us who is included in, and who excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition' (Fraser, 2009, p. 38)

Misrecognition - the counter injustice to the concept of recognition - is experienced when people, or groups of people are 'prevented from interacting on terms of parity by institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that deny them the requisite standing' (Fraser, 2009, p. 37).

In the case of young people who are LGBT+ or disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, it can be said that misrecognition is an experience that they will have encountered during their education. Inclusive education often has at its core the belief that 'students with disabilities shall be entitled to full membership in regular classes together with children from the same neighbourhood in local schools' (Haug, 2016, p. 208), or, essentially, a belief in parity of participation and recognition.

However, as we saw from the attitudes of staff surveyed about the practice of inclusive education, despite the best intentions, structures of traditional education (a cultural hierarchy) have often, in practice, denied these groups of people the chance

to fully participate as peers, often experiencing exclusion an ‘isolating and hurtful’ (Bolt, 2018, p. 11) experience.

Representation, then, is a 'political dimension' of justice, ‘matter of social belonging. What is at issue here is inclusion in, or exclusion from, the community’ (Fraser, 2009, p. 36).

Justice is a three-pronged experience, with recognition, redistribution and representation all needed to complete the experience. Representation, however, and its counter injustice, misrepresentation, can be considered purely political, and ‘occurs when political boundaries and/or decision rules function wrongly to deny some people the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction – including, but not only, in political arenas’ (Fraser, 2009, p. 40). Whilst the ways in which relationships and sex education have been conducted and, potentially, the new curriculum contained within the Statutory Guidance (Department for Education, 2018) has been developed, have not deliberately caused misrepresentation to the LGBT+ or disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse populations, they may be said to function 'wrongly' in a way which has allowed this to happen.

What these two axes of recognition and representation mean for this investigation into relationships and sex education, then, is that we should be able to analyse whether, or offer guidance on how, students who are LGBT+ and disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse are able to 'interact on terms of parity' (Fraser, 2009, p. 37) within the sphere of RSE. In terms of representation, we should be able to do the same for how they are able to achieve this participation through political boundaries, decisions, or rules.

With reference to these two populations of LGBT+ and disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, both as distinct populations and at, as this research will situate itself, the intersection of the two, it is important to consider how we can define them.

As seen with the concept of disability, there is a cultural element to these identities. The phenomenological study of this research will take place with young people ages 16-25 who self-identify as both LGBT+ and disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. In order to have the term 'SEND' or 'disabled' (here used interchangeably to accommodate those who have a disability but not a special educational need) resonate with them, the young people involved will likely have, at some point, had the definitions used by the Equality Act (2010) applied to them.

2. 6 Relationships and Sex Education and LGBT+ identities

In terms of LGBT+ identities, Identity is difficult to define consistently and challenging to measure (Korchmaros, Powell, & Stevens, 2013). Many young people no longer assign much importance to the labels traditionally found within the umbrella of LGBT+ (Wagaman, 2016). Current experiences of LGBT+ identities often differ from the assumed definitions of the term, and ‘similar to gender, sexuality is multifaceted and expansive and does not conform to a binary. New vocabulary is emerging to express the diversity of sexual orientations, beyond the binary of heterosexuality or homosexuality’ (Monaco, 2018, p. 84).

As such, the young people selected to participate in this study will be asked to self-identify as LGBT+, which could include a variety of identities, including, but not limited to: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or asexual. The use of self-

identification in this study ‘also supports the shift in power dynamics and privileging of voices that have not traditionally occurred in research,’ (Savin-Williams 2005, p. 210) allowing the young people involved to define their sexual and cultural identity for themselves. This is particularly important when considering parity of participation, as it is hoped that, by allowing the young people from these populations to define the boundaries of this study, this act will help to increase their experience of representation within it.

Let us consider, finally, how relationships and sex education have traditionally addressed both disability and LGBT+ status, and consider what we may find at the intersection of the two.

There are some general experiences of LGBT+ students (and teachers) that are important to consider. Fox and Ralston (2016) posit that ‘LGBTQ’ individuals face a ‘unique path’ in that they must ‘consciously navigate’ the emergence and disclosure of their identity. In terms of how this ‘unique path’ impacts on educational experience, then, Orlov and Allan (2014) found that even teaching professionals considered schools to be an environment in which they felt uncomfortable disclosing their sexuality, whilst Moore (2016) found that ‘LGBTQ’ students felt that they needed to have their sexualities acknowledged as a valid part of everyday conversation and that, when this was lacking, they made extra effort to disguise their sexuality in class, which they felt inhibited their learning (in reference to second language learning).

The National Council for Mathematics Teacher Education found in a 2006 survey that, in general, ‘LGBT’ students continue to feel marginalised within their schools, whilst 64% of them specifically reported feeling unsafe. Blackburn and Smith (2010) examine how schools continue to function within heteronormativity and

how choices of, for example, English literature texts (Romeo and Juliet versus Brokeback Mountain) reaffirm to students that heterosexuality is the norm. Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2015) confirm that only 18.5% of 'LGBT' students surveyed in grades 6-12 reported having an LGBT-inclusive curriculum and recommend practitioners view current literature through a 'queer lens' to encourage discussion of both diversity and inclusivity.

We cannot help but assume that these general experiences of education will also impact the experience of relationships and sex education. There can be said to exist a 'difficult relationship between sexualities and schooling' (Henderson, 2019, p. 851), and, in the main, we can assume that most schools do not affirm LGBT+ identities as the most common amongst their populations. Blackburn and Smith, (2010), work on the premise that all schools are heteronormative. 'That is, they are based upon the concept that heterosexuality is normal, and homosexuality is not' (626). This will, in turn, have an impact on how these individuals see themselves within the curriculum of relationships and sex education.

In general, trends in Relationships and Sex Education tend towards one of two outlooks: comprehensive or conservative (Shannon, 2016). Whilst one of these aims to have a progressive and secular approach and one a more abstinence-based approach grounded in religion, neither fully encompasses the experiences of LGBT+ students (Shannon, 2016).

Relationships and sex education, even when it is liberal in persuasion, often 'fails to appreciate the moral complexities of young people's sexuality and relationships' (Heyes, 2019, p. 165). Even if schools try to redress some of the imbalance caused by the presumption of heterosexuality, this can come with its problems. Assuming LGBT+ identified young people to have the same experiences

of and needs from Relationships and Sex education as their heterosexual peers can detract from the perceived difference in their identity. In this case ‘sameness is provided as a justification for queer people to deserve legitimacy, respect and representation within the curriculum’ (Shannon, 2016, p. 579).

The difference, or perceived deviance from the norm, of LGBT+ relationships can cause extra risks for LGBT+ young people. Often, young people exploring LGBT+ relationships are at greater risk of contracting HIV or AIDS, often because they ‘are forced to explore their sexuality secretly, often leading to clandestine sexual encounters’ (Macgillivray, 2000, p. 309). Young people who perceive themselves as sexuality of gender ‘deviant to the norm’ often experience that their ‘practices of learning, teaching, knowing and sharing information often happen at a distance from formal settings’ (Thomson et al, 2021).

What remains clear from Macgillivray to Thomson et al is that young LGBT+ people perceive themselves as different to the norm. Whilst the Statutory Guidance (2018) makes reference to specifically teaching about LGBT+ relationships, it is important to recognise that both this guidance and any previous school-specific curricula have existed, in the majority, within the framework of heteronormativity.

Let us consider then, the practical implications of teaching RSE within a heteronormative and cisnormative framework. According to Stonewall's 2017 School Report into LGBT+ experiences of RSE:

‘Just one in five LGBT pupils (20 per cent) – including one in ten LGBT pupils attending faith schools (10 per cent) – have learnt about where to go for help and advice about same-sex relationships at school. Just thirteen per cent have learnt about how to have healthy relationships in relation to same-sex relationships. Only one in five (20 per cent) have learnt about consent in relation to same-sex

relationships and fewer than one in five (17 per cent) have learnt about violence or abuse in relation to same-sex relationships.' (Stonewall, 2017, p. 22)

This lack of targeted education towards the LGBT+ relationships can contribute to a lack of overall recognition and representation for these young people. If young people do not learn about healthy, consensual same-sex relationships as Stonewall found and if, as Macgillivray asserts, LGBT+ relationships are more likely to be clandestine, we can infer some serious concerns over the likelihood that young LGBT+ are, in fact, gaining from their Relationships and Sex Education the 'information and skills they need to navigate relationships, understand sex and sexuality, and find the resources they need for obtaining additional information and relevant health services' (Kantor & Lindberg, 2020, p. 145).

Another factor to consider with LGBT+ populations and their experience of Relationships and Sex education is their family environment. LGBT+ youth are more likely to be abandoned or disowned by their parents after expressing their sexuality and, as most LGBT+ young people have heterosexual parents, they are 'one of the few groups of young people without parents as role models' (Macgillivray, 2000, p. 308). This can be further complicated by the acceptance of teaching about LGBT+ identities and issues in the wider community. As Stonewall found, in faith-based schools, fifty percent fewer young people learned where to go for help about same-sex relationships in school. And a lack of acceptance for LGBT+ equality can extend beyond the school. After protests started in Birmingham in 2019 over a Primary curriculum teaching about LGBT+ families, the BBC 'found letters opposing the teaching of relationships and sex education (RSE) and LGBT equality had been sent to schools across the country' (BBC, 2019). This potential lack of acceptance places greater stakes upon achieving an inclusive RSE experience within the school

community, to help LGBT+ young people face the challenges that may present themselves in the wider world.

2.7 Relationships and Sex education and disability

Young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse can find themselves similarly misrecognised and misrepresented due to societal perceptions, especially surrounding the need for RSE. ‘For young people with mobility impairments … socio-sexual development can be constrained by physical inaccessibility, judgemental attitudes and inaccessible sexuality and relationship education’ (Bahner, 2018, p. 640). This population can often find themselves being infantilised or being considered to develop at a slower rate than their peers, something which may be, albeit subconsciously, reinforced by the structure of the SEND Code of Practice which allows young people with Education, Health and Care plans to remain in education up to age 25.

Infantilisation is a particular concern with regards to RSE as ‘in relation to sexuality, Shakespeare et al. (1996) have exposed the extent to which disabled adults are not expected or permitted to do things that non- disabled people do, as a consequence of this infantilisation of disabled people.’ (Mallett & Runswick-Cole, 2014, p. 37)

The need for robust Relationships and Sex education for young people with SEND is acknowledged in the 2018 Statutory Guidance. Schools are advised to be ‘aware that some pupils are more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND’ and that ‘Relationships Education and RSE can also be particularly important subjects for some pupils; for example, those with

Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs or learning disabilities' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 15).

The idea that some special educational needs (language used in the guidance) may lead to increased vulnerability and, also, greater need for RSE is corroborated in other contemporary research which suggests that 'a problem is that most adolescents with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDDs) and autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) have particular difficulty expressing sexuality in satisfying ways, consequently facing issues such as limited intimate relationships, low self-esteem, increased social isolation… and limited sexual health' (Monaco et al. 2018, p. 1). This implies that it is important that RSE represents a range of relationships and sexual experiences, in order that every young person can begin to envisage an adult life that is sexually fulfilling.

We must also acknowledge that, just as LGBT+ young people are likely to need Relationships and Sex Education that understands the nuances of their different experience, so RSE for young people with SEND 'needs to acknowledge disability-specific needs as well as intersectional experiences of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and so on,' (Bahner, 2018, p. 641).

Of course, we can think of neither of these communities in a vacuum. If we consider that young LGBT+ people often feel 'clandestine' when exploring their sexuality (Macgillivray, 2000) and that young SEND people experience 'increased social isolation' (Monaco, 2018), we can begin to understand that the experience of a young person at the intersection of these two identities may be said to have a particular set of needs in Relationships and Sex Education. In an ideal world, we would perhaps aim to address misrecognition and misrepresentation for this minority

population in education by ensuring that an awareness of intersectionality is used to 'shape policy, training, resources, curricula, and extracurricular efforts' (Blackburn & Smith, 2010, p. 630).

2.8 Disability and sexual health

The World Health Organisation defines sexual health as ''…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.' (World Health Organisation, 2006)

Taking this as a working definition of sexual health allows us to focus on the multi-faceted aspect and complexities of it. Sexual health is not merely the absence of Sexually Transmitted Infections (as the previous iterations of sex education curricula in the UK would suggest), but also the presence of pleasure, safety and freedom.

In order to consider the effects of Relationships and Sex Education on disabled young people, it is important to have an understanding of the experiences of disabled people in regard to their sexual health.

Just as in section 2.7 we saw that young disabled people are often infantilised and educated with a focus on their increased vulnerability, there is evidence to select that this experience is echoed throughout disabled people's adult lives. Despite it

being ‘undeniable that people with physical disabilities have the same affective and sexual needs as everyone else’ (Morales et al., 2016), medical professionals continue to see disabled sexuality as ‘different and dormant’, with an underlying ‘compulsory or assumed’ able-bodiedness existing in society despite the prevalence of the social model of disability (Bollinger & Cook, 2020).

This assumption of able-bodiedness being the norm or ideal means that young disabled people often consider their participation in RSE as less important to them than their peers (Bollinger & Cook, 2020), have less sexual knowledge, lower levels of sexual experience and more negative attitudes towards sex than their peers (Jahoda & Pownall, 2014), and face scrutiny from their non-disabled peers based on their perceived differences (Gordon et al., 2004).

There are also issues around the equality of experience of sex education. Sex education for disabled young people is often a balance between ‘the right to sexual lives with protection from harm’ (Jahoda & Pownall, 2014, p. 430), rather than focusing on pleasure and safety. Young people who spend more time with adults than their peers due to support needs may also have less opportunity to discuss what they have learned during sex education with their peers, depriving them of ‘experiential’ learning (Jahoda & Pownall, 2014).

In their adult lives, there is growing concern for the experience of women, especially those with learning disabilities. Research finds that they generally have little knowledge or experience about sex and have negative feelings towards their sexuality (Morales et al, 2016), and their sex education does not focus on pleasure whilst also allowing them to develop the skills needed to accurately assess risk (McCarthy, 2014).

In order to address some of these imbalances, it is important that future research into disabled people's experiences of sexual health allows for them to tell their experiences, as up to now the dominant voice in this research area has predominantly belonged to 'those who regulate the sexual lives of disabled people (e.g., health professionals, social workers and support workers)' (Liddiard, 2013). By focusing on phenomenological methods, this research will begin to collate subjective experiences of disabled people in regard to sexual health.

Having considered the literature surrounding all aspects of this research, as well as an exploration of what participatory parity means for marginalised communities, let us consider the theoretical framework that underpins this research in more detail.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

There are two key frameworks that underpin this research: Fraser's theory of participatory parity and Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality.

2.10 Participatory Parity

In section 2.5 of this chapter, we considered the use of participatory parity as a lens to consider the experience of marginalised communities. The idea of participatory parity will be used as a guide for the Critical Discourse Analysis element of this research and to guide the practical guidance for teachers delivering the curriculum.

I will be applying the lens of Fraser to the field of Relationships and Sex Education and exploring the ways in which this population need to experience

recognition and representation in order to experience parity of participation in the Relationships and Sex Education curriculum. This framework lends itself well to the field of education, as can be seen through similar educational studies such as Keddie's (2012) Schooling and Social Justice through the lenses of Nancy Fraser, which examines the ways in which Fraser's theories can be applied to curriculum development and Hanhela's (2014) examination of the need for recognition in order for a population to engage in pedagogic action.

Participatory parity will be used to inform this thesis by placing the need for representation of young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people at the heart of the Critical Discourse Analysis, throughout the analysis of young people's experiences and encouraging teachers to consider the need for representation within their practice.

2.11 Intersectionality

This research also draws heavily on theories of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991 to recognise the differences within feminism of women from different race and class identities. Whist it was coined for this purpose, we can use this framework to consider the differences within the LGBT+ community, particularly between non-disabled and disabled people, as 'ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension *within* groups' (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242).

Intersectionality, according to Guittar and Guittar (2015, p. 660) 'analyses experiences based on the interconnection of ethnicity, race, class, gender, nationality, religion, sexuality, and any other social categories that situate one's

experience in relation to power in society'. Andersen and Collins (2012, p. 4) also recognise that, although throughout a person's life one category of experience (such as race, gender or sexuality) may feel more prominent, differing categories of experience 'are overlapping and cumulative in their effects'. It is for this reason that I have chosen to look at the intersectional identities of sexuality and disability. Whilst young people will undoubtedly, at differing points in their lives, feel that either their disability status or their sexuality is perhaps the more dominant lens of their experience, they experience the world through both sets of experiences, and it is important to see how this intersection can be included and represented within their experience of relationships and sex education. This awareness of intersectionality of identities will be important when we consider the methodological framework for this research, which we will do in the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Methodology and methods

Having considered the landscape of literature surrounding this research and its underlying theoretical frameworks, we will now examine the methodological approach. First, we will set the research within its ontological and epistemological context, and then we will consider how this research will answer the research questions and which methods will be used.

All methodologies used to answer the research questions below sit within the framework of qualitative research methods. This means that the methodologies used in this thesis are based on a belief that there are 'repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs' (Saldana, 2009, p. 5) and that people are 'anticipatory, meaning-making beings' (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 288). Believing that people are concerned with meaning-making, then, this thesis begins with the primary method of meaning-making, language, and considers the language used and the discourse around the statutory guidance, before studying the phenomenology of the meaning made by young people who have experienced relationships and sex education at school recently.

3.1 Ontology

Grix (2010, p. 59) describes ontology as the very starting point of research, and suggests that epistemological (and any additional) theories and viewpoints develop from it. Although the nature of ontology is often more complex than this, its basic

definition is ‘the image of social reality upon which a theory is based’ (Grix, 2010, p. 59.

Lewis (2002), quoted in Grix (2010), explains why as researchers we must have an understanding of our ontological position before beginning research: ‘it is impossible to engage in any sort of… thinking about the political [or social] world without … social ontology’.

My own ontological position is held largely on the belief that the experiences of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse exist through an exchange between those young people, the educational networks that surround them, and the legislative frameworks (such as curricula) that underpin that interaction. Specifically, this research is based on the concept of social ontology, and the idea that ‘social ontology is possible because of language. Language is not merely an element of social ontology – in Searle’s view, it is necessary for institutional reality to exist, while he acknowledges that it is obvious that language is a social phenomenon used by all societies’ (Pernecky, 2017, p. 148).

The methodology of critical discourse analysis and phenomenological study were selected based on this ontology, and the founding idea that, ‘social reality exists because we believe that it exists’ (Pernecky, 2017, p. 145). To understand the social reality that exists for young LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, we must therefore understand the social reality that this population *believes* exists.

My ontological assumptions, therefore, have their basis in my belief that human existence, and the way we interact with and make sense of our world, begets our reality.

3.2 Epistemology

Another foundational construct in research, epistemology concerns how we view knowledge. Epistemology 'helps … generate knowledge and explanations about the ontological components of the social world… '(Mason, 1998, p. 13 quoted in Grix, 2010, p. 66).

For this research, I have adopted an anti-foundationalist approach, arriving at the knowledge I have of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse's experience of RSE through understanding it, rather than seeking to explain the experience. In terms of the three epistemological positions, this research aligns itself most naturally with interpretivism, a position which allows the researcher to 'grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Grix, 2010, p. 65). Within the school of interpretivism, we can find phenomenology, which 'looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world' (Al-Ababneh, 2020, p. 80). In the case of this research, it seeks to understand the 'culturally derived' and, to some extent, 'historically situated' interpretations of the social world inhabited by LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse.

There is another element to the methodological design of this research, however, one that builds upon the consideration in Chapter Three of Fraser's theory of Participatory Parity.

3.3 Participatory Parity in an epistemological and ontological context.

This research holds it to be true that there exists a social reality wherein all young people are able to experience participatory parity. There is an examination of this a lens when considering neurodiversity in chapter five, but this belief is central to the framework of this research.

Fraser herself offers this explanation of how participatory parity theory can be used to understand social situations when she says 'the parity standard applies not to the syntax of the prepositions they utter, but to the social terms on which they converse. Are these terms such as to permit all to participate fully, as peers, in political argument?' (Fraser, 2008, p. 339). In the context of this research, we are looking at how this change in curriculum can help LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse feel that they are able to participate fully in regard to their relationships when compared to their peers.

Another key framework from Fraser that the phenomenological interviews seek to understand is that of recognition. This curriculum is the first RSE curriculum to be written into law in England, and therefore it stands to reason that it is also the first time the recognition of LGBT+ youth has been enshrined into educational law. It is important to consider the ways in which the social reality was previously constructed for LGBT+ young people – through the interaction between institutions (such as educational curricula), the young people and wider society as a whole – has been experienced to date. This may include issues of misrecognition.

3.4 Research question 1 - How does the new RSE curriculum address inclusion and representation for LGBT+ students who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse?

This research question is answered through a critical discourse analysis of the new secondary curriculum in terms of inclusion and representation for LGBT+ students who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse looking at: vocabulary used to describe both SEND and LGBT+ identities; topics included in the curriculum; recommended practice and any guidance given specifically on how to include these populations.

The process of discourse analysis considers 'the processes and power-relations that lie behind particular discourses being expressed and legitimised by curriculum, or in contrast, excluded from curriculum in various contexts' (Leahy et al. 2015, p. 47). It also considers that sexuality curricula, like all curricula, contain social and discursive values that are often selected by those with a dominant ideological position (Ezer et al, 2019). The discourse around a policy is important to bear in mind with a critical discourse analysis (Leahy et al., 2015), and this will be considered during this research. In particular, I have looked at discursive events surrounding the inclusion of LGBT+ relationships in the RSE curricula, such as parent protests and media reaction to both the curriculum and the controversy surrounding it (Parveen, 2019).

Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology offers a range of approaches and methods. This research question presents an element of discourse which has a social problem (the representation of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse) that can be considered, and potentially improved, through the semiotic lens (the Statutory Guidance document).

As the Critical Discourse Analysis component of this research constitutes only one methodology used to answer the research questions, it is important to consider an approach that is interdisciplinary and can enhance the methodology of the phenomenological interviews and influence the ensuing recommendations for practice.

'Fairclough (2001a, p. 229) emphasizes that his approach to Critical Discourse Analysis is interdisciplinary, and that 'it opens a dialogue between disciplines concerned with linguistic and semiotic analysis … and disciplines concerned with theorizing and researching social processes and social change'' (Fairclough, 2001 cited in Taylor, 2004, p. 435)

Whilst many scholars have developed sound approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis, the work of Fairclough offers a sound methodological approach to answering this research question.

Fairclough sees in 'texts and social practices the hidden, or partially hidden, discourses associated with it' and that 'discourses of neoliberalism threaten disadvantaged peoples everywhere' (Poole, 2010, p. 140). The Statutory Guidance, whilst potentially disadvantaging LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, also has the capacity to disadvantage other groups of young people, and Fairclough's approach offers a way to engage with both the text and its surrounding discourse.

For Fairclough, Critical Discourse allows us to consider 'the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part. This process includes in addition to the text the process of production, of which the text is the product, and the process of interpretation, for which the text is a resource.' (Poole, 2010, p. 141). In the context of this research, the Statutory Guidance (the text) is a smaller part of the larger

social interaction of teaching Relationships and Sex Education, and it is important that we are able to consider the text in this wider context, especially in the context of how it can be interpreted as a teaching resource.

The structure for this discourse analysis follows the model proposed by Fairclough (2001), which proffers three features of any discursive event such as a policy or curriculum: the text, the interaction (i.e., the production and interpretation of a text through discursive processes), and the context (i.e., the socio-historic conditions of production and interpretation). I will also be drawing on the work of Jones (2011) who proposed a discourse analysis framework for sexuality education documents, and Mackie and Tett (2013), who conducted a discourse analysis of participatory parity in policies relating to young people in Scotland. The first stage of the analysis will be using Fairclough' s (2001) 10 questions for Critical Discourse Analysis concerning vocabulary, grammar and textual structure in relation to inclusion and representation. It will then consider expressive values and relational and power values expressed within the text. The critical discourse will seek to explore vocabulary used to describe both SEND and LGBT+ identities; topics included in the curriculum; recommended practice and any guidance given specifically on how to include these populations.

Previous analyses of curricula have considered CDA to offer an emancipatory research tool that has the potential to destabilise what can be considered to be 'authoritarian discourses entrenched in educational policy agendas' (Liasidou, 2008, p. 483). This offers an opportunity to facilitate the linguistic and, by implication, conceptual reinstatement of inclusion as a notion that unequivocally advocates the protection of the human rights of children with special educational needs (Liasidou, 2008). Liasidou focuses the use of CDA on facilitating the needs of young people

with SEND, but this analysis will also consider how this technique can drive the inclusion of young people with SEND who are also LGBT+. This analysis will consider the protection of the human rights of children and young people both as members of the LGBT+ community and as persons with disabilities.

Ezer et al (2019) argue that language, as the antithesis of silence, has the ability to inform thoughts and public opinion and the use of language in official documents (554). The language we use in curriculum documents to describe and advocate for children and young people that are part of groups considered to have protected characteristics, therefore, can be argued to have some level of influence over how language will come to be used to describe those groups in wider society. Curriculum documents prior to Mary Warnock's seminal Department for Education report in 1976 (Department for Education, 1976) did not explicitly make provision for the education of children and young people with Special educational needs and disabilities within mainstream settings. As seen in chapter two, the Warnock report was far from perfect and has been criticised by many (Warnock herself describes its recommendations for inclusion as 'a disastrous legacy', Hornby,2005, p. 32), but this initial inclusion of young people with SEND within curricula paved the way for the beginning of the practice of inclusion within educational settings.

This critical discourse analysis takes as a starting point the idea that talk and texts do not neutrally reflect the world, one's identity, or social relations (Howarth, 2000) and presumes, therefore, that language has a performative element, even in official documents. It is always doing something with consequence (whether intended or not). For instance, it is through language that one goes about constructing their identity, ascribing identities to others, positioning others, etc. (Lester et al, 2016). Just as the Warnock Report gave voice to the experiences of

children and young people with Special educational needs and disabilities, the Statutory Guidance on RSE and Health Education has the capability to recognise the validity and need for inclusivity of children and young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have Special educational needs and disabilities.

Before undertaking a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it is important to contextualise what, in practice, is meant by this. In theory, CDA refers to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication. (Wodak and Meyer 2001). However, Critical Discourse Analysis often describes a multitude of approaches, and it is helpful to think about 'discourse analysis' as an umbrella term used to describe an interdisciplinary set of qualitative approaches used to study talk and text in social life. (Lester et al, 2016). In this analysis, I have examined the way in which the language used to both describe and prescribe educational outcomes for young people who identify as being LGBT+ and disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse within the Statutory Guidance on RSE and Health Education. I have also considered the ways in which this can be said to promote inclusivity within the curriculum. I have then analysed the ways in which the language used within this document can be said to reflect societal views as a whole towards this group of young people, and how explicitly recognising them within an official document may go on to contribute to their experience of participatory parity.

The structure for this discourse analysis will be according to the model proposed by Fairclough (2001), which proffers three features of any discursive event such as a policy or curriculum: the text, the interaction (i.e., the production and interpretation of a text through discursive processes), and the context (i.e., the sociohistoric conditions of production and interpretation). Fairclough's model is useful in analysing

texts that exist within a broader socio-historic context because the approach 'enables the analyst to focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, their layout. However, it also requires that the historical determination of these selections is recognised in order to understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility' (Janks, 1997:329).

As stated above, in order to focus on both the text of the curriculum and its broader historical context, I will be following Fairclough's (2001) five step framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, which follows the following structure:

1. Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect

In the case of this analysis, I have considered the ways in which young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities are represented within a curriculum, not just by whether they are mentioned (or represented) but also the way in which they are represented.

2. Identify obstacles to it being tackled through analysis of:

The network of practice it is located within

This analysis considers how the current network of curricula and legislation around equality and the education of young people with SEND supports or conflicts with the representation of young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities in the 2018 Statutory Guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health Education.

The relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice concerned

Specifically, I have considered whether the guidance that concerns young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and

disabilities in the Statutory Guidance (2018) is in line with other government recommendations for practice concerning young people with SEND.

The discourse

This concerns itself with the text of the Statutory Guidance itself, and the ways in which it presents young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities.

Structural analysis

This focuses on how the Statutory Guidance presents its recommendations for young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities, the order of discourse.

Interactional analysis

This considers how representations of young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities relate to representation of LGBT+ disabled people in society as a whole.

Interdiscursive analysis

This considers how the internal textual representation of young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities relates to their representation outside the text: e.g., are young people with SEND presented as more vulnerable/less capable or less sexual than their peers?

Linguistic and semiotic analysis

In this instance, this means a focus on the ways the representation of young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities is situated within the network of current educational practice in RSE and the legislative framework related to SEND, by considering all the above elements of the discourse.

3. Consider the importance of solving this social problem through its semiotic aspect.

In this instance, I consider why and how representation of young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities matters, and why it should be explicit within an educational curriculum.

4. Identify ways past the obstacles identified.

Here, I look at how we can better include young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have Special educational needs and disabilities in our teaching on relationships and sex, and in future policy documents that consider Relationships and Sex Education.

5. Reflect critically on the analysis.

I consider how this analysis can fit into the broader discipline of improving parity of participation for young people who identify as being LGBT+ and who have special educational needs and disabilities through teaching relationships and sex education.

As Relationships and Sex Education is a much more person-centred discipline than any other curriculum area, and one that has the potential to reinforce or reflect the political landscape it is created in, I will also be drawing on the work of Jones (2011). Jones considers the fact that 'sexuality education' is a term that is non-specific, debateable and is often used to refer to a range of different educational practices and concepts (Jones, 2011, p. 133).

Discourses around 'sexuality education' are diverse, and Jones argues that often works that criticise, analyse or study 'sexuality education' appear to be talking about vastly different kinds of education and pedagogical structure – because they are. Sexuality education curricula (like all curricula) exist within a much wider social and legislative framework. We could argue that for curricula that focus on elements

of sexuality, they interact more substantially with society as a wider construct than other academic curricula do. Mathematics curricula, for example, exist within a framework of planned outcomes for young people by the end of secondary education, and within the skills deemed necessary to gain either employment or to progress to further study.

The statutory guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health education is a curriculum that includes, and is not limited to, an understanding of diverse families and relationships, an appreciation of diversity of gender identity and the ways in which people can protect themselves from unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. These learning outcomes mirror concerns that exist within society as a whole and are multi-faceted concepts which can be given varying degrees of credence and validation both by the political and legislative structure of society (including legislation around equality and sexual and reproductive health) and by distinct groups in society (such as religious groups).

Therefore, whilst Fairclough's model will allow us to explore how this curriculum interacts with other policy documents that include this population as a whole, Jones' framework allows us to further interrogate the attitudes towards sexuality contained within it, and how this curriculum either mirrors or seeks to develop the current societal issues on relationships and sex.

Jones' (2011) study of sexuality education curricula devised a framework which allows for the analysis of such curricula along four axes, and during the discourse analysis, I will be considering where the statutory guidance could be said to fit within these. The four axes are as follows:

Conservative

This is defined by Jones as a number of approaches that seek to be an authoritative force that reinforces the dominant social and cultural approaches of the time. It can include various pedagogical methods, including euphemistic explanations of heterosexual reproduction designed to satisfy children's curiosity but not 'expose' them to dangerous truths (such as storks, fairies and cabbage patches); non-education (where educating young people on sexuality is seen as a job for either parents or the church); physical hygiene approaches that focus only on the hygiene elements of sex and sexuality education that focuses solely on the morality aspects of sex (Jones, 2011, p. 136).

Whilst conservative curricula to relationships and sex education can include any number or variation of the above approaches, the key concepts of a conservative curriculum tend towards biological essentialism and morality. They exist largely to reinforce the heterosexual norm, and do not consider diversity of families or couples. In these curricula, sex, gender, and sexuality exist in a fixed bi-polar opposition - one is either a feminine heterosexual female or masculine heterosexual male. Education on sexuality within these curricula focuses on the practice of sex within heterosexual marriage.

Liberal

Liberal curricula of sexuality education promote the development of skills and knowledge that prepare young people to live their adult life, and teachers can be said to act as facilitators to this development. The purpose of curricula with a liberal outlook is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills that allow them to inquire and make decisions according to their own best interests (bodily, medically, socially and emotionally).

In these types of curricula, the development of the self, and what is in the self's best interests, is placed at the heart of the curriculum. This can include reference to pleasure, readiness, safety and equality. Gender, sex and sexuality often remain in a bi-polar position, but other sexual orientations are included (albeit with heterosexuality implicitly placed above them).

Some liberal curricula will go further and promote an approach of comprehensive sex education, whereby 'troubling' concepts are developed (Jones, 2011, p. 145). This approach was often developed as a response to advancing rates of teenage pregnancy and high rates of sexually transmitted infections, and frames sex as positive and healthy but with developmental stages and reference to age-appropriate ideas and concepts, considering knowledge on a wide range of sexual topics (including contraception and homosexuality) essential to maturation.

Critical

Growing up alongside the gay liberation and feminist movements, critical curricula work to not only develop a knowledge of sex and reproduction, but to engage with it at a societal level. Students within a critical curriculum should be allowed to actively respond to society's privileging of particular sexualities and sexual identities and identify and question values and practices that are unjust or inequitable and undertake actions to lead to a more equitable society. They may also consider the repressive power dynamics of sexism, homophobia, transphobia and consider paths to empowerment.

Whilst sex, gender and sexuality are represented in a bi-polar model, active models of diversity are offered that exist alongside this and offer viable alternatives. Sexuality models within this framework reimagine the body as political and as a tool

for liberation.

Models of sexuality education situated within the critical model often aspire to the idea of inclusive education, and Jones references several ways this may be applied to young LGBT+ people or young disabled people by suggesting that, within this model, ‘an educator may aim to cover sexual issues relevant to specific students with particular disabilities or orientations in a sex education talk, choose a film featuring a bisexual historical figure in class materials, or actively work to ensure a transgender student has some friends to sit with at lunch’ (Jones, 2011, p. 156).

Postmodern

The most recent curricula take a postmodern lens, which offer analyses of various representations of ‘truth, authority, and reality’ (Jones, 2011, p. 159). In postmodern models of sexuality education, various sex, gender, and sexuality frameworks and positions are explored. Students are encouraged to engage with multiple perspectives on issues and knowledge and then deconstruct and co-construct these whilst also being self-reflexive. This approach also seeks to consider the ways in which cultures with differing views and beliefs on sex and sexuality can co-exist.

Postmodern curricula of sexuality education often present a poststructuralist view of society, holding the belief that our social reality is constructed by the discourse that surrounds it and the language we use to name it. As such, the construction of this reality can be altered through language, as can the dominant hegemonic understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality.

By analysing and situating the statutory guidance within these four axes, we will be able to determine the socio-cultural direction that implementation of this curriculum might be said to move in, and examine the skills, knowledge, and viewpoints it is encouraging teachers, and consequently young people who experience the curriculum, to value.

These two lenses of analysis, Fairclough and Jones, will offer an understanding of the representation afforded to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse through the discourse of the curriculum, and the ways in which this might cascade out into wider society.

3.5 Research question 2 - How does inclusion and representation at a curriculum level contribute to the experience of participatory parity for LGBT+ SEND young people as adults?

Having examined the semiotic representation afforded to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse through a critical discourse analysis, to answer the second question we will begin by establishing a theoretical linking of Fraser's theory of participatory parity and school curricula as a conduit to social justice.

With specific reference to the ways in which UNESCO recommend Comprehensive Sexuality Education as a global aim, this research question seeks to address how being represented in a curriculum can allow young people of a marginalized group to achieve participatory parity as adults, with RSE curricula as an example.

Like most qualitative methodologies, this study understands that people 'actively construct their own meanings of situations and make sense of their world and act in it through such interpretations' (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 288). Considering that, as Jones offers in her analysis of postmodern sexuality curricula, there is an argument that our social reality is socially constructed, so, too, are our experiences of this reality largely socially situated.

As such, it is important in answering this research question to select a qualitative methodology that allows for full understanding and appreciation of people's unique and diverse experiences of relationships and sex education, in order to appreciate what can be gained or lacked through a curriculum that is inclusive to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse.

The statutory guidance contains a curriculum that only began to be delivered in 2020, and, due to the disruption in education caused by the coronavirus pandemic, schools now have up until 2021 to implement it. This means that we can't currently evaluate the experience of young people who are currently being taught this new curriculum, but we can assess the experiences of young people who are LGBT+ with SEND and who are able to articulate the degree of participatory parity they feel in comparison to their peers.

In order to do this, I have carried a phenomenological study consisting of interviews with self-identified SEND and LGBT+ young people recruited from youth groups. They have recently finished secondary education and are between aged 18 and 25. The decision to conduct interviews came from wanting to listen to and begin to understand young people's recent experiences of Relationships and Sex Education. As discussed in Chapter 2, RSE has had a very tumultuous history in England, and therefore I felt it important to understand recent fractured experiences

of RSE that can be argued to have occurred as a result of this. As such, my interviews seek to provide further information on the phenomenon of RSE in England, in fact, to provide ‘witness information’ (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 321).

According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189) ‘the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved’. In this sense, I will be aiming to understand how LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse experience and understand their sense of inclusion and representation in the RSE curriculum – that is, how far they feel that it relates to them. I will also be aiming to understand how they experience a sense of participatory parity within society – that is how they relate to their able and heterosexual peers.

Cresswell (1998), Boyd (2001) and Groenewald (2004) confirm that, for phenomenological studies, ‘long interviews’ with a sample of up to 10 participants is sufficient to conduct a phenomenological study. This is the design I have followed, and I have conducted interviews with 7 LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. Participant recruitment will be discussed further in chapter five.

The data collected has been analysed according to Hycner's (1999) explicitation process, which has five ‘steps’ or phases:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.

I have replayed each interview to become familiar with each person’s subjective experience of the phenomenon discussed, in this case, the idea of experiencing representation through a RSE curriculum.

2. Delineating units of meaning.

I have considered individual experiences of the phenomenon. How have LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse felt included or excluded from the RSE curriculum they experienced? How do they feel about the proposed new curriculum including diverse relationships? Do they feel the new curriculum would reduce their feelings of exclusion? What part do teacher relationships or teaching methods play in their experience of representation and inclusion in RSE?

3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.

This is the process of grouping the experiences into themes – do participants experience themes of exclusion in their experience of the RSE curriculum? What trends in teaching practices do young people find valuable in the teaching of RSE?

4. Summarising each interview, validating it and, where necessary, modifying it.

I will make a brief summary of themes and experiences discussed in the interview.

5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

I will then be able to summarise the interviews as a collective and discuss common themes and experiences across them.

This analysis allows me to understand the ways in which representation and inclusion in the curriculum affect young people's experiences of participatory parity. As previously stated, it is important to recognise that the curriculum analysed in this research did not come into effect until 2020, meaning that, whilst interviewees will be made aware of the changes to the RSE curriculum and its inclusion of diverse relationships, the interviews will be taking place regarding participants' experience of

RSE during their schooling under whichever curriculum their school followed. This is a valuable method of understanding the phenomenon of inclusive (or not) RSE for LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse and its impact on their experience of participatory parity.

This does have implications that mean that this study, rather than identifying a strong positive link between representation and inclusion at curriculum level and the experience of participatory parity, will more likely confirm the negative link between lack of representation and inclusion at curriculum level and lack of experience of participatory parity. An important part of assessing the success of the new RSE curriculum in achieving participatory parity for LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse lies in assessing the starting point of young people who did not experience this curriculum. This will give future studies a point for comparison and some understanding of the fragmentation of experience under the current system.

Conducting this phenomenological study will solidify current understanding of SEND and LGBT+ experience and offer a point of comparison for studies conducted to assess the increase in participatory parity experienced by LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse once the curriculum has been fully implemented nationally.

3.6 Research question 3 - What are the implications of both the critical discourse analysis and the phenomenological study on classroom practice for educators seeking to encourage inclusion and representation when implementing the new RSE curriculum?

This section of the thesis considers the implications of the first two questions for educators. If this curriculum is to offer inclusion and representation to this population, what implications does that have on classroom practice? At present SEND young people are often educated in smaller groups for mainstream subjects but not for RSE. Does this practice offer true inclusivity? Will the experience of the young people interviewed suggest that differentiation or quality teaching first need to be adapted for RSE teaching? What implications might there be for whole school cultures, in particular faith schools, free schools and academies, and special schools? How can professional development and observation practices be developed to ensure inclusion and representation is present in the delivery of this curriculum across a range of school cultures?

In order to answer some of these questions, I have used the coded data from the phenomenological interviews. I have used a strategy of focused coding to categorise my data based on ‘thematic or conceptual similarity’ (Saldana, 2009, p. 151).

The evidence from both the critical discourse analysis and the interviews will offer a picture of both the successes and weaknesses of the new curriculum, and the areas of lack in the current curriculum that will then guide recommendations for practice in delivering the new curriculum.

Chapter 4. Data collection

This chapter will describe the methods of data collection used in the phenomenological study. The data for Critical Discourse Analysis all comes from the Department for Education Statutory Guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health Education (Department for Education, 2018).

4.1 Interview design

These interviews are the lynchpin of this research. They consolidate the information gleaned from the critical discourse analysis of the statutory guidance (what the curriculum in itself can be seen to offer in terms of representation and recognition for LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse) and form the basis of the key recommendations for practice.

As I have previously detailed in ontology and epistemology sections of this chapter, my focus throughout this study was to understand the experiences of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, and interviews were the most natural choice of research design for this study. After all, it is through interviewing that we 'can find out participants' views on a situation, event, experience or phenomenon: it provides 'witness information' (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 321).

I decided on a long form interview with a small sample of participants, in line with a phenomenological research design (Groenewald, 2004). I asked ten open ended questions, which all allowed for participants to give unstructured answers that they felt best described their experiences of relationships and sex education at school (see appendix).

There were some additional components to the interview design that were added because the participants all had some level of Special Educational Need or Disability. I offered an introductory meeting with all participants prior to starting the interview process – all but one participant chose to take part in this. I then discussed any access requirements the participant had for the interview – such as captions to be used in the Teams software or for regular breaks. I then shared the questions with the participants in advance to allow them to prepare their responses, as some participants said that this would be useful due to cognitive processing issues.

The questions were designed to be as unintrusive as possible, whilst still remaining a good source of information. I therefore avoided asking about specific incidents, or specific topics that may or may not have been covered, during relationships and sex education, but rather asked about the experience of relationships and sex education as a whole.

As another key focus of the interview process was to determine if their relationships and sex education had contributed to the positive or negative development of participatory parity, it was also important to ask questions that allowed the participants to situate themselves in relation to their peers.

Again, these questions were designed to be open-ended and to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences to the extent to which they were comfortable. The experience of LGBT+ young people can often contain trauma, in fact, ‘LGBTQ youth are one of the most vulnerable populations and continue to experience nearly all forms of trauma’ (McCormick et al, 2018, p. 160), and the ethical considerations of not opening participants up to reliving past traumas was paramount to the creation of these interviews.

With all of these considerations taken into account, the final interview design was open-ended, unintrusive and allowed the participants to reflect upon their experiences in comparison to the perceived experiences of their heterosexual and non-disabled peers.

4.2 Researcher Positionality

When conducting research that examines the experience of young people in relation to their identity, it is important to consider my own identity and any impact that this may have on the research. I am a white lesbian woman who defines herself as disabled, and therefore, some of the experiences described by participants in their interviews have the potential to mirror my own. I also had an unsatisfactory experience of RSE during my own schooling, as the Catholic school I attended elected not to teach sex education.

Every effort was taken to remove myself from the research in both analysing the statutory guidance and in conducting the interviews. The CDA was conducted using Fairclough (2001) and Jones (2011) to allow for greater structure in the analysis, rather than considering the guidance based on my own experiences. The participants were not aware of my identity prior to the interviews taking place, so that they would not assume anything about the information I was hoping to gain from the interviews.

Whilst all steps have been taken to remove my own bias from this study, and whilst I can be confident that the data collection and analysis were done free from my own opinion and conjecture in every way possible, it is important to recognise that my understanding of the need for this study to exist came, in great part, from my

experience of RSE at school, and from my professional experience teaching young people with SEND.

In the introductory session I had with participants, I explained that the information they gave during the interviews would be used to offer guidance to teachers teaching RSE, and I explained that I was a former teacher and was completing this research in order to improve RSE for LGBT+ and disabled and neurodivergent/diverse young people.

As previously said, I wanted to analyse these interviews from the point of view of the participants, and as a snapshot into young people's experiences on the eve of the new RSE curriculum, but I was wary of approaching this study from the point of view of 'insider research'.

Writers and theorists have called attention to the tendency to oversimplify the distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider', for example, distinguishing between 'total insiders' (those who share multiple identities or profound experiences) and 'partial insiders' (those who share a single identity and/or have some detachment from the community under study) (Chavez, 2008 referenced in Ross, 2017). - Whilst I share some commonalities of identity with the participants, I felt that, in this case, there was merit in recognising that my status as a former teacher and current sex educator meant that I had some detachment from the community I was interviewing.

Ross, 2017 (p. 7), explained of her experiences in conducting insider research that she sometimes found herself steering interviews in certain directions due to her own interests or 'personal concern', and this was an issue I was conscious to avoid.I was aware that much of my interest in this research topic originally lay in my own experiences (or lack thereof) of sex education, and I was mindful that I did not want to direct the interviews based on my experiences, but rather to offer an open space

for participants to talk about their own. Ross also says that she 'felt muddled by the emotional work of negotiating relationships both emotionally significant and yet appropriately boundaried' (Ross, 2017, p. 8). I was particularly cautious and hesitant to reveal too much about my own identity or to craft rapport based on personal information due to the age of my participants. My participants were all young people aged 18-25 which is the same demographic as the young people I work with professionally, and maintaining strong boundaries was of personal value to me as I conducted this research.

Mercer sums it up well by saying 'what insider researchers gain in terms of "their extensive and intimate knowledge of the culture and taken-for-granted understandings of the actors" may be lost in terms of „their myopia and their inability to make the familiar strange' (Mercer, 2007, p.12).

In the recommendations for practice arising from this research, I was aware that I would need to make the voices of the participants – and their suggestions for improvement – relevant to teachers of all backgrounds and levels of familiarity with issues of being LGBT+ and disabled, and, where possible, I wanted to make these recommendations through the participants' voices, which required them to not assume they were making recommendations to someone who could be considered an 'insider'.

4.3 Participants

The original research plan was to recruit from local LGBT+ youth groups. Participants were asked to be between the ages of 16 and 25 and self-identify as LGBT+ and having SEND. Due to COVID-19, the original plan to hold interviews

face-to-face and to recruit from local groups was not possible, and recruitment and interviewing all took place online. This meant that recruitment spanned several social media channels including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and meant that some participants attended the same educational setting.

I placed calls on social media for participants and the participants I recruited were from a range of LGBT+ youth groups and student unions across England.

I had originally been intending to hold face-to-face interviews and only record the audio of the participants and not their faces. This decision was made based on several factors. The first was the topic of the interviews. Considering the lack of consistent RSE curriculum prior to 2020, the legacy of Section 28 and the literature considered in chapter two surrounding the lack of RSE for LGBT+ and disabled young people, I knew there was potential for the interviews to discuss negative and/or traumatic experiences. Added to this was the fact that participants were taking place based on their experience as an LGBT+ and disabled young person, experiences that could be challenging due to the lived experience of being part of a minority group or 'minority stress', defined by McConnell et. Al. (2018) as 'stress stemming from experiences of stigma and discrimination' (p. 1). Only recording audio was a decision I took to allow participants to speak freely, knowing that their faces were not being recorded.

I decided that, when considering the ethics of moving the interviews from face-to-face to online interviews, that this practice of storing only the participants' audio would continue in order to allow participants the same degree of freedom. I held introductory meetings with each of my participants in which I discussed any access needs. By 'access needs', I meant anything that would make participating in the interview more comfortable and accessible for the participant. I discussed the

reasons for only recording their voices, and all the participants were in agreement with this. I also explained that I would keep my camera on, so that, similar to an in person interview, they would be able to see my facial expressions and, in some cases, lip-read for additional understanding. We made use of the 'captions' feature in teams which allowed participants to see captions of my speech if necessary.

The participants in this study were asked to self-identify as both LGBT+ and disabled. Within this definition there are numerous combinations of identities and experiences, and I made the decision not to ask participants to self-define further than this. There were justifications for this both in terms of the research questions and concerning ethics of care.

In terms of the research questions, the primary objective of research question three was to offer teachers and other practitioners a set of recommendations in improving representation and inclusion when implementing the RSE curriculum. In practice, it is unlikely that teachers would differentiate between teaching a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender student or that they would teach about one student's specific disability (not least because it has the potential to single out and highlight that student to others). It is, however, likely that a teacher would want to include all young people in their class, including those who do not yet have a full understanding of their sexual orientation, gender identity or disability status. For this purpose, separating results into the experiences of further sub-groups of LGBT+ and disability did not seem conducive to the desired end.

A more driving factor, however, was related to the ethics of care of the participants. As previously discussed, members of minority populations often live with minority stress, and I felt that, for LGBT+ young people who were also disabled,

asking them to quantify their identities even further had many more pitfalls than it did potential, which I will discuss in further detail in section 4.4.

Acknowledging that any interview is a non-natural setting, all effort was made to make online interviewing as comfortable for the participants as possible. Participants initially contacted the researcher by email or through direct messaging on the social media platform where they heard about the study, and were then given the participant information sheet and consent form (see appendix). After this, they were offered the chance to meet over Teams to ask any initial questions and discuss any concerns or access requirements needed. Out of 7 participants, 6 chose to have an initial conversation so that they could see the researcher and understand better how the interviews would work.

The information all participants were given was that the researcher wanted to hear their experiences of RSE at school and what could improve it, and were told that their answers would form advice for teachers. As discussed in 3.4, they were not told certain aspects of the researcher's identity (specifically LGBT+ and disabled status) so that they could discuss all ideas without knowing if they were speaking to someone in the LGBT+ community or not, or who identified as disabled. However, as recruitment took place online, and the participants had access to information about the researcher that was available in the public domain, there is a possibility that participants could have been aware of the researcher's identity regarding LGBT+ and disability status.

4.4 Ethical considerations

1A full ethics application was submitted and approved for this study (see appendix). This included a consideration for the delicate nature of some topics discussed. Participants were free to not answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with, and were made aware of this during interview.

As explained in section 4.3, the method of interviewing had to change due to COVID-19, and a revised ethics application was submitted and approved to manage this change. This included the use of Lancaster University's Teams software, and storage of the videos in Lancaster University's one drive system. During the interviews, participants were asked to turn their videos off so that the chances of identification would be the same as they would for a voice recording.

All participants were offered an informal meeting on Teams prior to conducting the interview to allow them to become familiar with the researcher and to allow them to discuss any access requirements for the interviews. The participants were sent the questions prior to the interview recording to allow them to be familiar with the questions and to allow them time to prepare as requested by several participants due to access needs.

In completing the ethics proposal and in carrying out this research, full consideration was given to the idea that 'qualitative research is inherently problematic from an ethical point of view (Warin, 2011, p. 807), and that a balance needs to be carefully struck between researcher aims and participant needs. Participants were aware that questions would not deviate from the questions that they were given in advance to ensure that they were not put in a position where they felt they had to expand upon something that could make them uncomfortable. They were also free to refuse to answer any of the questions if doing so was something that would cause them discomfort or distress.

4.4.1 Ethical considerations due to minority stress.

There were some further ethical considerations in the capturing of participant data (specifically the capture of which subcategory of the LGBT+ community they belonged to) which I underwent simply because of the nature of that information and the fact that I did not want to add to any stigma or trauma experienced by the participants due to their LGBT+ identity.

There is a careful balance that needs to be struck when researching LGBT+ communities. Structural heteronormativity positions LGBT+ people as 'other' and thus research that quantifies them within the community can reduce that 'otherness' and advocate for the need for services and provisions that meet their needs (Doan 2016). However, asking participants in research to define themselves into subjective subcategories of LGBT+ identity is fraught for a number of reasons. The first is the subjectivity itself. What it means for someone to self-identify themselves as a lesbian or as a trans person depends greatly upon how the person claiming that self-identity chooses to define it.

Whilst separating respondents to surveys into clearly-defined sub-categories of the LGBT+ population does 'generate usable findings' (Browne, 2008, p. 7), it can also exclude many of the people who define themselves out with standard definitions, especially those who would prefer to use the word 'queer' to categories themselves. In conducting her own research, Browne found that a subjective categorisation of 'queer' could not be arrived at, and therefore excluded it from a survey that did yield clear results about the needs of the subcategories of the LGBT+ community defined within it, but that did exclude people who couldn't find themselves represented within the series of options presented. When using the term 'LGBT', we

can sometimes find that, ‘despite their intent, the letters proved to be limiting’ (Gold, 2018). I felt it was important to allow space for identities that participants felt fitted within the broader umbrella of 'LGBT+' but that they may define in non-traditional ways.

Swindell and Pryce, 2003 identified that 'coming out', or identifying oneself as LGBT+ can be 'emotionally painful, psychologically stressful and challenging.' (p. 97). Again, bearing in mind that I was asking my participants to talk about an educational experience that could have been negative or traumatising in itself, I did not want to further add to this by asking them to 'out' themselves in the name of more subjective data categories.

Guyan (2022) says of data referencing LGBT+ people that, when this data is used "numbers do not speak for themselves - they always speak for someone' (Guyan 2022, p. 1). Whilst this text was not available as I began to consider how to collect my data, it sums up well my thought processes in deciding how to categorise - or, as I decided on, not - my participants. Guyan (2022, p. 2) also discusses the 'dilemma of data' and the 'potential benefits of being counted versus the risk of being counted'. I wrestled with this dilemma in the early stages of the design of this methodology and, after considering the statistics on LGBT+ young people's experiences of school in The School Report (Stonewall, 2017), decided that the bravery of participants to share their experiences as LGBT+ and disabled and/or neurodivergent young people in order to shape recommendations for teachers was already substantial, without needing to ask for further information on their particular disability or which subcategory of LGBT+ they identified as unless they wanted to volunteer this information in the interviews.

4.5 Conclusion

Having clarified the methods of data collection and the ethical considerations needed to complete this research, let us examine the results obtained through both the Critical Discourse Analysis and the phenomenological interviews.

Chapter 5. Results

As outlined in the methodology chapter, there are two main methodologies in use during this thesis – critical discourse analysis and phenomenological study. The recommendations for practice that emerge from these two methodologies will be presented in chapter six.

Here we will look at the results of the critical discourse analysis and the phenomenological study in detail.

5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis Results.

A previously explained, I will be using two methodologies for analysing the curriculum documents in depth – the approaches of Fairclough (2001) and Jones (2011). Before we look at the results yielded by these approaches, both of which allow us to consider the curriculum within its wider societal contexts, let us summarise what the text itself contains.

The Statutory Guidance for Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education consists of fifty pages. It is split into twelve sections with 3 annexes with links to further information.

The section headings of the guidance are:

‘Summary

Introduction

Developing a policy’ (within this, equality, Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) appear as headings.)

‘Working with parents/carers and the wider community (including the right to withdraw)

Relationships Education (Primary)

Relationships and Sex Education (Secondary)

Physical health and mental wellbeing

Delivery and teaching strategies

Safeguarding, reports of abuse and confidentiality

Assessment

Accountability.’ (Department for Education, 2018, p. 2)

This analysis focuses particularly on the ‘developing a policy’ section (with emphasis on the subheadings of SEND and LGBT), ‘Relationships and Sex Education (Secondary)’ and ‘delivery and teaching strategies’ as these sections contain the discourse that could contain or lack visible representation for young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people.

These areas of RSE delivery are consequently likely to be the ones participants choose to discuss, and the areas in which recommendations for teaching practice could achieve the largest impact, which is why they were selected to be the focus.

Sex education is not mandatory at Primary school level, and, as the participants in the interviews are likely to have received inconsistent RSE even at secondary level, the sections of the guidance referring to Primary school in detail were not analysed.

For example, the summary section includes the legislation set out to be considered in conjunction with this curriculum by teachers and other professionals. We will consider this in stage 2 of Fairclough’s analysis, but for now let us note that the Statutory Guidance establishes itself explicitly as a document to sit within an

existing framework of legislation. It is also in this section that we learn that the guidance that this curriculum replaces is the Sex and Relationship Education guidance (2000). Since any guidance written in 2000 predates the enshrinement in law of the majority of LGBT+ related legislation (the abolition of Section 28, the introduction of civil partnership and, eventually, equal marriage and the conferment of equal adoption rights to name a few) as well as the Equality Act, we can perhaps expect from the outset that the 2018 guidance would go further than its 2000 predecessor in representing LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse.

How many references does the guidance make, then, to LGBT+ young people 'with SEND'? In the text as a whole, the term *SEND* appears 13 times with *LGBT* (the guidance omits the '+' – a point of further discussion later) appearing 6 times. What this shows, before we even consider the nature of the discourse, that there is a disparity between the reference to *SEND* and *LGBT,* which is likely to mean that one of these terms is seen without the other on more than one occasion. This may allude to a lack of specific representation to those young people who identify with both labels rather than just one, but, again, we will consider this further later.

Having considered the physicality of the text, let us move on to the results found during the analysis according to Fairclough's (2001) five step framework as described in chapter three, taking each step of Fairclough's framework in turn.

5.2 Fairclough results

5.2.1 Step One

LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse are not distinctly represented in this curriculum. That is not to say that our analysis is over before it has begun. The first thing to consider is that the way LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse are represented in this document will exist as a continuation of the way all young people are represented within it. In all circumstances, young people and children are referred to as '*pupils'*. As we will see when we consider the relationship of the semiosis of this curriculum to that of other examples in this field of practice, not all educational documents have to refer to young people in this way. For example, the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015) refers to *'children and young people with SEND'* rather than *'pupils with SEND'*. The effect of this is that children and young people are conceptualised as such - as individuals with varying identities, rather than as belonging to the collective noun of *'pupils'.* The choice of how to refer to groups in official documents may, perhaps, seem to be accidental or inconsequential. However, words carry their own implications, however subtle the difference may be. Pishwa et. Al. (2014), said of the distinction between the use of the word 'survivor' and 'victim' when discussing cases of sexual assault '"Victim" has additional readings of helplessness, weakness and immobility, while 'survivor' rather involves agency' (Pishwa et. Al., 2014, p.10). Similarly, the choice of 'pupils' over 'children and young people' removes some of the agency afforded to the group being discussed in the RSE curriculum.

There is even more to consider when we examine how young people at the intersection of being LGBT+ and disabled and/or neurodivergent and neurodiverse are represented.

Whilst we cannot find any examples where a young LGBT+ person with SEND is represented in the fullness of this intersecting identity within the statutory guidance document, we can find examples of *'pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)'* and the label *'lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)'* respectively. There are some issues with the use of these terms regarding representation of young LGBT+ with SEND in terms of the wider context of those identities, not least that the young people 'represented' by these terms do not always claim ownership of or belonging to them. The label 'LGBT', used throughout the Statutory guidance document, limits the experience of a large group of people to neat categories that often do not match that group's experience. After all, 'similar to gender, sexuality is multifaceted and expansive and does not conform to a binary. New vocabulary is emerging to express the diversity of sexual orientations, beyond the binary of heterosexuality or homosexuality' (Monaco, 2018, p.84)

These concerns aside (to be considered later), how are LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse represented? Again, bearing in mind that we must look at the representation of *'pupils with SEND'* and *'LGBT'* separately, we can still see that the representation of each group individually can be said to be lacking.

'Pupils with SEND' are first referenced specifically in article 33 of the statutory guidance, where we find that 'Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education must be accessible for all pupils. This is particularly important when planning teaching for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities who represent a large minority of pupils'. We also find advice in article 34 that 'some pupils are more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND' (all Department for Education, 2018, p. 15).

Again, there is much to be said later in this analysis on the ways in which this representation can be said to mirror that of wider society, but if we look at the statutory guidance as a microcosm of society within itself, the focus within this part of the curriculum on the needs of young disabled people can be said to be placed on their protection from the vulnerabilities caused by their disabilities, rather than their empowerment and growth as young people with a sexual identity of their own. There is a chance to reflect, here, on the role that the discourse within this document could have played in improving the representation of young disabled and neurodivergent/diverse LGBT+ people, as 'social relations, not being predetermined, are (re-)negotiated and distributed in discourse' (Pishwa et. Al. 2014, p. 9). With the right lens taken to view this population, the Statutory Guidance had the potential to enhance the representation and of this group, rather than continue to place emphasis on vulnerability.

In the use of the word '*accessible'* we may find a further hint at the way young disabled people are represented. There are many words that, as a young disabled person, or parent of one, you may wish to see in relation to your education regarding relationships and sex. Relevant, accurate, useful, comprehensive would all be excellent adjectives that the curriculum should be for 'all' young people. Accessibility does not automatically beget any of those other qualities - not just for young disabled people, but for all young people experiencing the curriculum. It is also worth considering, within this statement that the curriculum 'must be accessible' that *access* is often something that happens away from the curriculum, rather than within it. The IMS Global Learning Consortium considered that, often 'disability has been re-defined as a mismatch between the needs of the learner and the education offered' and that, within this context, accessibility becomes 'the ability of the learning

environment to adjust to the needs of all learners' (IMS Global Learning Consortium 2004, cited in Seale and Cooper, 2010, p. 1107). What this section of the curriculum does, then, is confer the responsibility on adjusting to these needs upon schools and teachers, without setting out what this should, and could, look like in practice.

That being said, the goal of access is often an important one for young disabled people, and we should recognise the positive aspects of this being enshrined within this curriculum, and we will explore this further in stage 2 of this analysis.

If we look at LGBT+ students, the first piece of guidance concerning them specifically comes in article 36, explaining that schools must 'ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met, and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 15).

It is interesting that this article, found under the heading '*LGBT',* makes no specific mention of either gender identity or sexual orientation. As we saw in the literature review, the idea of a homogenous 'LGBT+ community' is problematic. We know that many young people no longer assign much importance to the labels traditionally found within the umbrella of LGBT+ (Wagaman, 2016) and that experiences of LGBT+ identities often differ from the assumed definitions of the term. There is also a multifaceted understanding of both gender and sexuality, that may or may not find itself conforming to a binary (Monaco, 2018). This means that by substituting mention of any particular identities – or even a phrase that accommodates all sexual and gender identities – this article lessens the representation contained within it. It does reference the need for 'all' young people to understand 'equality and respect', but this in contrast to, perhaps, 'all young people, regardless of gender or sexual identity, should experience and understand equality

and respect' falls very short of offering representation to the young people who may identify under the LGBT+ umbrella.

Article 37 warns schools to ensure that their teaching of this curriculum is 'sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content', and to consider that 'at the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 15).

For a group to be represented, we could argue that they must be respected and considered as equals within the sphere in which they are represented - education, in this case. There is no point in the curriculum where schools are warned to consider the point at which it is 'appropriate' to teach about heterosexual relationships. This on its own highlights the perceived difference of LGBT people, and therefore, whilst this curriculum does make specific reference to them, does this in a way which continues to confine them to a category of 'otherness'. In her consideration of what it means to 'silence' a group of people, Schröter defines the first step as deciding that there are 'categories of persons and ideas about which speech and texts will be unacceptable', (Schröter 2013, p. 4). By highlighting the need to consider when it is appropriate, or acceptable, to teach about LGBT+ relationships, the curriculum creates an 'unacceptable' element to the topic.

A point to note when considering the perceived 'otherness' of diverse sexualities and gender identities is that the statutory guidance does not refer to the term 'LGBT+', only to 'LGBT'. This may at first appear to be a minute semantic distinction, but the use of the '+' after the acronym 'LGBT' has a profound meaning for many members of the 'LGBT+' community, as will be discussed in further detail later in this analysis.

As we will see later, the Statutory Guidance exists in an entirely different social context than its 2000 predecessor in regard to the standing of the LGBT+ community in society. Where the 2000 guidance operated under the framework of Section 28 of the Local Government Act, forbidding the ‘promotion’ (and therefore, teaching) of homosexuality in schools, the 2018 guidance makes specific reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender young people, and families. Even this basic representation would have been inconceivable twenty years ago.

Twenty years ago, the use of ‘LGBT’ would have been a great step towards inclusion, as when the term ‘LGBT’ was coined its primary goal was representation and unification, ‘an expansion of the language used to represent a disparate group that had often just been called ‘the gay community’ (Gold, 2018).

However, the politics of identity have moved on since then. The language of sexuality and gender identity has changed and, for some, ‘despite their intent, the letters proved to be limiting’ (Gold, 2018). Over time, other initials have been added to the original ‘LGBT’ acronym, including ‘Q’ (which is often used to denote either ‘questioning’ or the contentious reclaimed term ‘queer’) and ‘A’ (which can stand for ‘ally’ or ‘asexual’). In addition, many other terms have been coined to describe specific aspects of sexual experience, such as: demisexual (someone who does not experience sexual attraction without emotional connection); graysexual (someone who may occasionally experience sexual attraction but usually does not) and pansexual (someone who is attracted to a person’s qualities irrespective of gender identity) (all Gold, 2018).

For a young person who has grown up with some awareness of these terms from either the internet or other peripheral culture, and who sees their identity as firmly pansexual over bisexual, they may struggle to see themselves represented in

this guidance, however progressive the use of the term ‘LGBT’ may seem in the context of its direct predecessor. This could have a direct impact upon how relevant the curriculum, and any subsequent education that stems from it, is upon the lives of the young people it is aimed at. If a young person has some knowledge already of some of these terms and seeks to explore this further within the boundaries of school-based RSE, the new curriculum does not offer much in the way of advice to teachers to facilitate this.

With this in mind, it is perhaps important, then, to consider what is said by the simple omission of the ‘+’, which is often used to contain a multitude of diverse identities. This is perhaps especially important when we consider that many young people no longer assign great meaning to the term 'LGBT', and may instead prefer to define themselves as 'queer' or any other range of identities (Wagaman, 2016).

We can see some theoretical representation of more diverse sexual and gender identities when the guidance sets out its recommendations for teaching. Article 75 recognises that ‘all pupils should feel that the content is relevant to them and their developing sexuality’, and that there should be ‘equal opportunity to explore the features of stable and healthy same-sex relationships’ (both Department for Education, 2018: 26). This offers some of the representation that is key to young LGBT+ people, the idea that same-sex relationships can also be healthy and stable and that the curriculum does place some specific value on them.

There are, then, positive features of representation in the curriculum. LGBT young people and SEND young people are specifically mentioned as distinct groups, and as headings under the ‘developing a policy’ section, directing schools to place specific focus on them. However, the representation afforded to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse is deeply limited by the

fact that they are represented according to disparate elements of their identity rather than in the fullness of all of their intersecting identities, and by the limitations offered by the term ‘LGBT’.

This is, however, one, document, so let us move onto stage 2 of Fairclough’s analysis, considering first of all how the representation of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse in the Statutory Guidance conflicts with or supports the current network of practice and legislation it is located within.

5.2.2. Step Two

The Statutory Guidance pins down its own intersecting legislative frameworks for us. In the summary section (Department for Education, 2018, p. 7), it sets out that the Statutory Guidance is designed to be read in conjunction with a number of pre-existing policies and pieces of legislation. Those that are named in the guidance that are perhaps best linked to the representation of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse are:

• Respectful School Communities: Self Review and Signposting Tool (a tool to support a whole school approach that promotes respect and discipline)

• Behaviour and Discipline in Schools (advice for schools, including advice for appropriate behaviour between pupils)

• Equality Act 2010 and schools

• SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years (statutory guidance)

• Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools (advice for schools)

• Preventing and Tackling Bullying (advice for schools, including advice on cyberbullying)

• Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools (advice for schools)

• The Equality and Human Rights Commission Advice and Guidance (provides advice on avoiding discrimination in a variety of educational contexts)

• Promoting Fundamental British Values as part of SMSC in schools (guidance for maintained schools on promoting basic important British values as part of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC)

However, much of the network of legislation that surrounds the Statutory Guidance is underpinned overall by the Equality Act (2010). Setting out protected characteristics – including disability, sexual orientation, and gender reassignment (but not identity), the Equality Act is the defining piece of UK legislation that secures equal rights for LGBT+ people and disabled people. Article 36 of the Statutory Guidance even reminds schools that they 'must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010… under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 15).

The Statutory Guidance, then, is supported by this legislation in its aims to consider these protected characteristics in its teaching, although we could perhaps argue that a curriculum entirely based around personal relationships and sex could have even higher ambitions in how it contributes to equality and diversity.

Similarly to the way the Statutory Guidance represents either LGBT+ young people or disabled people, we also do not see any wider legislation that represents people – either adult or child – who define themselves as both LGBT+ and disabled. People are afforded protections based on having one protected characteristic, but the challenges a person may face or the risk of discrimination that may be

encountered by a person holding two intersecting protected characteristics is not legislated for. In this respect, we can say that the representation around equality and education for LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse in the Statutory Guidance supports the pre-existing network of practice surrounding this group.

There is a long history of curricula and guidance around young people with SEND in English education. From its first iteration in the Warnock Report of 1976, education for disabled young people is now firmly underpinned by three key pieces of legislation: the Equality Act (2010), the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015). Most contextually relevant, and sitting closest alongside the Statutory Guidance, is the SEND Code of Practice (2015), which sets out educational institutions' responsibilities for young disabled people.

As mentioned earlier, the way the Code of Practice refers to young people as '*children or young people'* rather than *'pupils'* may be considered to be more person-centred than the Statutory Guidance. Its phrasing, also, is a little more in tune with the concept of participatory parity and social inclusion, stating that professionals working with young disabled people must 'have regard to the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions; and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions' (Department for Education, 2015, p. 8). This emphasis on participation is somewhat lacking from the Statutory Guidance, yet we can see from the Code of Practice that there is at least a legislative framework that sees participation – if not necessarily participatory parity – as a priority.

5.2.3 The Discourse

Again, the glaring gap in this analysis is data on LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse named within the Statutory Guidance as a specific group. This is a real limitation of the curriculum, and young people should be able to see the entirety of their identity represented, rather than two elements of it represented as distinct and separate from each other when their lived experience occurs at the intersection of the two.

5.2.4 Structural Analysis

The recommendations around young people with SEND and young LGBT+ people are set out early in the Statutory Guidance, focusing them as a point for consideration. By centring the discourse early in the text around the specific needs of LGBT+ young people and SEND young people, we can argue that their representation is considered a priority by the Statutory Guidance. In addition, the sections pertaining to LGBT+ young people and SEND young people are not contained solely in the 'Recommendations for Practice' section, but predominantly in the section on developing an RSE policy. This means that the discourse surrounding LGBT+ young people and SEND young people, and the consideration of their needs in a curriculum, is presented as a pre-requisite to teaching RSE, and not simply something to bear in mind during the delivery.

5.2.5 Interdiscursive analysis

As discussed in the first section of this analysis, this guidance replaces guidance last written in 2000 – before the introduction of civil partnership, equal marriage, equal adoption rights and many of the advances in fertility treatments that have allowed same sex couples to start families. We could say that the guidance has

moved to bring its representation of LGBT+ people in line with their legislated equality in wider society.

Again, we are looking at a population of two intersecting identities. It is perhaps important to consider that the community of LGBT+ people with SEND (young or otherwise) is likely to be small. Separately, the disabled and LGBT+ communities could be said, as termed in the Statutory Guidance, to be 'large minorities'. People with both identities form a much smaller minority, and there may also be disparities between those who have been labelled as having SEND in an educational context, but do not identify with the identity of disabled in adulthood – for example, those with specific learning difficulties.

We therefore see very little representation of this intersectional identity in society at large and, in this, we may find that representation in the Statutory Guidance is proportionate to representation in wider society.

That being said, communities of LGBT+ people with SEND do exist, and it is still important that they are able to see themselves represented. Within these communities, we may look to the social model of disability and the term 'disabled' over 'with SEND' to be a term of power. 'Disabled' people are disabled by ‘such things as flights of steps, inadequate public and personal transport, unsuitable housing, rigid work routines in factories and offices, and a lack of up-to-date aids and equipment’ rather than by the conditions that exist alongside this experience (UPIAS Aims paragraph 1).

As we saw in the Statutory Guidance articles concerning ‘*pupils with SEND’,* young people with SEND are represented as ‘more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND’ (Department for Education, 2018, p. 15). A greater focus on empowerment, and upon participatory

parity within this curriculum could be said to begin to influence the perception of people with SEND outside the text. Continuation of the concept of vulnerability as a consequence of disability does not aid positive representation of young people with SEND, and as such the Statutory Guidance serves to perpetuate, rather than challenge, antiquated forms of representation.

We can see an example of this in the 'managing difficult questions' section of delivering RSE where the guidance warns that 'children of the same age may be developmentally at different stages, leading to differing types of questions or behaviours. Teaching methods should take account of these differences (including when they are due to specific special educational needs or disabilities) and the potential for discussion on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Schools should consider what is appropriate and inappropriate in a whole-class setting, as teachers may require support and training in answering questions that are better not dealt with in front of a whole class' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 23). Schools are also asked to 'ensure that their teaching and materials are appropriate having regard to the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils. Schools will also want to recognise the significance of other factors, such as any special educational needs or disabilities of their pupils' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 23).

Within educational practice and educational legislation surrounding SEND, young people with SEND are firmly represented, and the legislation seeks to provide high aspirational educational outcomes for them with the express intention that they should be able to participate in their making and measuring (for example, the SEND Code of Practice, 2015). However, this focus on participation and aspiration remains lacking from the Statutory Guidance.

This analysis is firmly limited by the lack of representation to analyse but, in

itself, that gives us a point of analysis. In so many ways, this curriculum offers an opportunity to build upon a foundation that has been lacking in RSE legislation for decades. As such, the representation of young LGBT+ people with learning disabilities in this curriculum is foundational and would stand to be built on rapidly in future iterations of the curriculum.

5.2.6 Step Three

Like Liasidou says, curricula offer a linguistic statement of inclusion as a notion that unequivocally advocates the protection of the human rights of children with SEND (Liasidou, 2008). As such, a curriculum that represents not just young LGBT+ people and young people with SEND, but that also recognises and represents the point at which these two identities intersect and provides specific recommendations for practice to facilitate their inclusion in wider society would further enshrine the protection of the human rights of these young people in the wider network of practice surrounding RSE - including as those young people became adults.

5.2.7 Step Four

What is lacking from the curriculum but provided at length by peripheral organisations is young person voice. Listening to young people about how these two elements of their identity can interact during their education, and how they may impact upon their attitudes towards relationships and sex would allow the curriculum and further policy documents to be truly representative, and further increase the social inclusion of LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse in the development of policies that directly affect them. In a study on student voice being used at a school level, Baroutsis et. Al. found that, where used

consistently, student voice was an effective tool in ‘engaging young people in learning and engendering a sense of belonging’ (Baroutsis et al, 2016, p. 136), and it is likely that consultation with young people from this demographic would have made this curriculum more representative of their needs.

5.2.8 Step Five

In order to increase something, we must first truly assess our level or lack of it. This analysis has, in large part, served to highlight the lack of participatory parity and social inclusion offered to LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse through the statutory guidance. Like the curriculum itself, then, perhaps this analysis serves better as a foundation from which to build - a suggestion of how participatory parity *could* be achieved - than as a litany of the curriculum's current achievements. After all, ‘a crucial point in any research about silence is to prove that the silenced topic should be there… to be shown that there is an absence‘ (Schröter and Taylor, 2018, p. 26).

5.3 Jones results

Jones’ (2011) framework of sexuality education discourse analysis situates curricula along four axes: conservative, liberal, critical, and postmodern. The determining factors that situate a curriculum in one axis over another is predominantly the content and the ways in which the content is covered. In a conservative curriculum, for example, the focus would be on sex as a reproductive act within the context of heterosexual marriage, and would rely heavily on euphemism to explain the mechanics of sexual interaction.

As discussed in chapter four, the analysis of the Statutory Guidance within Jones' framework was conducted by entering dominant terms for each axis (e.g., reproduction, marriage, euphemism, and morality for conservative) into NVIVO to assess for frequency.

Table1 shows the results of this analysis.

AXIS	SEARCH TERMS	RESULTS
Conservative	Morality (‘morality. yielded no results so the search term used was ‘moral’).	6 – all in reference to SMSC development
	Marriage	13 references that present marriage as a relationship choice and consider same-sex marriage
	Reproduction	2 (1 of which references the biology curriculum)
	Euphemism	0
Liberal	Pleasure	0
	Ready	0
	Safety	11 – all in the context of internet safety
	Equality	28 (21 reference equality legislation)
	STIs	2
	Pregnancy	7
	Contraception	2
	Homosexuality	0 (but the term ‘same-sex’ is used 6 times)
	Age-appropriate	41

Critical	Societal (‘societal’ did not yield any results so ‘society’ was used’	0
	Diversity	1
	Inclusive	1
	Privilege	0
Postmodern	Truth	0
	Authority	3 – but this was referencing either local authority staff or people in positions of authority
	Reality	0
	Language	4
	Discourse	0
	Structure	2

Table 1. Analysis of dominant terms in Jones’ framework.

We can see that the terms searched under the conservative axis show that although marriage was mentioned thirteen times in the Statutory Guidance, every mention of marriage also stipulated that this definition included same sex marriage or civil partnership, so this would not be an example that could lead us to situate this curriculum within a conservative axis.

We can also see that the search terms (based on the terms named under each curricula type in Jones’ model) for critical curricula (societal, diversity, inclusive and

privilege) and for postmodern curricula (truth, authority, reality, language, discourse, and structure) all yield very few results. Whilst there are still some themes that yield no results from the liberal axis (concerningly, these terms are ‘pleasure’ and ‘ready’ as well as ‘homosexuality’, although this is presented instead by the term ‘same sex’), the majority of terms considered to be central to a liberal curriculum are largely present in the Statutory Guidance. It still considers most of relationships and sex to take place within a binary but does consider diverse families and relationships. It also mentions prevalent issues such as STIs and pregnancy, and contains 41 mentions of the term ‘appropriate’, all largely focused on considering the ‘appropriate’ time to teach certain topics.

From this analysis, we could consider the Statutory Guidance to be a predominantly liberal curriculum. Introduced by a conservative government, this does suggest that the curriculum is making a strong effort to be relevant to all young people. The move towards a critical curriculum would be desirable, as argued by Drazenovich (2015), in the long-term in sex education ‘educators need to find ways to deconstruct sexual identities through a critical educational process’ (Drazenovich, 2015, p. 4).

5.4 Conclusions from both analyses

From both Fairclough and Jones, we can see that the Statutory Guidance begins to offer representation to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse as a group whose needs to be considered and accommodated.

There are, however, several limitations to this representation. The first comes in the overwhelming focus on marriage and contraception. Whilst these are not structures that are unique to heterosexual relationships, there is a, perhaps

unintentional, heterosexual bias to the way these topics are introduced in the curriculum. For example, under the heading of ‘by the end of Secondary school’, detailing what young people need to have learned in relation to ‘intimate and sexual relationships including sexual health’, we can see the following topics:

‘the facts around the full range of contraceptive choices, efficacy, and options available.

the facts around pregnancy including miscarriage.

that there are choices in relation to pregnancy…

how the different sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including condom use) and the importance of facts around testing.’ (Department for Education, 2018, p.29)

None of these topics are presented as if they refer solely to heterosexual relationships and sex, but neither is it explicitly stated that contraception and safer sex should be presented as something that is needed for all kinds of sex, or that teachers should emphasise that oral and anal sex, the sharing of sex toys and genital to genital contact can all pose a risk of STI transmission (Brook, 2021). Without this explicit direction, it is possible that teachers will tend to focus on vaginal sex and the potential for unplanned pregnancy, which has the potential to cause LGBT+ young people who feel that this is not likely to be relevant to their lives to disengage.

In addition to the continued focus on heterosexual sex acts and pregnancy prevention, there is little to no representation of the difficulties or challenges faced by the LGBT+ community or of how young people might preserve their rights in the face of them. Since 2015, attacks based on sexual orientation and gender identity have increased year on year (Brooks and Murray, 2021). Whilst education around LGBT+

identities should never take hate crime or discrimination as its focus, it is important that young LGBT+ people are able to perceive homophobic or transphobic discrimination as an act that is abnormal, violent and at odds with society's rules. Young people should feel that their school, and the wider community, would respond to incidents of this nature seriously and should be aware that they should never be subjected to discrimination or abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The curriculum emphasises that 'all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect' (Department for Education, 2018, p. 15), but, as with the topics surrounded sexual intimacy, there is not explicit guidance on what this means in practice. With 45% of LGBT young people experiencing homophobic or transphobic bullying in school, and 86% regularly hearing phrases that are negative or derogatory to the LGBT+ community, such as 'that's so gay' (Stonewall, 2017, p. 9), we can imagine that, for positive LGBT+ representation at a curriculum level to have any positive impact on young LGBT+ people, it must be presented within an environment that manages and responds to this sort of bullying or negative language.

We can see, then, that the representation afforded to LGBT+ young people by this curriculum is, at best, a cursory level of recognition. In order to fully represent LGBT+ people in terms of their intimate sexual health and their experience of the wider community, it would need to be more explicit and prescribe greater detail of topics and messages to be conveyed to all young people in the school community.

The representation of young LGBT+ people is further limited by the complete lack of consideration that a young person may experience more than one protected characteristic at once. For example, young LGBT+ people at faith schools can come

to see their religion as more of a ‘problem than a solace’, while school staff can find it difficult to balance protections on the grounds of sexual orientation and religion within the same school (Carlile, 2019, p. 628). The intersection of LGBT+ and disabled identities is underrepresented in research, but participants in one qualitative study described ‘queer and disabled identities as inseparable and part of their overall self-concept’ (Miller, 2018, p. 336). These studies suggest that the presentation of LGBT+ experiences as separate from, or different to, other human experience takes away from young people’s experience and validation of their intersectional identities.

Having considered the ways in which the discourse of the Statutory Guidance represents LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, let us look at the results of the phenomenological interview study, that asked LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse how their experience of RSE had contributed to their experience of participatory parity.

5.5 Phenomenological interviews – results

5.5.1 Introduction

In considering the results achieved in a qualitative research method, it is important to first sort the results into themes and categories, and not to confuse the two. While a category is ‘a collection of similar data sorted into the same place’, a theme is ‘meaningful ‘essence’ that runs through the data’ (Morse, 2008). A theme may sometimes be in the foreground and sometimes in the background, but it is always present, it is perhaps the heart of the data.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, phenomenological interviews were conducted in this research with eight participants, and recruitment and interviewing took place online due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19. The questions asked are found in the appendix, and each participant was allowed to speak for as long as they felt moved to in answering each question. This meant that the ensuing interviews varied in length from fifteen to fifty minutes. Participants were also given opportunity at the end of the interviews to discuss anything that they didn’t feel fitted within the previous questions.

5.5.2 Dominant themes

The completed interviews show three dominant emerging themes in the experience of LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse of Relationships and Sex Education within the last five years: that of lack of representation (LGBT+ identities), lack of representation (disability) and lack of preparedness for relationships as a young adult.

We can see from the Critical Discourse Analysis that representation – even within this new curriculum – for young disabled and neurodivergent/diverse LGBT+ people is far from being achieved at a holistic level. The curriculum offers a lack of specificity when it comes to describing the risk of various sex acts, and there remains a heterosexual bias to it. The worrying trend is that this is also the lived experience of young people who self-identify as belonging to this group. Each participant in the study offered at least one response that reflected both dominant themes. The questions were open-ended and constructed to allow participants time to reflect upon whether the Relationships and Sex Education they experienced at school allowed them to participate in relationships as equals as adults, but it did not ask this specifically. For all participants to remark upon a lack of representation of their identity and a lack of preparedness vis a vis adult relationships suggest that the state of Relationships and Sex Education before the introduction of this curriculum was – at least in the case of LGBT+ people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse – not fragmented as previously thought, but rather universally poor.

5.5.3 Lack of Representation (LGBT+ identities)

Let us first consider the theme of lack of representation. Participants were asked questions that allowed them to reflect upon their experiences of Relationships and Sex Education at school, to consider if there was a heterosexual focus to that education what the impact of that was on them, and to express their opinions on whether or not Sex and Relationships Education needed to offer any specific teaching on the subjects of gender and sexuality and special educational needs and disability. Within the theme of lack of representation (LGBT+ identities), the data from the participants can be further organised into categories of teaching methods

and content, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, unsafe environment, additional sources of sex education and suggestions for improvement.

Heteronormativity

All participants described a lack of representation in the Relationships and Sex Education they experienced. Whilst all participants described a lack of representation in both the areas of gender and/or sexuality and disability, it was the heteronormativity of Relationships and Sex Education that they described first. These experiences of heteronormativity can be found within multiple other categories as well – notably those of teaching methods and/or content, an experience of compulsory heterosexuality and in teacher or school negative attitudes to homosexuality or gender variance. Considering that 'that schools are not neutral sites for gender and sexualities, shaping (often heteronormative) school spaces' (Nash and Browne, 2021, p.74), it is likely that RSE curricula and lessons will need to go some way to counter this balance.

Participants, when asked about their experiences of Relationships and Sex Education at school described experiences of heteronormativity in terms of the content in lessons on sex and relationships. Not all participants experienced a form of sex education that including teaching on the subject of relationships – for five out of the eight their education solely focused on sex and its physical components. The lack of representation and heteronormativity experienced by participants was experienced across both the sex and relationships component of the teaching (when a relationships component was experienced), and as such it is probably helpful to consider the participants' experience of heteronormativity in sex education separately from their experience of it in relationships education.

Describing their experience of sex education, participants reported an ‘overwhelming focus on heterosexual, penetrative sex’, that lessons were ‘only ever about like penetrative sexual intercourse or pregnancy and it was like nothing outside of that, ever’ or that it was ‘very heteronormative-focused, these are the STIs you can get, this is how you use a condom and nothing else really’.

For two of the participants, the relationships and sex components of their curriculum were delivered at different times and during different lessons (relationships being delivered during Physical, Social and Health education or PSHE and sex being delivered during Biology), and their experiences were particularly interesting. One participant said that ‘because sex ed was part of biology it was limiting sexuality to reproduction and well queer sex and a lot of actually better heterosexual sex has not much to do with reproduction and… it meant that I didn’t know how to have sex which was a bit confusing’ whilst another recounted this incident: ‘when we doing the other part of secondary sex ed with our science teacher and he made everyone say the name of the sex organ that the opposite sex had, so all the people presenting as female were instructed to say the word ‘penis’ and all of the people presenting as male were instructed to say the word ‘vagina’. It just seems really weird that like he didn’t make us say the name of our own anatomy, or like say the name of both considering that it was relevant to the conversation. It was just so heteronormative…’. Sperling, 2021, in her research of contemporary sex education programmes in the USA, considers how an ‘approach falsely described as “comprehensive” does not provide opportunities for truly inclusive experiences’ (Sperling, 2021, p. 10) which suggests that these participants, even when experiencing sex education that tried to be comprehensive, will not have seen their experiences represented.

Another participant who covered anatomy during sex education but not in Biology explained ‘I learned about human anatomy and about how you know cisgender people’s anatomy is because trans people don’t exist, intersex people don’t exist and yeah I learned about all the different types of contraceptives you can use and how you shouldn’t get STDs cause STD equals bad’.

The focus on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) was common to several participants and will be discussed separately when considering teaching content and methods. However, there is a particular experience that two participants shared that should be considered through the lens of heteronormativity, and this is the lack of representation of female/female sex acts when considering STI transmission and prevention. One participant explains that ‘I didn’t even learn about like things like dental dams like to prevent STI transmission between women until like university which is like, stupid in my opinion, like it’s just ridiculous. And it’s quite awkward actually because a lot of gay and bi women that I’ve come across have had like really similar experience or like sometimes, even at university… sometimes they don’t even know what you’re talking about and that’s like really difficult, especially if the conversation’s about like imminently using one… there’s huge disparity there because I’m pretty sure there’s not an eighteen-year-old in the country who hasn’t at least heard of a condom’. Another said, ‘one thing I would always note is that they’d always mention say, obviously condoms which are obviously widely accessible and then they would always say stuff like ‘you know if you’re having sex with a vulva you need to use a dental dam’ but they never explained that it’s practically impossible to purchase or find dental dams anywhere’.

In this case, the lack of representation offered during sex education of sex acts between women could have very real consequences. As the first participant

explains, there would be few eighteen-year-olds who have not heard of a condom, but dental dams are significantly less widely known. In real terms, this could cause young women having sex with other young women to be more vulnerable to the transmission of STIs because less information is offered on how to protect themselves. This is a lack of representation that has existed for many years, most notable during the early years of the AIDS crisis where 'immune to infection by virtue of the fact that lesbian sex is somehow seen as purer, cleaner and safer than any other form of sexual practice' (Griffin, 1996, p.3), and one that, in these participants' experience, persists and continues to place women who have sex with women in a more vulnerable position in terms of knowing how to, and accessing the equipment to, protect themselves from STIs.

In terms of relationships, participants reported that the lack of representation of LGBT+ relationships was quite damaging. One participant explained that 'I definitely conformed to what I'd now term as compulsory heterosexuality, like I dated boys in school because I was trying to copy everyone else and it was just a really uncomfortable experience. And I remember like some of the girls in gym class asking me if I thought my 'boyfriend' at the time was attractive and I was like 'no' and they were like 'well why are you dating him?' and I was like 'well, do you date people you find attractive, do you find your boyfriends attractive?' and they were like 'yeah' and I was very confused because I was just like, I just thought it was a thing we had to do… I just don't think anyone had ever told me that it was just, like, okay to not like boys,'. One participant said that their sex education lessons inspired a feeling of anxiety and fear over having to one day have sex with a man, even though she assumed she was straight, saying 'I was fairly sure I was straight… I have this memory of being I guess sixteen and I started a new school and I made a new friend

and she came out to me as bisexual and I like… suddenly I realised that, you know… I don't have to be straight… I definitely think if they'd explained what that was earlier in sex education, maybe at least some of the kind of anxiety about one day having to have sex with a man might have been reduced'. We can see how the reinforcement of heterosexuality as a norm or standard could create the experience of being LGBT+ feeling outside of that. There is also an element of a lack of 'sexual script' being developed in LGBT+ young people, due to the lack of repeated representation. A sexual script being an ;internalized behavioral framework that guides an individual within their sexual experiences' (Gillespie et. Al, 2022, p. 27).

The lack of visibility of LGBT+ relationships and, as one participant explained it, the presentation of LGBT+ people as 'having always known their identity' caused a lot of the participants to feel anxiety over themselves and their identities. One participant said that she felt the lack of representation of LGBT+ people in Relationships and Sex Education was 'probably part of the reason it took me so long to realise I wasn't straight' and that, when she considers her sexuality in retrospect 'there's so many signs and so many things that made it really obvious to me but I just didn't have the language'. Other participants said that their Relationships education 'was only ever straight relationships', 'I don't feel like I ever got any in school sex ed that set me up for having a queer relationship and what the dynamics are like in that' and that 'we talked about non-heterosexuals as if they were a deviation from the norm'.

We can perhaps assume that much of this messaging was unintentional on the part of the school or the teacher, and that perhaps, by discussing non-heterosexual relationships, an attempt was being made to represent all young people. However, we can see that the period of their lives when young people experience school-

based RSE coincides often with the period where they begin to examine their own identities, often seeking clues or signs to understand themselves and language with which to better articulate their experiences. By separating stories of LGBT+ relationships from those of heterosexual relationships, we could expose young people to a subconscious message that their relationships are, at best, different from and at worst, less than, those of their heterosexual peers. Some of these issues could be addressed through a 'queer pedagogy', a concept developed by Drazenovich to describe a process of 'questioning identity as opposed to fixing identity' that can 'assist in students asking different questions around sexuality, and therefore finding different answers to such complex questions' (Drazenovich, 2015, p. 9).

The Statutory Guidance does reference that LGBT+ topics should not be presented separately but should form part of all teaching. However, we can see from participants' experience that there are many practitioners for whom this method of delivery will need considerable practice and commitment to deliver.

Cisnormativity

Participants described a lack of representation in other issues surrounding gender and sexuality, and had some specific suggestions that they felt would have been helpful if they had been included in their RSE. For example, many participants expressed a desire for LGBT+ inclusive education to be offered to all young people, all the time, explaining: 'the sex education should be given to everybody that's kind of LGBT+ focused, because not only is it the people who are LGBTQ+ who need it but also you know it's important that people who are cis-het maybe know what people who are LGBTQ+ are going through'. They also considered that 'at the point

at which sex education is delivered, not everyone will know their identity… so I think it's important to deliver this sex education to everybody at the point at which you do so it's inclusive'.

The need for inclusion of all gender identities was also considered important to participants. One participant said that 'LGBT people would benefit from sex education that was queer inclusive because like differences in bodies and desires and not only whether you're in like a gay or lesbian relationship but what if you're in a relationship with someone who is trans or intersex and their body is different'.

Drawing attention to the physical characteristics of different gender identities is not something that is referenced in the Statutory Guidance, but we can see that, from participants' points of view, this is something that they would have appreciated learning about in school. As trans individuals may undergo treatment or surgeries to affirm their gender, this subject being explored in school could promote greater representation and inclusion, and allow all young people to approach the subject with greater empathy.

Participants also considered the importance of presenting issues regarding gender and sexuality matter-of-factly, offering examples such as 'it's really important that it is mentioned that…sometimes … the outward appearance of someone isn't going to match their genitalia… and that is okay,'. One participant also considered this within the context of same-sex relationships, saying 'it definitely would have been useful for them to go 'if you're having sex with someone who is also a woman this is how, you know, you would do that safely''. This is a need that emerged while discussing heteronormativity, but it is important to consider it when thinking of gender identity too – just because two people may both have female sex characteristics does not mean they both identify as women. Whilst this participant did

use the word ‘woman’, we should perhaps reflect upon the need for gender inclusive language, and that, in this instance, discussing how ‘two people with vulvas’ might have safe sex might be more appropriate.

Horton, 2020, considered the emerging needs of trans children and young people and found that ‘often trans children are failed by our cisnormative systems and priorities’ (Horton, 2020, p. 2). It would be prudent to reflect that the participants interviewed in this study represent only a small section of the population of young people – and, in particular, the population of trans young people – and that it is likely that this lack of representation is experienced by many more trans people across England.

Another participant reflected on the need not just to include all kinds of sex, but also a lack of it, saying ‘asexuals need to be acknowledged and told that that’s …a perfectly valid way to live your life.’ This is another way in which the curriculum does not meet young people where they are – asexuality is a widely acknowledged identity, but it is not referenced at all within the curriculum.

In general, participants expressed very basic wants in terms of representation, here – they simply asked that these various identities be presented during Relationships and Sex Education as existing, so that all young people in the room would be able to have an awareness of them.

Unsafe environment

From the participants’ experiences we can see that not representing LGBT+ relationships as equal to heterosexual ones, as well as presenting LGBT+ as having ‘always known’ could contribute to, at best, a sense of confusion around their

identities when they started to consider that they may not be heterosexual and, at worst, a negative feeling towards their identity.

This negative feeling would not have been helped by some of the participants' experience either of direct homophobia or by a negative representation of homosexuality by the teacher and/or school environment. One participant describes a particularly traumatic incident of homophobia that went unchallenged by the teacher, recounting that during a sex education lesson a girl in her class said 'I don't want to learn about dykes', and this was responded to by the teacher saying 'that's fine 'cause we don't have any of those in here'. She described this as one of her worst memories of sex education and, whilst she went on to clarify that the comment was not aimed at her, because she hadn't heard the term before and only knew what it meant when looking it up after the lesson, that 'it was actually more hurtful out of the room once I actually understood what the comment meant'.

In addition to homophobia, participants reported that often their teacher or schools – although they were often unsure as to whether this was done purposefully or not – represent LGBT+ people in a negative light. One participant said 'there were things about LGBT people but they were always framed around, like, their suffering… I was queer, that didn't feel good'.

Sperling (2021) found that young people were, in the right space, willing to ask questions and to discuss their sexuality but that the creation of truly safe and inclusive spaces often required stepping outside of what teachers 'normatively consider these spaces to be' (Sperling, 2021, p. 152), suggesting that there is much thought to be put in to addressing the issues of an unsafe RSE environment.

Not just representation, then, but also the manner of representation, matters to young LGBT+ people experiencing Relationships and Sex Education during a time

when they may be unsure of their identity. Without being offered examples of LGBT+ relationships, they may not see them as a viable option and instead feel anxiety about heterosexual relationships or gender identities that do not fit them. When negative attitudes and homophobia are displayed, they may see an identity that they feel fits them as a shameful thing. The participants in this study lacked visible representation of LGBT+ sex and relationships during their RSE at school, and the impact has been lasting.

Teaching methods and content

Whilst I will consider participant's specific reflections on teaching content and methods separately in the discussion section, some participants did comment on how the teaching they received, and its lack of differentiation, impacted them in later life. One participant explained, 'I'm autistic, right, and… I knew I was different from people… but … I thought that I was somehow less good' whilst another said, 'as an autistic person I could have done with a lot more education around relationships and … non-explicit consent things because I only learned about consent when I went to uni'.

Teaching professionals, then, should not assume understanding of these topics, and should take extra care to embed knowledge of concepts that could perhaps cause confusion for neurodivergent or diverse people. Without ensuring all young people are able to equally access this content, teachers cannot really have a true picture of the success of the delivery in their classroom.

5.5.4 Lack of Representation (disability)

What of disability representation? As previously mentioned, all participants discussed the lack of LGBT+ representation and the heteronormativity of their experience first, but they all followed this with explanations of a lack of disabled representation. Within this, there are further categories of invisibility, caring, disabled relationships as different, disabled identities as 'other' and the need to not 'add on' disabled representation. Broadly, however, in the context of these participants' lived experiences, the important categories to consider in a lack of disability representation are invisibility and difference.

Invisibility

In terms of invisibility, one participant had this to say of their experience of Relationships and Sex Education: 'I just wanted to kind of reflect on how completely invisible disabled experience was in my schooling the kind of queer thing was implicitly acknowledged…but I don't think disability things were even vaguely on the radar', they also said that this meant that it was less likely that disabled people would be 'stakeholders' in their bodies and that they may lack the knowledge needed to adapt their sex lives appropriately.

Participants also touched on a 'societal blind spot' regarding young disabled people, saying that there is awareness of disabled children, and disabled older adults, but that young disabled people who want to have sexual relationships are often excluded from conversations around disability. One participant said that it had taken 'a lot to be at peace with being a disabled and queer person' due to this general lack of visibility across both schooling and society as a whole.

This experience goes some way to explaining how lacking the representation of disabled people is in education. The Statutory Guidance covers the need to consider

that the way in which young people with Special Educational Needs may be different to their peers (hence the guidance's advice that some young people with SEND might be more vulnerable), but not that their identity as a disabled person may be something that they need support with.

The suggestion from the participant about being a 'stakeholder' in their body also suggests the need for a change of focus in the way disability is represented when it does make an appearance in education. For many reasons, the legislation surrounding disability – and potentially, therefore, school discourse around disability – focusses heavily on support, and the vulnerabilities of disabled people. To increase representation of the lives of disabled young adults, their lives need to be presented as their own, and as equal to those of their peers.

Another participant, when considering the needs of disabled people in Relationships and Sex Education considered that 'I think again firstly teaching people the basics of what disability is and what chronic illness is and how that could present … would be fabulous because there are so many misconceptions there'.

Like this participant says, the role of exploring what disability is and what life is like for a disabled person may not be the role of Relationships and Sex Education, and might fit more comfortably within the remit of Personal, Social and Health Education. However, the participant who spoke about their experience of invisibility considered that there is a societal gap for young disabled adults – those who were disabled children and continued to be disabled as young adults. Their experience is considered in the SEND Code of Practice in terms of providing opportunities for their education and mandating schools to prepare them for adulthood – surely a part of this preparation for adulthood would logically include relevant Relationships and Sex Education?

The lack of disabled representation is triply problematic for disabled people as it affects both their understanding of their selves, their identity as a disabled person and the way their able-bodied peers see them. It is simplistic to assume that all disabled people will only have disabled partners, and all young people may find themselves in a position where they are in a relationship with a disabled person, and may find that the Relationships and Sex Education they experienced at school has not prepared them sufficiently for this relationship. The lack of visibility for disabled people affects both abled and disabled young people, and means that the Relationships and Sex Education that they experience offers a less comprehensive resource for adult life than we would hope for.

Participants were passionate that the lack of representation of disability in schools was, in itself, disabling for them in later life. In terms of how it affects relationships, one participant said, ‘depending on the special educational need or the disability it is going to affect relationships quite strongly in some situations or might mean, for example, with me, for example, the ability to just engage in just having sex might be more difficult and require more patience from your partner and things like that’. Another participant, considering how disability might affect sex and relationships said, ‘I am physically disabled but it doesn’t have a major impact on sex for me… However, what does is like the complete infantilisation of disabled people… it’s not my disability that hinders me when it comes to sex, it’s people’s lack of understanding’.

Again, we can see that representation of disability tends to focus on children, and assumes a lack of sexual interest of many disabled young adults. For the participants in this study, the principal suggestion for improvement to increase visibility of disabled people in RSE was to explicitly acknowledge that disabled

people have sex, and that the decision to have sex by a disabled person does not automatically signal abuse or manipulation. Ferrante and Oak, 2020, found that for disabled adults, particularly those with an intellectual disability, their rights to sex education 'have been denied due to societal prejudice and taboo surrounding their sexuality' (Ferrante and Oak, 2020, p. 394).

The commonality of invisibility experienced by participants suggests that, to combat these experiences, the current curriculum must go even further than it already does in requiring the depiction of disabled sex lives within RSE. Shah (2017), asserts that the assumption that disabled people are 'asexual' impacts upon their 'sexual citizenship', but this is an assumption that is perpetuated and held often by their non-disabled peers. It is not enough, in the experience of these participants, to simply teach all young people, disabled or not, about sex. To make any progress in visibility, we must make it clear that disabled people have the same right to – and the same desire for – healthy sex lives as any of their peers. We must also make this a point of all RSE, not just lessons aimed at disabled young people, to allow all young people to have a better understanding of how disability may impact upon sex and relationships.

Caring

Another category in lack of representation concerning disability that one participant experienced in relationships that she wished had been explored more during her RSE was when a physical and/or romantic relationship also has a dynamic of care within it. She explained, 'if your partner is having some sort of caring responsibility then I think that is a really nuanced dynamic that is also quite tricky to deal with and I think it really needs to be said like you know you might be annoyed

with somebody but it's not okay for you to not do the caring things that you have agreed to do for them'. She went on to explain that, when there is a caring dynamic in a relationship, the person being cared for is often more vulnerable than the carer, and that the carer should take this into account. Again, it can be difficult to explore issues of vulnerability for disabled people within sexual relationships without perpetuating the idea that, for disabled people, relationships are somehow more dangerous, or that disabled people need to be protected. What this participant expressed focuses more on the need for all people – disabled or not – to be able to approach conversations around health and disability in a way that makes the disabled person feels safe and respected. This is a topic that often research approaches only from the point of view of the non-disabled partner, as in Di Giulio (2003) who found a negative impact on couples' experience of sex and intimacy after one partner took on a care-giving responsibility for another.

In terms of how to teach young people about aspects of care within a relationship, there is a way to do this which does not focus on the idea of disabled people 'always' needing care, or one person being 'responsible' for another. Within the curriculum, there is space for discussion of the qualities that contribute to a healthy relationship. For all people, there is a possibility that care might become part of their relationship, and so this can be discussed as a natural part of the discussion around healthy relationships, reminding young people that everyone may need care at some point.

Disabled relationships as different

Even when providing care is not part of a relationship dynamic, participants explained that often relationships where one or more partners has a disability may be different to relationships where all partners are abled. One participant said that relationships with a disabled partner were different ‘pretty much from every standpoint so like communication, emotional, mental, physical standpoints, knowing how to communicate your specific needs with someone else and knowing how that might interact with their own needs. They also explained that this was not something that was ever discussed in RSE.

Another participant, reflecting on the idea of encouraging all young people to better understand the needs of disabled people explained, ‘I think that sex ed needs to cover that. I’m not sure whether sex ed could fully cover, like the ways things are for different individuals…but I think the focus needs to be on other people not desexualising disabled people as opposed to disabled people understanding how they can participate in sex’.

There are overtones in this discussion of the old ‘dilemma of difference’ (Norwich, 1993), and the idea that discussing disability frankly will emphasise to disabled young people their difference. However, taking these young people’s opinions as a starting point, we can see that if disability is an issue that is not explicitly stated, and that the word ‘everyone’ is taken to include disabled people without ever specifying their experience, young disabled people often see themselves misrepresented.

Ableism

A strong narrative that emerged from the participants’ responses was the idea that a lack of disabled representation in RSE is harmful to both ‘abled’ and disabled

young people. This is noticeable even in the terminology used by participants, who often chose to refer to ‘abled’ people or even ‘ableds’ rather than using more commonly heard terminology such as ‘able-bodied’ or ‘non-disabled’. Whatever terminology is used to describe people who do not have a direct experience of disability, participants were clear that, whilst this group may not be aware of the lack of representation of disability in RSE, its lack could still have an impact on them in the future.

For example, one participant explained that ‘people like the ableds might just end up with a partner who has special educational needs or disability and then you know they’ll be thankful to their school that they learn how to best serve and interact with their partner’, and ‘everyone needs to sort of see that discussion’. One participant referenced research they had seen that said few people would date a disabled person, and said ‘at some point in someone’s life they quite possibly will date somebody with like a mental health issue or meet somebody neurodivergent or meet somebody with chronic health issues.’ This suggests that disability, like sexual orientation and gender identity, should be represented throughout the curriculum and not presented as an additional or separate subject. For some young people experiencing school RSE, just as they may not yet be aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity, they may not yet have experienced disability, but may experience this later in life. Exploring disability as a regular part of RSE expands upon the stereotypes of disabled people young people may have, and could begin to challenge ableist notions.

Ableism was something considered by many participants. One participant said that one key consideration that should be made when discussing disability – especially when considering that their sex education took place in biology – is the

subject of genetic counselling and/or testing. They said ‘questions of whether you might or might not want genetic counselling is important because… I think lots of able-bodied people just presume that disabled people don't want children and people would never have a disabled child knowing that they're going to have a disabled child which is … quite ableist’. This speaks to the dangers of allowing medical model of disability thinking to creep into educational spaces. Just as we have seen the impacts of homophobic and transphobic atmospheres within RSE on young LGBT+ people, so we must consider that language that frames disability as a problem to be fixed or something to avoid in children will negatively impact on young disabled people.

Disabled identities as ‘other’.

As we saw with the Critical Discourse Analysis when considering LGBT+ representation, continuing to represent an identity as ‘other’ perpetuates the idea that the identity is something to be understood and considered separately from the ‘norm’, rather than simply as a co-existing norm.

Participants have already shown that the identity of ‘disabled’ may, similarly to an LGBT+ identity, be something that young people need support with understanding. The lack of representation of disability in RSE also impacts on how young people feel towards attributing to themselves an identity of disabled. Even the way disability is presented in schools (and consequently also in this research), using the term ‘Special Educational Needs and Disabilities’ has its own problems, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. One participant clarified ‘I just wanted to like, for the record, voice my dislike of person-first language …I think special needs

is a really problematic term rooted in ableism and… I think disabled is a really important term for us to utilise in seeking liberation,'. It is difficult to conduct research that examines disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people's experience in education without, at least at some points, referring to the term special educational needs and disabilities as it is an established educational term enshrined in a wealth of surrounding legislation. However, this does perhaps point out the need to use it less frequently and to consider using the term 'disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse' instead.

Participants also felt that more distinction needed to be made between physical disability or chronic illness and neurodivergence and mental health, and the ways in which each of these things may impact upon relationships. One participant explained that it was important for young people to understand how mental ill-health impacts on relationships, and that it is important for all partners, whether they experience mental ill-health or not, to understand these issues.

5.5.5 overlapping issues of representation

There were some issues of difference that straddled LGBT+ and disabled identity. One participant said that they 'didn't see any body diversity in my sex ed and you know people with physical disabilities are more likely to have more diverse bodies'. They went on to say that body diversity in general would also increase representation for young trans people, whose bodies may appear different to their gender identity.

When it came to representing both disability and gender and sexuality in lessons, participants were clear that (as the Statutory Guidance states) this content should not be seen as an 'add on' component. 'I just think… whatever

recommendations… need to be supported and funding needs to be there in order to ensure that it actually works and that it's not like just 'cool, we've ticked that box'', one participant said. Another said that these subjects, when they were presented ', it seemed to be a kind of, they had it on the checklist, they delivered one hour teaching and then they moved on'. As we have seen from previous results, participants experience the impact of their LGBT+ and disabled identities every day, and the presentation of these topics in RSE should reflect that.

5.5.6 Lack of preparedness

An issue that all participants found with their Relationships and Sex Education was around the way in which the relationships element was delivered – or, more frequently, not delivered. Participants were vocal about the fact that the lack of relationships education had impacted upon them in later life. From the very basic criticism of the focus on sex over relationships education, to the idea that they had to learn about communication and relationship dynamics as they were having relationships for the first time, leading them to accepting negative behaviours from partners, they felt that relationships education could have significantly improved their experience of relationships as young adults. Participants also discussed that, because of their experience of disability and/or sexual and gender identity, they often felt that they weren't able to discuss these aspects of relationships with their peers. Whereas some young people might consolidate the learning offered in RSE during time with their peers, for some disabled young people, this peer relationship may not be available to them (Contact, 2020). This means that ensuring that all young people have the space to discuss and explore the concept of healthy relationships in school

is essential to allowing disabled young people equal opportunity to develop into young adults.

Participants said that their RSE often led to them feeling less equipped than their peers to interact in relationships as equal. Participants said they experienced this lack of preparedness from both an LGBT and a disability perspective, and each participant had a story to tell about feeling unprepared for relationships as a young adult. They described that the lack of LGBT+ representation often led to confusion around their sexual orientation which often led to them feeling isolated. A lack of comprehensive relationships education also made them less able to spot the signs of abuse, and the heteronormative focus of sex education led them to think of sex in a very narrow way and caused them to feel ill-prepared for their first same-sex sexual encounter.

Participants also explained that 'from like a disability perspective…it's not my disability that hinders me when it comes to sex, it's people's lack of understanding'. They felt that more discussion around the different kinds of sex would have made them feel that sex was more accessible as an activity and that not being able to partake in one type of sex would not prevent them from having a healthy sex life in the future.

The second category under the theme of lack of preparedness for relationships as an adult in comparison to their peers considers the ways in which participants feel that better Relationships and Sex Education would have contributed to them feeling able to interact as equals with their peers in relationships. Although this knowledge has been hard won through having to experience relationships and sex where they felt unprepared, all participants had something to share on how representative RSE lessons could contribute to preparedness and participatory parity for LGBT+ young

people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. They felt that RSE that focussed on more than a very narrow, heteronormative lens would have helped them to come to terms with their experiences better. They also expressed that some of the teaching around sex and relationships needed to be taught more explicitly, as their learning needs meant that trying to understand the subtleties of relationships was challenging to them.

5.5.6 Participatory Parity

Much of the data obtained through these interviews can be viewed as inhibiting the experience of participatory parity for young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people. The idea of all adults being able to interact as equals within a society, especially within the concept of relationships and sex, relies upon all young people having access to equal education on relationships and sex.

For the participants in these interviews, much of their learning and realisations around the complexities of relationships and sex happened away from – and often long after – their experience in the classroom. The focus on a heteronormative, able-bodied experience often led to more confusion than it did clarity, and they often felt at a disadvantage to their heterosexual and able-bodied peers.

It is important to consider the meaning of participatory parity when considering the idea of a society which ‘permit[s] all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers’ (Fraser, 2003, p. 36). What this looks like may change when we consider it within the frame of neurodiversity.

One participant summed up the difficulty of obtaining participatory parity between those who could be considered neurotypical and neurodivergent, particularly within intimate relationships by explaining that "the neurotypicals

specifically they don't express their needs so that was a big mystery for me" and that "autistic people communicate with other autistic people just as well as neurotypicals communicate with other neurotypicals". A better way of considering participatory parity in order to better include the experience of neurodivergent young people may be to assess whether all young people are able to be equally aware of their differences of communication style – rather than neurodivergent people always being considered different. This aligns with Judy Singer's definition of neurodiversity as the idea that 'every human has a unique nervous system with a unique combination of abilities and needs' (Singer, 2020, para. 32)

We must, however, consider that this research does not explore the experience of heterosexual, able-bodied young people. Whilst the participants in this research assumed based on their experience that their heterosexual and able-bodied peers were able to experience RSE more fully and felt prepared for their adult relationships, we do not know that this is definitely the case.

The feedback of the participants advocating for more inclusive RSE for all could be said to aid participatory parity for all, as the greater range of experience represented would allow even more young people to develop their understanding of relationships and sex.

5.5.7 Conclusion

If we look at the RSE experienced by participants, we can see that much of it, if we were to situate it in terms of Jones' axes, straddles the line between conservative and liberal. Much emphasis was placed on reproduction, with little diversity of relationships presented.

Thankfully, participants were able to offer many suggestions on how teaching of RSE could be improved for LGBT+ people with SEND, and these, along with an

examination of how RSE can lead to an increased experience of participatory parity, will be considered in the discussion chapter.

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Having considered the results gained from both the Critical Discourse Analysis and the phenomenological interviews, we can see that there are a number of ways in which the current delivery of Relationships and Sex Education could contribute to a lack of participatory parity for LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. This chapter aims to use the theoretical issues of representation identified in the Critical Discourse Analysis, as well as the practical suggestions given by participants in the phenomenological interviews to offer suggestions for educators in improving delivery of the RSE curriculum.

6.2 Suggested Improvements for the Curriculum and Further Policies.

The participants offer real and practical suggestions for how to deliver RSE in a way that is more accessible and relevant to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. However, it is important to recognise that practice sits very much in relation to policy. It can be hoped that, with the (albeit minimal) representation afforded to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse by the Statutory Guidance, some of the participants' more modest ambitions may be met. For example, the Statutory Guidance does state that LGBT identities should be represented within the teaching of RSE throughout the curriculum, and not as distinct and separate lessons.

There is also some reference to helping young people acquire the skills they need to participate in relationships as adults. The guidance says young people 'need knowledge that will help them to make informed decisions' and also that they can 'put this knowledge into practice as they develop the capacity to make informed decisions' (both Department for Education, 2018, p. 8). However, this is not developed fully into a skills-based curriculum. For teachers to truly have the ability to equip young people with the skills they need as well as the knowledge, the government guidance needs to scaffold this more soundly.

In terms of how to represent the LGBT+ and disabled communities better in the Statutory Guidance, much could be done by improving the language and terminology used. By offering a more updated acronym – even LGBT+ rather than simply LGBT – and defining the terms included within it in a way that represents more of the groups of a growing community, teachers would have more confidence in the use of those terms. As it stands, a young person who asks questions in class about asexuality or pansexuality of a teacher who is equipped with only the statutory guidance may not get an answer that is helpful or accurate. And, as we have seen from the participants' experiences, teacher reactions to terms surrounding identity and negative (or simply dismissive) attitudes surrounding them can cause lasting effects on the way young people view both their identity and themselves.

Presenting LGBT+ identities in a way that allows young people to see them as part of a spectrum of human experience rather than something 'other' is likely to be a challenging task for teachers. Slovin's (2016) study of presenting being 'gay' as 'okay' in sex education showed that, even when participants knew that 'being gay is okay', they were still likely to classify homosexual identities as taboo.

It is unfair to expect teachers who may not have taught RSE before, and who may have no personal or cultural knowledge of the terms encompassed by LGBT+ (and why the '+' is important) to be able to confidently use those terms without providing them with working definitions. In order to boost both teacher confidence and young person experience, the Statutory Guidance should consider refining the advice offered around this acronym and the people it represents.

An additional area for improvement for the Statutory Guidance as a text is its representation of disability. As we saw in the Critical Discourse Analysis, the term Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is an established educational term and is enshrined in much legislation that protects and upholds the rights of the young people included within it. But this does not mean that it is a term without its problems.

The Equality Act of 2010 refers to disability status, rather than to SEND status. This subtle change of language offers an element of complication for young people who have a special educational need, rather than a condition defined by schools as a disability. For example, a young person who has a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia is fully protected under the Equality Act as a disabled adult, and is entitled to reasonable adjustment for this disability in the workplace. However, if as a young adult this person heard that they had a special educational need rather than a disability, they may not feel entitled to define themselves this way, and may not access their legal protections, putting themselves at a disadvantage. Bailey et. Al (2015) set out the importance of involving disabled young people in research about them, and extending the definition of disability, within this context, to include 'special educational needs' is important to ensure all young people feel able to participate in this.

As we saw in the literature review when we considered disability, the experience of disabled people is broad and by separating it into two distinct groups for educational purposes, young people may lose sight of the diversity of the disabled community. I would recommend, therefore, based on participants' experience of both the term 'SEND' and in coming to terms with their identities as disabled, that the Statutory Guidance use the term disability to encompass all disabilities, and reference the broadness of the scope of this label either in the body of the text or in an appendix.

Again, for a teacher with no prior knowledge of disability outside of the common education acronym 'SEND', support with explaining the complexities of disability is essential.

There is a section in the Statutory Guidance within the primary school section on 'Managing Difficult Questions'. What may be more helpful to teachers delivering this curriculum is to either expand upon this or to add an additional appendix offering sample questions and their answers. This would again bolster teacher confidence. Participants in this study often remarked that they could tell when a teacher was awkward or uncomfortable delivering RSE, and that this made them much less likely to ask questions that they needed answering. It stands to reason, then, that young person experience of RSE would improve if teacher confidence in delivering it also improved.

6.3 Representation

The first area where improvements are suggested from both participants and the CDA is in the area of representation. Without seeing examples of LGBT+ disabled

people during their Relationships and Sex Education, young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people report that it takes them considerably longer than their heterosexual and/or abled peers to conceptualise both their identity and what they want in relationships. As discovered in the Critical Discourse Analysis, it is important to consider this representation as intersectional. One participant summed this up as ‘it’s important to talk about the intersectionality of it all as well because that exists’. Whilst seeing some degree of LGBT+ and disability representation separately could still be helpful, there is a special importance to seeing these two identities represented simultaneously. It is also important to recognise that young people need the opportunity to discuss these identities and create their own narratives using them. Albury (2013) considers that agency is not simply about being given a voice, but also ‘access to material resources that allow them to produce their own self-representations’ (Albury, 2013, p. 34).

Interestingly, the Critical Discourse Analysis and phenomenological interviews yielded different results when it came to lack of representation. When considering the Statutory Guidance independently from the participants' experience, the representation offered within it seemed rudimentary. A simple consideration for the fact that LGBT+ relationships exist, that some people have different gender identities to the sex they were assigned at birth and that families can also have LGBT+ parents did not seem particularly comprehensive. However, when we consider this alongside the participants' experiences, what most participants said was lacking from their experience of Relationships and Sex Education was a simple acknowledgement of the existence of LGBT+ and disabled people.

Participants offered several suggestions for how representation could be improved. They discussed the fact that some schools use organisations that help

ensure an LGBT+ person is present for the conversations in RSE. They suggested that, for some young people, talking to an LGBT+ person can be quite ‘eye-opening’ and can help to challenge stereotypes and make young people reflect on their choice of language when discussing LGBT+ issues.

They suggested that teachers should consider whether or not RSE was the first time LGBT+ issues were ever mentioned. The representation of LGBT+ people in general, during History or PSHE lessons, was something that the participants felt would contribute to a greater degree of a representation as a whole. The school environment was also mentioned – suggesting that if a school does not seem like an inclusive and equal community, representation within lessons would only go so far.

Another suggestion for the improvement of representation is one that is perhaps harder to implement in practice. Participants said that it was important to them that teachers consider the impact of their own identities on their teaching of RSE. This ranged from the idea of ‘if you’re an educator and you are cis and/or straight acknowledge that just mention it to your kids’ to the concept of having ‘people who are identified as safe people to go and talk to about [gender and sexuality]’ within a school environment. Participants also said that if a teacher were either disabled or LGBT+ and felt confident enough to share this identity with their students, this is something that they would find incredibly valuable.

This is perhaps an appropriate point at which to consider that these suggestions are, in large part, suggestions of how RSE would be delivered in an ideal situation. For many teachers, especially those who have been educators since the days of Section 28, revealing their sexual or gender identity or disability status is not within their comfort zone. We must consider that, at present, teachers of RSE are often also subject teachers, and maintaining professional boundaries within this dual role

might feel like too large a challenge. An environment where teachers can establish a safe and open space in RSE that is distinct from those of other lessons where they can share their personal identity is perhaps one to aspire to. In its absence, a greater suggestion for practice would be for teachers to ensure that the learning environment is free from judgement and comments of a homophobic or transphobic nature.

This was, in itself, a suggestion by participants. They suggested that comments that suggested that LGBT+ identities were ‘weird’ or ‘abnormal’ should be shut down politely. Participants understood that everyone in the room was still learning and that comments should be challenged ‘politely’ but they asked that teachers always assume that there is someone in the room who is LGBT+.

The final suggestion by participants was that teachers always focus on the diversity of sexual practices. They recognised that pregnancy prevention was still an important teaching point, but that it shouldn’t be the only focus of lessons on sex. They felt that ‘if you move towards talking about the broader aspects of sex to talking about things like oral sex in school then I think that the language can become way less gendered anyway, because those acts aren’t like, inherently straight or gay’. This suggests that what participants wanted wasn’t that LGBT+ representation became the centre of teaching, but that the general discussion broadened to include all.

6.4 Learning Needs.

Participants also had suggestions on how to improve RSE to accommodate different learning needs. One of these suggestions focused on the different methods of communication, and how the ways in which neurodivergent or neurodiverse people may communicate may differ from neurotypical people. One participant

described that they felt there were a lot of misconceptions that ‘autistic people are unempathetic or have bad theory of mind or are lacking’, and that teaching that different people have different styles of communication and that relationships involve learning these things about another person would have been helpful.

Whilst they could see that this could be a difficult idea to implement, one participant suggested that role play could be a really useful teaching method for autistic young people, to allow them to understand how one might approach conversations around consent or communication clearly.

One participant echoed the Statutory Guidance on the idea that young people who are neurodivergent may be more vulnerable to abuse because of their differences in processing situations, and that they felt that more explicit teaching on how to recognise if a relationship is unequal or harmful could help combat this.

There were also several practical suggestions on teaching using different methods. Participants explained that RSE teaching often seemed ‘didactic’ and that there should be a greater focus on participation. They said that allowing young people to have discussions in smaller groups would also help young people to consolidate their learning together.

A variety of resources was also presented as helpful. Several participants explained that there was often a lot of information presented quickly in RSE and that booklets that could be taken home would help people to retain this knowledge. In general, participants felt that teaching methods in RSE were less varied than in other lessons and that ‘just having booklets, having videos, having something that you can take away from the lesson and read in your own time if necessary or just to supplement what you’ve learned would have been very useful’.

Several participants also said that, when presenting topics around sex, teaching needed to be explicit. One participant explained that as ‘an autistic person people doing metaphors is just like very unhelpful, and people are very uncomfortable about sex, so they just say it in the vaguest way possible, but then I don’t understand’, whilst another said that, if teachers were blunt and avoided euphemism it ‘demystifies the whole thing and just makes it like super matter of fact’.

There were also further suggestions around considering the needs of all students better, particularly regarding conversations around trauma and/or sexual consent.

6.5 Trauma

Participants suggested that, whilst the emphasis should be on presenting sex and relationships in a positive light, that teachers should take a trauma-informed approach to delivering RSE. One participant discussed that allowing young people to understand that trauma can affect sexual experience and that this is something that you may need to support a partner through would help young people to explore better ways to communicate.

The importance of equipping young people with the knowledge of what to do in the wake of sexual assault was also discussed by several participants. One participant explained that lots of people don’t know what to do if their consent isn’t respected, and that this is something they often learn after they have experienced rape or sexual assault. They said ‘I think we should actively be proactively giving young people that information even though obviously it’s a scary and difficult topic’ so that young people were prepared.

One participant felt that exploring the range of experience of sexual assault was important, as they had volunteered at a sexual assault service where many service users had felt that what they experienced was not sexual assault because it wasn't penetrative sex. They felt that this would also have the impact of reinforcing that there is a wealth of sexual experience and that you can seek support regardless of what kind of assault was experienced.

As well as exploring these more complex issues of trauma, participants felt that conversations around consent should be more comprehensive and allow young people to consider different scenarios where consent would be needed.

Participants also had more general suggestions around how RSE delivery could be improved for all students.

6.6 Suggestions for Improved Delivery

Participants felt that improving RSE delivery should start with how RSE features on the curriculum. One participant remarked that RSE 'gets lumped in as kind of like a side subject because … really the most complex maths I ever had to do is splitting a bill, but you know I have to deal with my relationship and my sexuality and gender every single day'. Another participant considered that the teaching of RSE is often assigned to teachers who had little choice in or desire to teach it. They gave the example of 'my biology teacher who like was clearly uncomfortable talking about it and then made everybody else uncomfortable' to reference how good teaching by someone who was enthusiastic about teaching the subject would improve the delivery.

Another area of concern for participants was the way in which sex was represented in teaching. One participant said that sex should be presented as a 'buffet option' rather than a 'required meal' and that it should also be emphasised that choosing not to have sex or to remain single was also a valid choice. Another participant expressed concern that young people were probably turning to pornography to learn about sex and that teachers should be really clear about pornography not being an accurate representation of sex and ensuring young people have access to other sources of accurate information, such as the websites of sexual health organisations.

A final suggestion for improvement was that asking students about their learning and what they wanted to learn would allow the teaching to better meet the needs of all students, although they recognised that this was a suggestion that may be difficult to implement in practice.

6.7 Considering the representation of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse in the context of other protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

Representation, diversity, and equality are important for all young people. The Equality Act 2010 recognises many protected characteristics. This thesis has focused primarily on the characteristics of gender reassignment, sexual orientation, and disability status; however, religion is also a protected characteristic. The Statutory Guidance offers advice for faith schools in delivering this curriculum and advises them to present the characteristics in the Equality Act alongside the concept

of British values in the context of the faith of the school and to advise young people that, whilst everybody is entitled to freedom of religion, the Equality Act enshrines in law that nobody should be treated unfairly or face discrimination due to their protected characteristics.

However, for some young people the experience of RSE that focuses on equality and diversity and presents many examples of LGBT+ relationships may be a new experience. Young people may offer comments or opinions due to the fact that they have not previously been exposed to discussion surrounding diverse identities that could be considered harmful or offensive to young people in the room who identify as LGBT+. As mentioned in the suggestions for practice in the delivery section, it is important that teachers are able to strike a balance between challenging potentially harmful comments and making young people that make those comments feel unwelcome or humiliated. A positive approach to this would be to consider where young people get their values from. A lesson at the beginning of the academic year, before any RSE content is delivered, that allows young people to consider the influences in their lives may help them to think critically about where their opinions surrounding certain topics come from. Teachers can then challenge them in a way that is suitably firm in addressing comments that could be considered harmful, but also gentle and supportive of young people who maybe considering viewpoints from outside their religion or culture for the first time. It is hoped that by expanding the diversity and representation of LGBT+ and disabled people in RSE that more young people, rather than less, will feel included.

6.8 A final note on participatory parity, and the place of the RSE curriculum within it.

All participants in this study said that the Relationships and Sex Education that they received at school left them feeling ill-prepared for the relationships they went on to have as young adults. This feeling of a lack of preparedness was due to both a lack of representation of the diversity in relationships (e.g., the fact that same-sex relationships were as legitimate as their heterosexual counterparts) and a lack of representation of the fact that disabled children could grow up to be disabled young adults and adults that had sexual desires and sexual relationships. Ultimately, the fact that this representation was not available to them during their Relationships and Sex Education affected the way they conducted themselves in relationships as young adults, and often left them feeling confused and conflicted about their identities and about how to communicate their needs when in a relationship. Participants felt that if the concept of both LGBT+ relationships and relationships where one or more partners were disabled were represented as a part of standard practice of the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education, they would have felt considerably more prepared to have relationships as young adults, and also, they would have felt that the people they went on to have relationships with had an obligation to consider their needs and desires.

Fraser's (2013) theory of participatory parity, that allows all 'adult members of a society to interact with each other as equals', is a phenomenon that would benefit all young people, not just those who are LGBT+ and disabled. By not providing young people with representation of LGBT+ people and/or disabled people, Relationships and Sex Education does not prepare young people for the diverse body of

experiences that they may experience as adults. It does not equip cisgender heterosexual young people to interact equally with their future LGBT+ disabled colleagues and peers. It also places LGBT+ and disabled people on a perceived lower rung of society then their peers and places extra pressure on them to conceptualise and verbalise their needs. Ideally, with a well-structured Relationships and Sex Education curriculum all young people would complete secondary education knowing how to communicate and form relationships – both professional and personal – with all members of society. All young people would be able to engage in sex and relationships in a safe way that allows them to experience pleasure and where they can set and respect healthy boundaries. Diversity that represents some groups in turn increases the understanding of all groups and their ability to interact with each other equally.

In considering how we can increase the experience of participatory parity it is essential that we do not confine our conversation to minority groups. It is equally important that the majority of young people be able to relate to and interact with their minority peers as equals as it is for young people of minority groups to be able to interact with their majority peers as equals.

Participatory parity is a valuable tool for increasing the experience of social justice for everyone. By acting on the recommendations for practice outlined in this chapter, teachers can contribute to allowing young people to experience a more equal society and a greater feeling of participatory parity.

The statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education by no means offers all the answers in securing greater participatory parity for LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. However, coupled with teacher

behaviour and attitudes, it could greatly contribute to bettering their representation in school and in wider society.

Having looked at suggestions for improvement that came directly out of both elements of this study, let us consider a synthesised version of this advice that can be used by teachers and other educational staff when delivering this curriculum.

Chapter 7. A guide to practice: delivering the current RSE curriculum.

The suggestions from both the participant interviews and the Critical Discourse Analysis can be distilled into the following guide to practice for teachers and RSE delivery staff.

7.1 Content

Content based around LGBT+ experience would be most effective if it were authentic and from the community it represents. Suggestions from the young people interviewed included content produced by LGBT+ creators on social media platform YouTube, local activists from the LGBT+ community who could come in and deliver lessons and documentaries that were created by LGBT+ people about LGBT+ experience.

Body and (dis)ability diversity would greatly increase representation for LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse. The idea that people can be in healthy relationships when they have a physical disability, chronic illness, mental illness or neurodivergence is something that participants would have liked to be explicitly stated during RSE – particularly if it was contained in either representative content such as the examples described above or in scenarios used for teaching.

Greater attention and emphasis are needed on sexual consent and the violation of it, and of abuse within relationships. Participants said that when they were taught what consent is and how to recognise signs of abuse that this was helpful, but that what was needed was a development of this content to include what to do when your

consent has not been respected and how to approach either getting help with an abusive relationship or at how to communicate that you would like to end a relationship safely.

All participants agreed that the need to continue delivering content around penetrative sex, pregnancy, contraception and STI transmission was important. They were able to reflect on the fact that the majority of people in a class may well be heterosexual. However, including various kinds of sex in the teaching of sex and contraception – such as oral sex, anal sex, and genital touching – this would make the content considerably more inclusive and representative of diverse identities and needs. Presenting sex as more than one single physical act offered representation to those with physical disabilities as it would allow young people to begin to conceptualise what may be possible for them physically in order to have a further conversation with their medical team if needed. A more comprehensive definition of sex would also offer greater representation to LGBT+ people, as people who may never choose to engage in vaginal penetrative sex would be able to see the kinds of sex they experienced as valid and, more importantly, have a better understanding of the risks involved with them. This is particularly true of oral sex between two females, which participants explained was often not explored in RSE at all.

In addition to including a greater range of sex acts in the definition of sex, young people also wanted more coverage of identities within the asexual spectrum, and to reflect the fact that some people may never feel the desire to have sex, but may experience romantic attraction, and also that some people may experience neither sexual nor romantic attraction.

Whilst representation of the diversity in labels for identities was considered important for participants in terms of allowing young people to begin to conceptualise

their desires and needs in terms of an identity, they also warned against presenting these as prescriptive, definitive labels. Rather labels should be offered as something young people could choose to identify into if they aligned with their beliefs and experiences instead of a diagnosis awarded when a set of criteria is achieved. For example, if someone experiences sexual attraction in a way that could be considered demisexual, the choice of whether to use that label to define themselves rests with the individual, rather than with others.

7.2 Delivery

When delivering RSE, participants said they would appreciate having diverse viewpoints on offer. This could include cisgender, heterosexual teachers but also visiting speakers who were openly identified as being LGBT+ and disabled. They saw this as essential both to visibility (allowing LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse to see themselves as adults), but also for fostering inclusion within the class and allowing heterosexual, abled young people to see examples of LGBT+ disabled adults.

Young people interviewed did express that knowing a particular teacher was LGBT+ would have been helpful, but this does carry with it a consideration for professional boundaries and the comfort level of the teacher involved with divulging their own identity to the class.

Participants were keen to express that there really can never be a ‘one size fits all’ approach to RSE. Just as differentiation is required in other subjects such as Maths and English, so it is required in RSE. Participants reported that delivery of RSE, more than with any other subject, tended to be didactic and auditory in style, where young people were given information and expected to be able to process it

quickly during the lesson and remember it afterwards. Examples of techniques that could be helpful included scenarios, roleplays and having booklets that could be used as aide-memoires after the session.

In a similar vein, participants remarked that delivery of RSE could be enhanced if topics were continuously revisited, rather than knowledge only being imparted once.

Delivery should include some consideration of comfort level of the young people. Participants remarked that taking part in RSE could feel very vulnerable and make them feel that they were open to judgement. This might mean that there is a more delicate balance to be struck regarding behaviour management than in other lessons. Low level disruption, such as giggling, may be a sign of embarrassment or unease, but must also be challenged sufficiently so as not to interrupt the learning of others.

Similarly, teachers and other staff should be conscious of the fact that comments made by other young people during RSE lessons – particularly around LGBT+ and disabled identities – could cause harm to those in the lesson who either were aware that they fitted one of those identities or who were beginning to question whether they did or not. Teachers should therefore be proactive in challenging such comments, whilst being mindful that young people who make such comments may simply not have the knowledge or awareness of diversity to appreciate the harm in those comments.

As young people may have limited access to additional information about relationships and sex outside of school, it is important that they are able to get the most information they can during school lessons. To allow young people to ask questions that they have comfortably, having some sort of anonymous question box

may be useful – either a physical box where young people can write questions and deposit them in it or an anonymous electronic form young people can use (this may become particularly important if guidelines around physical object due to COVID-19 persist).

Some participants who had experience of visitors and outside organisations delivering RSE considered this favourably over having their teachers deliver RSE. They considered outside delivery a positive when it was done by organisations with a focus on health as the information was considered accurate and reliable and the delivery was non-judgemental. The Statutory Guidance does present outsourcing the delivery of RSE to outside organisations as a viable option, but encourages schools to consider their choice of organisation carefully. Participants showed a preference for sexual health organisations and schemes that promoted near peer education by recruiting university students when choosing an outside agency to deliver RSE.

The potential downside to this is when teachers are unable to follow up on the information delivered by those outside agencies and also when teachers are disengaged from the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education in a way that means young people perceive them as unavailable to approach regarding an additional question around relationships and sex education or as a source of further information on the topic covered within the lesson.

Overall participants' experiences and considerations of both teacher comfort and a need for school control of delivery of Relationships and Sex Education suggest that a more blended approach, where some lessons are delivered by outside agencies, and other lessons and any follow up needed in between or delivered by teachers, would be preferable to an exclusive delivery by either teachers or outside agencies.

Regardless of the agency chosen to deliver Relationships and Sex Education, what matters in addition to its delivery is that the environment of the whole school is conducive to an open and inclusive atmosphere surrounding matters of relationships and sex. Participants reported that it was always quite clear that some teachers would not be open to the idea of them approaching them to discuss any questions surrounding their gender identity, sexuality or disability status and it would be helpful, therefore, if schools could have members of staff available who were comfortable with advising young people on matters surrounding identity so that young people felt that there was always somebody at their disposal if they wanted to talk about an issue further in a way that they did not feel was appropriate to be dealt with by counsellors or therapists, health professionals or their parents.

Participants explained that there is sometimes a hesitancy for young people to participate actively in Relationships and Sex Education, due to perceived stigma or judgement from their peers. A participant who also delivered RSE as a volunteer said that this was particularly the case for young girls, who were often worried that if they appeared to have pre-existing knowledge surrounding relationships and sex they would be labelled ‘sluts’. It is important, therefore, that teachers are mindful to reinforce the positive connotations of having knowledge and skills in relationships and sex to all young people, and to continually refer to the skills that young people are developing as being a key part of preparing for adulthood.

It is also essential to interrogate traditional gender roles in the delivery of RSE. This research focuses on the experience of LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse, but the importance of maintaining that all partners in a relationship should be equally involved in conversations around

contraception is an important aspect to ensuring RSE is delivered in a way that allows all young people to experience healthy relationships and sex lives.

A key consideration for the content of Relationships and Sex Education is further guidance surrounding sexual abuse, assault, and trauma. Young people expressed that the way in which this was delivered was equally important as the fact that the content itself was covered. Young people needed to know where they could go after a lesson if they had any questions surrounding sexual assault or abuse and also, they needed to feel supported if they were in a situation where their sexual consent was not respected. A helpful way of aligning both the delivery and content surrounding sexual assault and abuse, then, would be to align the delivery of RSE lessons with the timetable and availability of safeguarding and or pastoral staff – alerting safeguarding and pastoral staff to the fact that topics concerning consent. assault and abuse were likely to be covered during a certain term or series of lessons would allow them to access any resources that they feel would be beneficial to young people who were to approach them after these lessons with questions surrounding these topics. This would mean that the whole school approach was embedded in the delivery of RSE, and young people would be able to feel supported around difficult topics without experiencing any gap in the support offered.

Now, let us consider how we could advance our delivery of RSE even further, by applying the participants' suggestions that go beyond the scope of the current Statutory Guidance. After all, schools and teachers want to deliver the best possible outcomes to the young people they work with, and we can see from the results of this study that, despite its advances, the Statutory Guidance offers lots of areas for improvement.

7.3 A guide to practice: enhancing the delivery of RSE beyond the current curriculum

Having considered the best way to deliver the current RSE curriculum, let us turn our attention towards how we could go beyond its current curriculum to deliver the most comprehensive version of RSE.

An area of lack in the current statutory guidance that we can see from the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis is any consideration of the concept of pleasure in relation to sex. Participants in this study said that as young adults they often felt that their needs were secondary to the needs of their partner. In addition to discussing different kinds of sex act rather than limiting the discussion to penetrative vaginal sex, widening the discussion of sex to include the concept of pleasure would allow young people to feel more empowered in their sex lives as young adults. Participants particularly expressed that being able to discuss the concept of masturbation as a way to get to know your own body – both from the point of view of sexuality and disability – would have considerably helped them in accepting and feeling comfortable with their own identity as young adults. Whilst pleasure and masturbation can be daunting topics for teachers to explore with young adults, if we are to expand the reach of the current Statutory Guidance in a way that allows young people to develop as independent and empowered young adults who are able to experience relationships with sex equally when compared to their peers, expanding the discussion to include acts that allow them to experience that independence in a safe way, on their own away from other people, and before they experience sexual relationships is an important starting point.

Participants also said that when considering the topic of abuse and unhealthy relationships it was as important to recognise when you were being the partner behaving in an unhealthy and/or abusive way as well as when you were the partner who was receiving abuse or an unhealthy behaviour. This was important as participants said that they had sometimes behaved in a way that they now understood to be inappropriate, and they would have liked further guidance on this. Participants also expressed that more delivery on the topic of communication would have helped them in regard to having better relationships as young adults – in particular when neurodivergent people had relationships with neurotypical people, being able to understand that there were two opposing viewpoints at play and that as long as both people were able to express their needs, communication would be enhanced would have helped participants in this study in their early relationships.

A topic already featuring in the Statutory Guidance is the topic of choices when an unplanned pregnancy is experienced. Participants said that often, in their experience of RSE, the conversation surrounding pregnancy began and ended with the concept of contraception. Knowing the laws around abortion in the UK as well as the fact that young people are able to access abortion without their parents' consent even if they are under the age of sixteen is something that participants felt would have put their mind at ease when worrying about unplanned pregnancy.

In order to firmly cement diversity into the delivery of relationships and sex education it is important that all kinds of bodies are represented within the delivery of topics such as contraception and STI transmission. In particular, it might be good practice to mention as a matter of regularity the way in which gender affirming treatments may interact with the need to use contraception. For example, a person who is assigned female at birth but who is taking testosterone as part of their gender

affirming treatment is still able to become pregnant if they are having unprotected vaginal sex. It is therefore important that these young people are aware of this fact and are able to seek medical advice to find a method of contraception that works for them to protect themselves from pregnancy and STIs as well as not causing them increased unease with their gender. Mentioning bodies like this in a matter-of-fact way and not drawing undue attention to their difference from the ‘norm’ allows young people to recognise that body diversity is present at all levels of the community and that they may need to consider it during the sexual relationships with potential future partners.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

Having considered the literature surrounding the landscape of Relationships and Sex Education over the past several decades, as well as the landscape of legislation surrounding special educational needs and disabilities, it is important that we recognise that the Statutory Guidance (2018) constitutes a major development in the representation of diverse relationships and families in the teaching off RSE in English schools. However, having looked formally at the curriculum both as a text in itself and as a document that has the potential to offer representation, and, consequently, participatory parity to LGBT+ young people who are disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse we can see but there are still several hurdles to overcome before this is achieved.

After a fractious history, Relationships and Sex Education in England finally seems to be moving towards a place or representation, diversity, and equality in regard to young people with LGBT+ identities. The Statutory Guidance also supports wider documents and legislation that uphold the rights of young people who have a special educational need or disability. What the curriculum lacks is a recognition of intersectionality, and of the fact that one young person may experience more than one marginalised identity at once.

Recognition and representation are key factors in allowing marginalised groups to experience social justice (Fraser, 2003). They are also essential to meeting the needs of those marginalised groups. This research set out to investigate how a new curriculum for Relationships and Sex Education could meet the needs of, and offer representation to, young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Critical Discourse Analysis showed that, whilst the needs of these populations – in

particular the population of young people with a special educational need or disability – are represented within the new curriculum, representation for identities that intersect along one or more axes is often lacking.

Providing some guidance to teachers and educational staff around meeting the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender pupils, as well as advising on the need to ensure young people with a special educational need or disability are able to access the content of the curriculum is an excellent start. However, because the representation of LGBT+ identities is rudimentary. and working from what could be considered, especially for young people, an outdated definition, the representation afforded to young people from it is always going to be slightly inferior to the representation the young people feel would allow them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to participate in relationships and sex as equals in comparison to their peers. This is an important point to consider. If the new curriculum is to offer guidance and skills to young people to navigate the contemporary landscape of relationships and sex, updating the terminology it uses to reflect the complexities of the sexual and gender identities often experienced by young people is essential. Participants that were interviewed during this research explained that they needed considerably more LGBT+ representation (especially when it came to transgender identities) to allow them to see themselves included within the curriculum and in order for them to conceptualise what their future relationships may look like.

8.1 Key Findings

The phenomenological study into participatory parity revealed that, for many young people who are LGBT+ and have a special educational need or disability, the

Relationships and Sex Education they received at school did not prepare them to fully understand how to enter into a relationship safely, how to communicate their needs, in some cases how to practise safe sex and how to recognise unhealthy behaviours or signs of abuse. The suggestions gained from this phenomenological study allow us to refine our practice and to consider that, when delivering RSE, the ultimate goal is to equip all young people in the class with the skills they need so experience healthy relationships.

The participants in this study did offer hope that improving the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education in line with their recommendations would contribute to young people who are LGBT+ and have educational needs or disabilities feeling equally as equipped as their peers when it came to relationships and sex. An essential consideration when improving the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education is that young people who are LGBT+ and have educational needs or disabilities do not want lip service paid to representing their identities. They expressed a strong desire for authentic resources and role models who identify as LGBT+ and disabled because they felt that this would improve the representation of these identities both for young people who saw their identities mirrored in these role models and young people who may never have met someone with that identity before.

Participants were also very clear that the representation of LGBT+ and disabled identities should be offered to all young people in all Relationships and Sex Education lessons rather than as a separate component delivered separately to other lessons. They saw this as particularly important when considering the physical aspects of sex. They felt that by continuously broadening conversations around sex and expanding the definitions of sex, all young people would feel more comfortable

in considering their own sexuality and needs and then potentially being able to do this for a future partner.

An area of weakness identified in the Statutory Guidance is the lack of specific teacher support. As RSE is a newly mandatory subject, there will be many teachers asked to deliver it who have never considered doing so before. Participants expressed that teacher confidence contributed positively to the delivery of RSE and it is important, therefore, that schools offer adequate support and training for staff delivering the new curriculum.

A final key point for consideration is that the Statutory Guidance, whilst setting out several topics that are mandatory and beginning to standardise the curriculum Relationships and Sex Education on offer in English schools remains a guidance document. There will always be schools who are equipped to go considerably further with this guidance and offer a more comprehensive approach to Relationships and Sex Education. What we need to bear in mind, then, is that for some young people the mandatory topics contained within Statutory Guidance are the only topics they will be taught. For these young people, the Relationships and Sex Education curriculum has some way to go before we can say that it is able to fully meet the needs of and offer representation to young people with special educational needs and disabilities with LGBT plus identities.

8.2 Contribution to Original Knowledge

As the first piece of phenomenological research to consider the experiences of LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people, this research offers insight into how RSE equips – or fails to equip – these young people with the knowledge that they need to experience relationships and sex as young adults. It

also considers the idea of participatory parity and its implications for RSE, showing that comprehensive RSE can allow all adults the opportunity to interact with each other as peers.

8.3 Limitations to this Research

This research represents a starting point from which further investigations into the experiences of marginalised populations can grow. As a small-scale study, the research is limited to the experience of the 8 participants who took part in it. It is also important to consider that this study only considered one intersecting point of identity – that of LGBT+ identity and disability. Further work into the intersection of identity in RSE should also consider the effects of religion, class, and other protected characteristics.

Due to the newness of the Statutory Guidance, this research also only considers the experiences of RSE of young people under the previous, rather fragmented system of education.

8.4 Future Research

As well as considering a greater range of intersecting identities, future research on the experience of young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse young people could use this present research to ascertain what impact the new Statutory Guidance can be said to have had on their experiences, and whether teaching and learning has improved.

8.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has considered the history of RSE in England, the changes brought about with the new Statutory Guidance and the importance of inclusive practice when delivering the curriculum. The Critical Discourse Analysis assessed the level of representation offered to young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people within the Statutory Guidance, whilst the phenomenological interviews explored how young LGBT+ disabled and neurodivergent or neurodiverse people experience RSE and how it impacts on their adult lives.

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Chapter 4 pp 176-262

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Appendix one – extract from interview transcripts

Researcher

Can you tell me about your general experience of sex education at school?

Participant

Like school, for me, I think like looking back on sex education, there's two things particularly that stood out to me as very negative. I think the worst thing for me was in secondary school, so it was our PSHE teacher that did sex ed and when she said that that's what we were going to cover that lesson, one of the other girls in my class said the phrase "I don't want to learn about dykes" and the teacher was like "that's fine 'cause we don't have any of those in here", so like, that's one of my worst memories of sex ed. I was only eleven and I didn't really have a label on my sexuality at the time but I was pretty sure that I liked girls but nobody would have known that, it definitely wasn't a comment that was directed at me, no one had ever implied that that was the case, but it really sticks out as a memory for me of like "okay, cool, that was really bad". And actually, I was quite confused at the time because I hadn't ever actually heard the term 'dyke' before that context, so it was more, going away, looking it up on the computer myself, and I think it was actually more hurtful out of the room once I actually understood what the comment meant.

Researcher

How would you say that your experience of sex education at school prepared you for the relationships you went on to have as a young adult?

Participant

So like, short answer, it didn't. And, I guess a bit of a longer answer, so I think it's easier to maybe separate it from like an LGBT perspective and a disability perspective. From like an LGBT perspective there was just like, as I said before, no, no mention at all of like lesbian relationships or like anything about like, just, yeah, anything even at all. I didn't even learn about like things like dental dams like to prevent STI transmission between women until like university which is like, stupid in my opinion, like it's just ridiculous. And it's quite awkward actually because a lot of gay and bi women that I've come across have had like really similar experience or like sometimes, even at university, where we're all over eighteen like sometimes they don't even know what you're talking about and that's like really difficult, especially if the conversation's about like imminently using one, like, I think, yeah, there's huge disparity there because I'm pretty sure there's not an eighteen year old in the country who hasn't at least heard of a condom, so, erm, yeah, when you think, I can't believe how many sessions we had on like contraception, but they were only ever spoken about as a way of like preventing pregnancy because that's not, like, the only use of things and, yeah, I just find it really, really shocking as well as just how hard it is to even like get stuff like dental dams like, it's really hard and but yeah.

Researcher

Did the focus (if, in your experience, there was one) on heterosexual relationships and families in sex education have any impact on you? Can you describe the impact?

Participant

Yeah, so obviously there's the incident I just mentioned which made me feel quite uncomfortable and really unsure of myself. But I think, like, much more than that, I

think I definitely conformed to what I'd now term as compulsory heterosexuality, like I dated boys in school because I was trying to copy everyone else and it was just a really uncomfortable experience. And I remember like some of the girls in gym class asking me if I thought my quote, unquote boyfriend at the time was attractive and I was like "no" and they were like "well why are you dating him?" and I was like "well, do you date people you find attractive, do you find your boyfriends attractive?" and they were like "yeah" and I was very confused because I was just like, I just thought it was a thing we had to do, and just, definitely not, and it was just very confusing.

Researcher

Do you think that people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities need sex education that allows them to talk about how those needs and/or disability might affect relationships and sex?

Participant

So, yeah, firstly like, I just wanted to make a comment on the question, which is that I just wanted to like, for the record, voice my dislike of person-first language and just the term 'people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities' and I know why you're using it, I know that it's used in schools but like, I think special needs is a really problematic term rooted in ableism and like, yeah, I just hate the language, I would definitely describe myself as disabled and I think disabled is a really important term for us to utilise in seeking liberation but yeah, that's obviously another conversation.

In terms of better understanding the needs of disabled people, like I mentioned previously, I think that sex ed needs to cover that. I'm not sure whether sex ed could

fully cover, like the ways things are for different individuals. I think by broadening the conversation beyond penetrative sex I think that's beneficial for everyone, so like then people can try and understand better for themselves what they would and wouldn't be able to engage in, but I think that needs a complete shift around not just teaching kids how to not get pregnant to like talking about, like, sex for pleasure and like just shifting the narrative of that whole conversation.

Appendix two – extract from RSE Statutory Guidance, 2020

‘Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)’, p. 15

Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

33. Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education must be accessible for all pupils. This is particularly important when planning teaching for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities who represent a large minority of pupils. High quality teaching that is differentiated and personalised will be the starting point to ensure accessibility. Schools should also be mindful of the preparing for adulthood outcomes,12 as set out in the SEND code of practice, when teaching these subjects to those with SEND.

34. Schools should be aware that some pupils are more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND. Relationships Education and RSE can also be particularly important subjects for some pupils; for example those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs or learning disabilities. Such factors should be taken into consideration in designing and teaching these subjects.

35. In special schools and for some SEND pupils in mainstream schools there may be a need to tailor content and teaching to meet the specific needs of pupils at different developmental stages. As with all teaching for these subjects, schools should ensure that their teaching is sensitive, age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate and delivered with reference to the law.

‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)’, p. 15

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

36. In teaching Relationships Education and RSE, schools should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met, and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect. Schools must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, (please see The Equality Act 2010 and schools: Departmental advice), under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics.

37. Schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson. Schools are free to determine how they do this, and we expect all pupils to have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum.